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## Redrawing French Empire Comics

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# 1

## REDRAWING FRENCH EMPIRE IN COMICS

### *An Introduction*

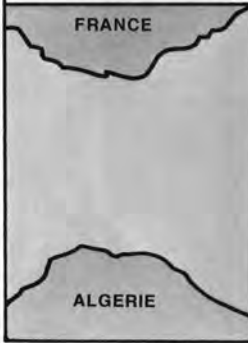
### Redrawing the colonial affrontier

How do French cartoonists redraw French empire in comics? In what ways do they represent its consequences today? In *Jambon-Beur: Les couples mixtes* [Ham-Butter/Arab<sup>1</sup>: Mixed Couples] (1995), by Farid Boudjellal, the painful burden of colonial history has a devastating impact on Charlotte-Badia, the vulnerable young daughter of Patricia Barto and Mahmoud Slimani, a French-Algerian couple. Unmediated, conflicting memories of the Algerian War (1954–62) spark an identity crisis in the child: her French maternal grandfather (Fabien) died in Algeria at the same moment as her mother first opened her eyes at birth, and her Algerian paternal grandfather was wounded in the war.<sup>2</sup> The result is that the three surviving grandparents still harbor pain and resentment, which they communicate to the girl. The cartoonist suggests the weight of the Algerian War in the simple, three-frame opening sequence of the book (5; Figure 1.1). We read first about the birth of Patricia, who first opens her eyes in 1961, towards the end of the war. Then, in a transitional second frame, we see a map of the south of France and the north of Algeria. The third frame informs us that the child's father has just closed his eyes for the last time, having died in the war. This sets up both the continuity or renewal of life and the traumatic, terminal experience of death during the war, which constitute the fundamental socio-historical problem of the comic book: how can those of European-French and Algerian-

13 avril 1961, PATRICIA BARTO ouvre les yeux pour la première fois...



Au même moment de l'autre côté de la MEDITERRANÉE...



FABIEN son père, ferme les yeux pour toujours.



20 avril, un gendarme remet une lettre à ELIANE, la femme de FABIEN ...



Elle en devine le contenu.



Depuis, ELIANE se consacre efficacement à l'éducation de sa fille ...

Mars				2 <sup>e</sup> trimestre	
Contrôle	Devoirs	Travail journalier	Comportements	APPRECIATIONS	
9,5	10	9	9,5	Participation à la classe	
8	8	9	10	Initiative	
9	10	9	10	Mémoire	
10	10	9	9,5	Rythme de travail	
9	9	10	10	Attention	
9	10	9	10	Effort	
9	9	9,5	9	Soins	
10	9	9,5		Appréciations générales	
9,5	10	10		excellant	
10	9,5	9		llb	

à sa vie professionnelle ...



Et à sa vie sentimentale... Mais elle n'oublie pas FABIEN.



Figure 1.1: Birth and death coincide during the Algerian War, creating a legacy of pain and bitterness for future generations in France. From Farid Boudjellal, *Jambon-Beur: Les couples mixtes* [Ham-Butter/Arab: Mixed Couples], articles by Martine Lagardette, colors by Sophie Balland (Toulon: Soleil Productions, 1995), p. 5. © Farid Boudjellal.

French background who were affected by the war, and their descendants, live together peacefully and harmoniously today?

Although one reads these three frames sequentially, the eye also takes them in together and is attuned to the two axes that structure them as a whole: one could draw a horizontal line across the middle, from the child to her father, who are both lying flat, and a vertical line from France to Algeria, in the middle frame. These axes meet in the center frame, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, which both unites and separates France and Algeria, Patricia and her father. These imagined, invisible lines redraw what I call the colonial *affrontier* [*l'affrontière coloniale*] (McKinney 2007a, 2008c, 2011a), a boundary that here divides and connects France and Algeria, and around which individuals and groups confront each other [*ils s'affrontent*]*—*through insulting language [*des affronts*] or physical confrontation [*des affrontements*]*—*or instead seek peace and the effacement of the *affrontier*, producing an *afrontier*: a space characterized by freedom of movement and expression. The latter is a post/colonial territory from which colonial confrontation between groups in the present has been eliminated (cf. Hargreaves and McKinney 1997: 22), although the memory of the colonial past may remain. There is also a kind of visual anti-gravitational or centripetal force at work in Boudjellal's page: the head of the child is pointing to the left, whereas the French soldiers carrying her father's body are running toward the right, in the same direction as the helicopters are pointing; while France and Algeria are being pulled apart, and separating into two distinct nations during the war. The old passes in a violent, unnatural way, placing a tragic burden on the new: the *affrontier* of today is a product of the affront and the confrontations of yesteryear [*l'affrontière naît de l'affront-hier, des affrontements d'hier*]. It therefore includes a temporal and ontological tension between a dying colonialism, an ill-defined post-colonial present and a post/colonial future.

Other visual correspondences both unite and divide the first and third frames: the black background behind the healthy, pink baby girl in the first frame is echoed by the macabre black silhouettes in the third frame, which stand out against the red background of war, blood and fire—of the sun setting on French Algeria. On the left is the personal dimension, that of individualized history and a new self, represented close-up through the drawing of a human face, while on the right is the larger dimension of national history, seen at a greater distance and depersonalized through the anonymity of the silhouette shapes and the violence of the death-dealing machines hovering above the lifeless body. The two poles are mediated in the middle frame by the formal abstraction of the map, representing the geo-political and natural elements in and through which the personal and the collective

meet: the cartoonist draws from the map-maker's symbolism. Through the layout of all these elements, the cartoonist suggests that one of his most important tasks will be the articulation of the individual and the collective, of personal and national histories: the individuation of the historical, making it more comprehensible, real and convincing to readers; and the historicization of the personal. The eye takes in and interprets the simple but profound symbolism of these three frames together as a dynamic whole, while also reading the strip sequentially.<sup>3</sup>

The story then shows Patricia as she grows up, meets and marries Mahmoud, and gives birth to their daughter Charlotte-Badia, who catalyzes the memories of her grandparents about the Algerian War. Faced with the double burden of cultural mixing and family animosities deriving from the war, nine-year-old Charlotte-Badia splits into two separate characters, Charlotte and Badia (Boudjellal 1995: 27; McKinney 1997). In order for the girl to piece together her two halves, her grandparents must be reconciled and their differences laid to rest. This occurs at her birthday party, where the family feud erupts once again, in a complex sequence that weaves together the violence of colonialism (the Algerian War), of the Algerian civil war that erupted in 1992 (and brought back memories of the preceding Algerian conflict for many) and of neo-colonialism (the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in which the French army has been accused of various types of complicity). Significantly, it is the family matriarchs who open the possibility of healing, of broaching the colonial affront, by sadly comparing the pain caused by the death of a loved one. Moreover, they do so in a way that short-circuits the earlier competition between their opposing painful memories of the Algerian War. Instead, they resolve their differences by drawing an equivalence between the painful effacement of self that immigration can bring and the tragic violence of the Algerian War. When Charlotte-Badia's French grandmother mourns the battlefield death of her husband, the girl's Algerian grandmother responds by evoking the loss of her eldest daughter, Latifa, who committed suicide rather than face her father's anger, after she was impregnated by her French boyfriend (Boudjellal 1995: 53). We understand that Charlotte-Badia might once again become whole when we see her two selves looking on at her/their grandmothers, who are embracing for the first time (54). Charlotte-Badia and her French and Algerian families are what Claude Liauzu (2000) designated "passeurs de rives" [shore crossers], and Jean-Robert Henry (1991: 301) called "frontaliers": "individuals and groups living on the symbolic frontier between societies positioned as antagonists or as visibly different. . . . *Marginal* with respect to their society, these individuals are central to the inter-societal conflict, and to zones of common reference constructed by and in spite of this conflict."

In this comic book, the longing and hope for post/colonial vistas no longer plagued by the weight of the colonial past (Hargreaves and McKinney 1997: 22), and for a transformation of the colonial affrontier into an affrontier (a non-frontier) is symbolized by the possibility that Charlotte-Badia may become whole again. Nonetheless, the hyphen in her name remains a fragile link. The comic book's final pages show Mahmoud and Patricia looking at a family tree that Patricia has just made from photographs of four generations of the two families (59–61). The tree's form is symbolic: instead of a trunk representing the family's founding couple, and the branches showing the offspring, here the direction is inverted. In this case, the ancestors are tacked onto the branches, and Charlotte-Badia's portrait is on the tree's base, but it is located on the physical faultline at the center of the double-page (cf. Groensteen 1999: 44–48). This configuration suggests that it is the mixed offspring of France and Algeria who are important today, and not long-departed past generations or ancient quarrels. As Mahmoud gazes at the tree, he admonishes Patricia not to go too far back in their families' histories, lest she encounter unpleasant surprises. Boudjellal suggests here that although one might reexamine colonial history in order to promote the healing of French-Algerian antagonisms, an overvaluation of the past could perpetuate conflict along the French-Algerian affrontier, with negative effects on future generations of Maghrebi-French. Is this an injunction to leave colonial injustices buried in order to facilitate assimilation? For some, the admonishment by Mahmoud would echo eerily with Renan's problematic insistence in "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" [What Is a Nation?] (1947; 1993) that a nation must forget historical grievances against minorities in order to survive, intact. However, it has been noted that a major problem with Renan's argument is that it is usually the minority that must hide its historical wounds, not the majority, and that this can have grave consequences for both. *Jambon-Beur* and other graphic narratives by Boudjellal, analyzed below (Chapter 4), demonstrate that the cartoonist is well aware of the risks and benefits, the felt necessity and objective impossibility, of forgetting colonial history and its injustices.

A less pronounced version of the French colonial affrontier can be detected and analyzed today in comics and graphic novels pertaining to other historical contexts and regions, for example, French Indochina, as we shall see (Chapter 3, below). I focus more on French-Algerian relations in this volume because cultural proximity and often violent sharing between French and Algerian cultures—due to many factors, but especially 132 years of French conquest and colonization, and related large population transfers between the two nations—have produced a long, rich, complex and fractured French-Algerian cultural formation, including many French-language

comics and graphic novels related to Algeria, drawn and read on both sides of the Mediterranean from before independence to the present. A photograph taken by Pierre Bourdieu (in Bourdieu, Schultheis and Frisinghelli 2003: 186) during the Algerian War and published over four decades later suggests the genesis of French-language Algerian comics and of French comics by cartoonists of Algerian heritage: it shows two Algerian boys standing outside a newsstand in French Algeria and gazing intently through its window at the display of comics inside, which include the French classic *Fantax*.<sup>4</sup> But what appear to interest the children most are the pocket-sized versions of cowboy and Indian comics (referred to in French simply as “pockets”), with titles such as *Totem*, *Buck John* and *Old Bridger*. Comics such as these helped inspire Algerian cartoonists (Labter 2009: 45–47, 53–55), as well as Algerian-French ones. Here already, the American colonial affronter appears as a paradigmatic model for the French-Algerian one (cf. Woodhull 1997). And in Boudjellal’s “Petit Polio” [Little Polio] series (1998–2002), set in Toulon during the Algerian War, young Mahmoud Slimani admires those same American-themed frontier comics and westerns.<sup>5</sup> That this sharing of a model of remembrance of colonial history was mediated by cartoonists from another country (Italy) may seem stranger still, but exemplifies a recurring feature of cultural memory, according to Ann Rigney (2005: 24): the transfer of “mnemonic technologies and memorial forms” from one group to another. So although I focus here on French imperialism, I am aware that other empires play a role in shaping the colonial affronter for French comics: for example, it is sometimes figured in comics through references to the American frontier, including the Far West (see below, Chapter 4), while at the other end of North African history stand the Roman empire and then the Ottoman one. These three imperial entities—Roman, Ottoman and American—and their frontiers were already articulated in French colonial visions of its Algerian conquest, to which Algerian novelists Kateb Yacine and Assia Djébar, among others, subsequently responded in their writings.

The frontier is both a hard historical reality and a figure for dividing and connecting cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other entities. To redraw empire therefore involves retracing frontiers still in dispute: that is, affrontiers. Colonialism has produced an unsettling fault line—a kind of frontier—in French-language comics, fracturing the apparently smooth surface and line of pleasant fantasy and artistic style, and running from the present day back through the “ligne claire” [clear line] of Hergé and his studio artists, all the way to the beginnings of the French-language comic book. One might choose, with some justification, to locate the medium’s launching in a series of *romans en estampes* [novels of engravings] by Swiss



cartoonist Rodolphe Töpffer, including *Histoire de M. Cryptogame* [*Story of Mr. Cryptogame*], whose initial 1830 manuscript version of the book was read and favorably received by Goethe (Kunzle 1990: 29–30, 2007: 49–53; cf. below, Chapter 2). That first draft was drawn during the conquest of Algiers, and expresses European anti-Algerian sentiment of the period, in its representation of merciless Barbary pirates, and of the dey of Algiers as an oriental despot who rules tyrannically until he is killed by a captured European woman just added to his harem. Colonialism remains a source of contention in France today, as politicians, pundits and ordinary people debate whether the French colonial occupation of Algeria was essentially a form of exploitation and domination for which France bears responsibility, or was instead mainly a positive outgrowth, expression and even gift of French civilization to North Africa. Much like his presidential predecessors (François Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac),<sup>6</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy often argued that colonialism was at least partly an enterprise for which France should be proud, and that in any case belongs to the past, so does not require apologies (“repentance” is the term often used) or, especially, reparations. However, writing on 18 March 2012, on the occasion of the fifty-year commemoration of the cease-fire of 19 March 1962, historian Benjamin Stora (2012) describes Sarkozy’s declaration during a visit to Algeria in December 2007 as a step forward in official French recognition of the injustices of colonialism: “Unjust by nature, it could not have been lived other than as an enterprise of servitude and exploitation” (Sarkozy, quoted by Stora). Perhaps, but the fact remains that Sarkozy’s official conduct and language were often neo-colonial in nature; for example when he courted right-wing voters by stigmatizing post-colonial, working-class immigrant minorities in France.

The affrontier is a faultline across and through which national and trans-national identities are constantly being reconstituted. By redrawing empire in comics, cartoonists reenvision identities of the French and of the (formerly) colonized, including people from Vietnam and Algeria, where two of the bloodiest and most protracted modern wars of decolonization were fought. The two wars and the colonial history leading up to them have inspired many French cartoonists in the last few decades. We have already seen some of the iconic figures of the colonial affrontier in French comics: the mixed couple, the *métis/se* [a person of culturally or ethnically mixed descent], the post-colonial immigrant (and family) and the war victim. These exist singly and in various combinations: for example, Abdel, the Algerian grandfather of Charlotte-Badia, is both a post-colonial immigrant and a war victim. Cartoonists who redraw empire often focus on figures who guard the colonial affrontier, challenge it or disregard it: French professional soldiers and conscripts, colonized soldiers in the French army



and nationalist anti-colonial soldiers. Unauthorized crossing of the frontier constitutes a threat to national identity, so national, ethnic and cultural betrayal is a key trope of this space and is often personified in army dissenters and deserters, mixed couples and *métis/se* characters. Here too one finds a concatenation or layering of figures, for example a French soldier falls in love with a colonized woman, forms a mixed couple and deserts to join an anti-colonial organization.

In the rest of this chapter I sketch out key dimensions of redrawing French empire in comics. First I outline the reasons why there has been a return to colonialism in French popular culture, and specifically in comics, over the past few decades. Next I explain how genealogy allows cartoonists to reconnect with the French colonial past. I then describe significant ways that cartoonists have approached colonial historiography. This leads me to an exploration of the importance of colonial archives for cartoonists. I then briefly describe how the medium's specific representational capacities allow it to depict the colonial past. I conclude by providing an overview of the following chapters of my study.

## Returning to colonialism in French popular culture and comics

For the most part, colonial themes fell out of fashion in mainstream French comics after 1962, when the majority of French colonies had achieved formal independence. With a few significant exceptions, French-language cartoonists did not return to colonial history until a couple of decades after the end of the Algerian War. They did so then for several important reasons, especially the arrival of post-colonial ethnic minorities as a cultural and political movement drawing national news coverage in the 1980s (Hargreaves 1995: 142–44; Blatt 1997; Branche and House 2010: 130–31). Important events in this emergence include, on the political end, the 1983 *Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme* [March for Equality and Against Racism] and, in the cultural domain, the exhibition of works by “children of immigrants” at the Centre Pompidou museum of modern art and culture in Paris. Cartoonists participated in these and related events (Mechkour and Boudjellal 2004: 8–9). This new visibility was facilitated by the election of François Mitterrand to the French presidency in 1981, and the multicultural initiatives that his government took at the beginning of his fourteen years in that position. The Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, played an important role in this opening (Rigby 1991: 182). Another key factor was the rise of the far right as a political force in the early 1980s, and specifically the electoral breakthroughs of the National Front (FN), then led by

Jean-Marie Le Pen.<sup>7</sup> He helped to resurrect and attempted to rehabilitate a colonial history in which he had played a role personally, by participating as a French soldier in the wars in French Indochina and Algeria, but also as an elected legislator [député] who defended the colonialist cause of *l'Algérie française* [French Algeria] during the Algerian War (Stora 1992: 288–91; 1999: 38–46).

The return to colonial history during this period was in part a continuation of preceding, colonial-era debates and disputes, but conducted more freely, with less censorship, in newspaper articles, films, books, theater and television talk shows (Dine 1994; Stora 1997; Fleury-Vilatte 2000). However, to a certain extent it was taken up by a generation that began to come of age in the 1970s and early 1980s and had been too young to participate directly in France's colonial wars or debates, so was less inhibited by painful personal memories, or feelings of guilt, loss or responsibility: for that generation, engagement with colonial history could even be fashionable or funny. This interest found expression in a variety of popular means of expression, including magazines such as *Actuel*, film and music (for example, the “rock-arabe” of Carte de Séjour and Mounsi; and the songs of the rock group Indochine). Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, exotic adventures in historical comics were published in (now defunct) French magazines such as *Circus* (which serialized François Bourgeon's “Les passagers du vent” [Passengers of the Wind], about the triangular slave trade),<sup>8</sup> *Corto Maltese* (where “Carnets d'Orient” [Oriental Sketchbooks], Jacques Ferrandez's long running series of comic books on the colonization, settlement and decolonization of Algeria, were partly serialized)<sup>9</sup> and *Vécu* [Lived] (which published another series set mainly in colonial Algeria, “Chronique de la Maison Le Quéant” [Chronicle of the Le Quéant Family], by Daniel Bardet and Patrick Jusseaume),<sup>10</sup> whose motto was “L'histoire c'est aussi l'aventure” [History is adventure, too].

The formal independence of most French colonies put pressure on cartoonists to re-evaluate their depiction of colonialism (as epic history), which had long provided them with story material and narrative paradigms, as well as heroic character types (adventurer, missionary, reporter, soldier, settler)<sup>11</sup> and villainous ones (indigenous anti-colonialist leaders, Communist spies, rival imperialists, drug smugglers). Several options were available to them. For example, they could focus on decolonization as a dramatic period in which different groups from colonizing nation(s) were pitted against each other and when Europe was forced to confront the national aspirations of colonized peoples. Pierre Christin, scriptwriter of comics and professor of journalism, described this when I asked him why he chose to focus on decolonization in some of his comics (Christin and Goetzinger 1996):

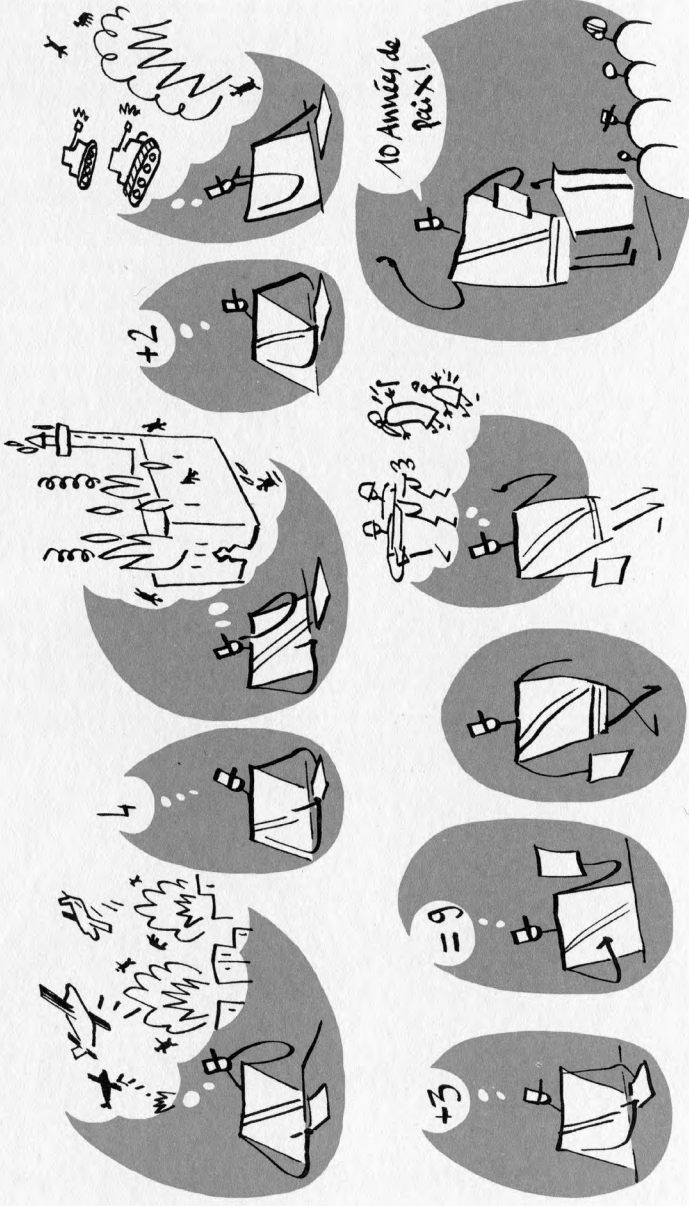
Quand les choses commencent à se détraquer, c'est ça qui est intéressant. C'est là où il y a des histoires à raconter, parce qu'il y a des déchirements autant politiques que personnels, parce que ça représente un monde disparu ou en train de s'écrouler . . .

[What's interesting is when things begin to go off kilter. That's where there are stories to be told, because there are splits that are political and personal, because it represents a world that has disappeared or is collapsing. . . ]

Cartoonists such as Christin attempt to locate the roots of colonialism's failure and retrace the history of its decline and transformation. For example, some have recently depicted a sequence of events that prefigured and helped lead to the Algerian War (Figure 1.2): a nationalist Algerian demonstration in Sétif on 8 May 1945, the immediate violent crackdown by French forces, the ensuing Algerian riot that killed some one hundred Europeans, and the weeks-long retaliatory massacre by the French army, police and *Pieds-Noirs*<sup>12</sup> of untold hundreds and even thousands of Algerians (Horne 1978: 23–28; Abun-Nasr 1990: 339–40; Ruedy 1992: 149–50; Benot 2001: 9–35; Pervillé 2003: 17). Comics that revisit this episode of French colonial history include *Tabya El-Djazair: Du sang sur les mains* [Long Live Algeria: Blood on the Hands] (Galando, Dan and Ralenti 2009), *Petite histoire des colonies françaises: La décolonisation* [A Short History of the French Colonies: Decolonization] (Jarry and Otto T. 2009), *Les Z: Sétif-Paris* [The Zs: Sétif-Paris] (Malka and Volante 2011) and *Leçons coloniales* [Colonial Lessons] (Begag and Defali 2012). This last volume, which deplores the French colonial failure to educate Algerians and treat them equally, was scripted by Azouz Begag, former *Ministre délégué à la promotion de l'égalité des chances* [Under-Secretary for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity] in France. Begag, whose family is from this region of Algeria, and Djillali Defali, who drew the story, researched the event on site.

Christin's statement also suggests that cartoonists may view colonialism's apparent failure in disparate and even conflicting ways. For instance they may portray colonialism as: tragedy, farce, or epic struggle; deeply flawed and doomed to failure from the start or potentially recuperable at key points; a heroic narrative of sacrifice and redemption or a grotesque descent into human depravity; and a closed chapter of history or a force that reaches into the present (for example, as neo-colonialism, uninterrupted colonialism, imperialism, or destruction for which reparation still needs to be made). Moreover, the manner in which artists depict the colonial past always says something about their vision of the present. For example, there may be a nostalgic emphasis on a disappearing colonial society

Le général Duval, qui commandait la répression à Sétif en 1945, déclara quand tout fut terminé : « Je vous ai donné la paix pour dix ans ; si la France ne fait rien, tout recommencera en pire et probablement de façon irrémédiable. » Ce n'était pas difficile de savoir que la France ne ferait rien, mais « 10 ans », il fallait être visionnaire, les analystes tablaient sur 100 ans de paix minimum.



**Figure 1.2:** A satirical depiction of the accounting after the massive French repression in Sétif, Algeria, and the surrounding area in 1945. The French general responsible for the massacre proclaims that it has bought ten years of peace for France. The Algerian War began about nine years later. From Grégory Jarry and Otto T., *Petite histoire des colonies françaises*, vol. 3: *La décolonisation* [A Short History of the French Colonies: Decolonization], colors by Lucie Castel and Guillaume Heurtault (Poitiers: FLBLB, 2009), n.p. © Grégory Jarry, Otto T. and Editions FLBLB.

(in Christin's words, "a world that has disappeared or is collapsing") or an anti-colonialist, forward-looking focus on the creation of a new nation by the colonized. In comics that focus on colonial history there always exists, in latent or explicit form, a view of present-day relations between ex-colonizer and ex-colonized, just as comics that focus on the post-colonial multiculturalism of present-day France and on its former colonies incorporate one or more views of colonial history. Here again, comic-book representations of the events in 1945 in the Constantine region provide an excellent example. Whereas the four recent works cited above provide a critical perspective on this infamous example of massive French colonial repression, an earlier work evokes it in vague terms (Tacconi et al. 1978: 1134), a biography of De Gaulle ignores it completely (Saint-Michel, Goutteman and Rufieux 2000), and comics that celebrate French colonial troops either ignore it (Saint-Michel and Le Honzec 1995) or euphemize it as a "une castagne" [a scrap] (Glogowski and Puisaye 2003: 42). This last comic book appeared in a series on the French Foreign Legion (a quintessentially colonial army branch) commissioned by a traditionalist Catholic publisher with ties to the French far right, which suggests how the representation of French colonial history, including in comics, remains a highly politicized struggle. The French state long blocked access to, and even purged, its archives on the event (Rey-Goldzeigueur 2002: 60–61), and it was only in 2005 that the French ambassador to Algeria finally described the French repression as an "unexcusable tragedy" (AFP 2005). Genealogical activity and historical inquiry—such as that of Begag into the uprising and massacre in his parents' home region<sup>13</sup>—provide cartoonists and readers with important ways of reconnecting with French colonial history in comics.

## Drawing colonial and imperialist genealogies

Genealogy in relation to colonialism and imperialism in and around French comics takes at least five interconnected forms: familial, ethnic, national, artistic and critical. The potential and problems of genealogy are suggested by the quandry at the end of *Jambon-Beur*: drawing up the family tree may provide self and community with a stable sense of identity and continuity, but when the colonial affrontier traverses it, investing ancestral history with too much authority over the present can create painful divisions. In *Le cimetière des princesses* [The Cemetery of the Princesses] (Ferrandez 1995), Marianne, a *Pied-Noir* art student living in Algiers in 1954, begins to trace back a colonial genealogy to Joseph Constant, an orientalist painter and adventurer who travelled to Algeria in 1832, by reading his "Orien-



**Figure 1.3:** The reading of an artist's scrapbooks from the Algerian conquest inspires a colonial genealogical search by a *Pied-Noir* art student. From Jacques Ferrandez, *Carnets d'Orient*, vol. 5: *Le cimetière des princesses* [Oriental Sketchbooks: The Cemetery of the Princesses], preface by Louis Gardel (Tournai: Casterman, 1995), p. 24. © Casterman. Reproduced with the kind permission of Jacques Ferrandez and Editions Casterman.

tal sketchbooks” (Figure 1.3): although not a direct descendant, she adopts him as an ancestral figure in quasi-familial and ethnic terms. In many of the comics that I analyze, the familial represents the ethnic (cf. Ferrandez in Buch 2005: 58–59). This comes partly from the generic conventions of historic fiction (family sagas for recounting colonial history, etc.; Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 124), but is also related to the familial language of nationalism (see below). Marianne’s reading spurs her, as it did Captain Haddock in Hergé’s *Le secret de la Licorne* [*The Secret of the Unicorn*], to retrace the itinerary of her ancestor (here, Constant) through an initiatory pilgrimage to the *lieux de mémoire* [places of memory] where he was years ago, scattered across Algeria. Today’s cartoonists have reworked this theme from earlier colonial comics, such as those of Hergé (McKinney 2011b) to help produce what Rigney (2005: 17, 23–24) calls a working memory. Cartoonists also redraw the genealogy of their own family history as it intertwines with French colonial and imperialist history. Ferrandez has engaged in this type of research on his family’s *Pied-Noir* roots in Algeria (Poncet



and Morin 1996: 76; Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 128–29; Buch 2005: e.g., 64–66, 73–77). Marianne is therefore a fictional double of Ferrandez and could also be partly based on Ferrandez’s own mother (Poncet and Morin 1996: 76). Marianne’s search for her mythical ethnic ancestor (Constant) leads her to interrogate her family history: for example, she learns that her great-grandmother modeled for an orientalist harem painting that Constant made in Nice, just as Marianne models for an Orientalist painter in Algiers decades later.<sup>14</sup> Morvandiau, also of *Pied-Noir* heritage, inserts a drawing of his family tree at the beginning of *D’Algérie* [About/From Algeria] (2007: n.p.), which intertwines his personal and family history with that of French-Algerian relations from the 1830 invasion to the present, to critically examine the connections between his family and the history of colonialism and decolonization. This is also therefore a genealogy of violence and counter-violence, whose erasures still weigh on the present: Morvandiau points out that some events and actions—such as the disappearance of Maurice Audin while in French military custody—remain silenced and taboo for official France (Figure 1.4).

Contemporary cartoonists in France engage therefore in personal and ethnic genealogical inquiries, such as when they reconstitute their family history: fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles, grandparents and others who lived in—or visited—French colonies, including French Indochina and Algeria, arguably the two most significant French colonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They reconstruct their family history as a genealogical link between themselves and the colonial past, often as a way of situating themselves within strands of history that have not been fully integrated into the dominant French historical narrative, and (or) whose definition is still contested: the colonization of Algeria, which profoundly modified both France and Algeria in palpable ways up to the present (Chapter 2, below); the Indochinese War,<sup>15</sup> which helped launch the process of decolonization across the French empire (Chapter 3, below); and the Algerian War, a bitter and long-lasting colonial conflict that tramautized many Algerians and French (Chapter 4, below). These reconstructed family histories are often related to post-colonial ethnic minorities: for example, presented as symbolic of the history of *Pieds-Noirs*, Algerian Jews, Algerian Muslim immigrants to France or Viet Kieu (expatriate Vietnamese). Others are not: familial stories about French conscript soldiers, for example.

A third form of genealogy, after familial and ethnic versions, is national genealogy. Ferrandez’s character Marianne is obviously named after a national symbol of France, suggesting that the recreation of the Algerian past through her involves reinserting Algerian colonial history and memory into the history of France. What is at stake here, therefore, is a coun-



# UN HOMME A DISPARU



Le 11 juin 1957,  
Maurice Audin,  
militant du  
Parti Communiste  
Algérien-interdit-  
est arrêté par  
les parachutistes.  
Henri Alleg,  
camarade politique  
lui aussi arrêté,  
le croise une  
ultime fois au  
centre de tortures  
d'El-Biat.  
La vérité sur  
les circonstances  
de sa "disparition"  
n'ont, à ce jour,  
jamais été  
dévoilées.

## MAURICE AUDIN

DE GAULLE N'ENTEND PAS LAISSER LES MILITAIRES OCCUPER LE TERRAIN POLITIQUE ET LE CHEF DE LA FRANCE LIBRE N'A PROBABLEMENT PAS OUBLIÉ L'ARDENT RALLIEMENT DES FRANÇAIS D'ALGÉRIE À PÉTAÏN. MON PÈRE—QUI A 21 ANS CE MÊME 4 JUIN—EST ATTENTIF AUX ÉVÈNEMENTS. IL LIT "LA QUESTION" D'HENRI ALLEG, MAIS, COMME SES PARENTS, CROIT ENCORE POSSIBLE UNE ALGÉRIE FRANÇAISE, UNIE ET FRATERNELLE. LE GOUVERNEMENT PROVISOIRE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE ALGÉRIENNE (GPRA) EST CRÉÉ ET ÉLIT FERHAT ABBAS À SA PRÉSIDENTE.

Figure 1.4: On this page of his autobiographical comic book about France and Algeria, Morvandiau interweaves his family history with that of decolonization. Here he redraws a document recalling Maurice Audin—a mathematician and Communist who was born in Tunisia—and overwrites it with text referring to the cover-up of the torture and disappearance of Audin by the French army in Algeria and notes that at the time his own father, a *Pied-Noir* who still believed in “a French Algeria, united and fraternal,” read Henri Alleg’s *The Question*, which recounts the arrest and torture of Audin and Alleg for their radical activities in Algeria. From Morvandiau, *D’Algérie* [About/From Algeria] (Rennes: L’oeil électrique/Maison Rouge, 2007), n.p. © Morvandiau and L’oeil électrique/Maison Rouge.

ter-memory (Rigney 2005: 23) articulated through an historical fiction, a form of writing and here, of drawing, that helps palliate “the difficulties of using the historiographical genre” (22; cf. Leroy 2011). The latter are compounded when much evidence from the colonial past has been lost for ethnic minorities living in France, at a far remove both temporally and spatially from foundational *lieux de mémoire*.

According to Etienne Balibar (in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 101), “in contemporary national societies, except for a few genealogy ‘fanatics’ and a few who are ‘nostalgic’ for the days of the aristocracy, genealogy is no longer either a body of theoretical knowledge or an object of oral memory, nor is it recorded and conserved *privately*: today it is *the state which draws up and keeps the archive of filiations and alliances*” (original emphasis). Some cartoonists have become “genealogy ‘fanatics,’” or at least devote considerable (though sometimes ambivalent) attention to genealogy, precisely in part because of the ways in which French nationality has been constructed through the nation-state. Balibar argues that the latter produces a fictive ethnicity, which increasingly supercedes other types of kinship structures and identifications (in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 49). This creates an “imaginary unity *against* other possible unities,” including—in France—groups historically dominated and excluded through colonialism, imperialism, social class and gender. Fictive ethnicity is produced through both language and a notion of race (96): since the linguistic community is inherently open (anyone can learn a national language; 98), it must be closed off through a racial supplement, in the form of the idea that members of the national community all belong to a quasi-family, which is constituted by “the community of ‘French,’ ‘American’ or ‘Algerian’ families” (99–100; cf. Balibar 1998: 83).<sup>16</sup> So for Balibar (in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 100; emphasis added):

The symbolic kernel of the idea of race (and of its demographic and cultural equivalents) is the schema of *genealogy*, that is, quite simply the idea that the filiation of individuals transmits from generation to generation a substance both biological and spiritual and thereby inscribes them in a temporal community known as “kinship.”

Genealogies produced in comics about French colonialism tend to reinforce, contest or otherwise rework the racist closing off of French national belonging and, perhaps more rarely, the masculinist gendering of nationalism and national “patrimony” (cf. McClintock 1993; Beaty 2007, 2008), including the colonial heritage of French comics (McKinney 2011b)—the colonial adventure in comics (Miller 2004) was traditionally the preserve

of French boys and men, in the stories and among their producers and consumers.

A fourth type of genealogical reconstruction is the search for artistic masters from the past. Marianne also resembles Ferrandez in that her research into the life and work of Constant creates an artistic genealogy (orientalist painting and painters), as well as an ethnic and family one: the references by Ferrandez to Hergé and to Eugène Delacroix as his artistic forebears are transparent here (see above, Figure 1.3, and Chapter 2, below).<sup>17</sup> Another version of this genealogical activity is the field-forming, often institutionalized, search for progenitors of the comics medium, which leads publishers, cartoonists and scholars to consecrate as the founding fathers of comics some cartoonists whose oeuvre is indelibly marked by colonialism and imperialism (cf. McKinney 2011b).<sup>18</sup>

My fifth form of genealogical inquiry in and around comics is the critical investigation into the colonial and imperialist roots of French comics. Here, and in a companion study, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (McKinney 2011b), I engage in this type of investigation, inspired by the methods of Michel Foucault, Balibar, Edward Said, and Rigney, among others. Foucault (1981: 83; quoted in Woodhull 1993: 97), for example, defines genealogy as “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today,” and archeology as “the appropriate methodology of this analysis of local discursivities” (Foucault 1981: 85; cf. Foucault 1982). However, in *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, Kristin Ross (1996: 190) argues that “Foucault states that he wants to write about the present; this desire is used to justify the genealogical project, and then he never quite gets to talking about the present.” And as Said (1994b: 41) has observed, investigation into European imperialism was mainly absent from Foucault’s otherwise powerful and productive genealogical research. By contrast, my critical genealogical project traces colonial ideology and representation up to the present, in a popular medium. And despite its importance for understanding the nature and evolution of present-day French society, popular culture has been mostly ignored by theoreticians and cultural critics such as Said and Foucault, who are otherwise capital to my genealogical investigation.

The reincorporation of colonialism into French history has not happened smoothly or extensively, in part because of the rupture of partial decolonization: the loss of most of the French empire disrupted the national narrative of French grandeur, progress and civilization, which had been instrumental in imperialist expansion and domination (Agulhon 1998: 300). And continuing neo-imperialist relations between France and former

colonies also make investigation into colonial history and its aftermath a sensitive subject in France today. A striking example of the resulting blind spot is the often cited and almost complete exclusion of the related histories of colonialism, immigration and slavery from the impressive, multi-volume series on *Les lieux de mémoire* in France, edited by Pierre Nora (1984–92)—this absence has been noted by many commentators (e.g., Noiriel 1992: 18–19; Cottias 2006: 128; Liauzu 2006: 95) and is all the more surprising given his previous research on colonial populations (Nora 1961). Of course the occlusion of colonial history has always been partial: for example, since 1962 there has been much discussion of the ways that it should be viewed and integrated into the national narrative. One illustration is the debate sparked by a law passed by the French parliament on 23 February 2005, which stated that, among other things, in public schooling:<sup>19</sup>

les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit.

[school programs recognize in particular the positive role of the overseas French presence, notably in North Africa, and give to the history and the sacrifices of the French army combatants from those territories the eminent place that is their due.]

Although some found other features of the law objectionable too, this article especially provoked a storm of protest by historians, who argued that their freedom of thought and expression was being unduly restricted (e.g., Liauzu and Manceron 2006). French president Jacques Chirac eventually rescinded the offending article, which had been included in part to satisfy associations of French settlers of Algeria and their descendants.

In the prior decade, one such organization, the Cercle Algérieniste [Algerianist Circle], cited as instrumental in the passing of the 2005 law (Escanlon Morin, Nadiras and Thénault 2005: 41), published a series of five comic books recounting the colonization of Algeria. They exemplify some of the ways in which cartoonists have used genealogy to promote alternative or submerged versions of French history, which reincorporate colonial history viewed through their perspective—in this case, a reactionary, colonialist one. Evelyne Joyaux-Brédy, a teacher and president of the Cercle Algérieniste of Aix-en-Provence, wrote the story for the series, which was published by subscription. She left Algeria in 1961 at age 12 and has explained that her family history helped inspire a prose novel that she published, as well as

the comic books (Esteve n.d.). Genealogy is therefore a pertinent category for reading her series: it recounts the fictional(ized?) epic story of a family in Algeria, from 1832 to 1962. The cartoonists include family trees on the title pages of two comic books—they function as both an aid for readers and a visual representation of an ethnic community (the *Pieds-Noirs*) as a family, a nationalist trope (Balibar, in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; see above) structured by gender (McClintock 1993). In this case it serves both to demarcate a French colonial community and to (re)connect it with the larger national one, beyond the “interruption généalogique” [genealogical interruption]<sup>20</sup> caused by the loss of French Algeria. The Algerian War removed the colonizers from their colonial *mère-patrie* [homeland] (their homes, the tombs of their ancestors, etc.) and forcibly (re)inserted them into mainland French society. It also isolated them from French national history, through the temporary suppression or marginalization of its colonialist and imperialist features, whose glorification had previously contributed to French national mythology and history (Dine 1994: 146–77; Agulhon 1998: 300). French comic books and series (but also other narrative forms, including film and prose fiction) such as the *Cercle Algérieniste* one often recount colonial history via a family saga, and may take the form of fiction, semi-fiction or even straight biography and autobiography (cf. Rigney 2005: 22). This last form of writing has become a dominant one in the alternative comics movement over the last couple of decades (Baetens 2004; Miller 2007: 61–62, 215–41), so it is not surprising that mixtures of autobiography, as well as family, ethnic and national history are found in many comics about French Algeria. The deep settler colonization that occurred there over the 132 years of French occupation (McClintock 1992: 88) has made a significant imprint on French popular culture, including comics.

### Drawing on historians and colonial history in comics

What sorts of relationships have existed between, on the one hand, historical and other scholarly research and, on the other hand, (post)colonial comics? This is a leitmotif of my investigation throughout this study, because it helps clarify the meaning and value of these comics and scholarship about them and about colonialism. Throughout this book I highlight the complex and sometimes close links that exist between historical research, (post)colonial studies and comics. Some of the best-known experts on colonialism—including historians, sociologists and anthropologists—have reproduced documents and published research that contemporary cartoonists have drawn on, or redrawn, to create their historical fictions about colonialism

and decolonization. Among the most obvious examples are historical studies that cartoonists quote explicitly, whether within the comic itself (Figure 1.5),<sup>21</sup> in a bibliography at the end,<sup>22</sup> or on an artist's blog.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes one or more images, stories or texts worked into a comic strongly suggest that a cartoonist used the work of a particular historian: e.g., some images of colonial-era Algeria found in *L'histoire de l'Algérie en bandes dessinées: L'épopée du Cheikh Bouamama* [The History of Algeria in Comics: The Epic of Cheikh Bouamama] (Bessaih, Bakhti and Masmoudi 1986), *Carnets d'Orient* (Ferrandez 1994a) and "Le coup de l'éventail" [The Fan Blow/Trick] (Slim n.d.) were no doubt redrawn from *Villes d'Algérie au XIXe siècle: Estampes* [Cities of Algeria in the 19th Century: Engravings], edited by Djébar (1984).

In "L'effet d'histoire" [The History Effect], pioneering French comics critic Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle (1979) argued that historical references in comics often provide a thin veneer of historical verisimilitude to fictions primarily intended to distract: the historical references help produce an "history effect," much like the "reality effect" theorized by Roland Barthes (1985) in prose fiction. The four-part model of Fresnault-Deruelle accurately describes the relationship to history and historical research of many recent comics set in the colonial past: for example, the "Mémoires d'un aventurier" [Memoirs of an Adventurer] series (Dimberton and Hé 1989–91), set in colonial Indochina, or the "Chronique de la Maison Le Quéant" series (Bardet and Jusseume 1985–89), much of which takes place in colonial Algeria. On the other hand, works by Ferrandez, Lax and Frank Giroud, Clément Baloup and Mathieu Jiro, Séra, the two Cercle Algérieniste cartoonists (Joyaux-Brédy and Pierre Joux), and comic-book hagiographies about French colonial soldiers and missionaries commissioned by the Editions du Triomphe are designed to distract, certainly, but also intervene, more or less directly, in contemporary debates over the nature of colonial history and its aftermath. It is not surprising that these and other cartoonists often take markedly different political and ideological positions on France's colonial past, given its contentious nature. Contemporary cartoonists may use historical sources and cite historians with opposing views on colonialism, but some use the same historical evidence and sources in comics whose historical meanings diverge or even contradict each other. This is especially obvious in comics about the colonization and decolonization of Algeria, in part because of the wide variety of comics available in French on this topic, but also because of the presence in France of several minority groups with a more or less direct connection to Algeria and the war, and highly contentious public debates about French colonialism in Algeria.

Cartoonists may clearly announce their intention to intervene in historical debates through comics, for example, in published interviews (e.g.,



Figure 1.5: A historian's study that documents a mostly forgotten aspect of the French colonial past in Vietnam—how some French soldiers upheld their ideals by leaving the French army and aiding the Vietnamese nationalists and Communists—is depicted in a comic book partially based on that historical publication. From Lax (art) and Frank Giroud (script), *Les oubliés d'Annam* [The Forgotten Ones from Annam], vol. 1 (Marcinelle: Dupuis, 1990), p. 37. © Lax and Frank Giroud.

Ferrandez, on his publisher's website),<sup>24</sup> in prefatory material or appendices (e.g., *Azrayen'*, vol. 2, by Lax and Giroud [1999]), or by requesting and publishing a preface by a well-known specialist of the history that the comic book retells. The professional credentials of historians<sup>25</sup> can provide cultural capital and legitimation to a medium that has been described as a “paralittérature” (Couégnas 1992) and is often associated with juvenile distractions, not always of the best variety (cf. Beaty 2007, 2008). For example, Belgian historian Louis-Bernard Koch scripted a pro-colonial comic book, *Avec Lyautey de Nancy à Rabat* [With Lyautey from Nancy to Rabat] (Cenci and Koch 2007), published by the Editions du Triomphe, whose cultural and historical agenda is on the far right. As I noted earlier, other historians have prefaced books that deal with episodes from colonial history. Ferrandez invited historians Stora and Michel Pierre to introduce two volumes of his “Carnets d'Orient” (in Ferrandez 1994d, 2005a). Stora, of Jewish Algerian heritage and born in Constantine, is a preeminent historian of Algeria, whereas Pierre has published on the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition, the *bagnes* [French prison camps] (e.g., in French Guyana), as



well as on connections between colonialism and comics. Perhaps inspired by Ferrandez's example, Lax and Giroud solicited a preface from Stora for the first volume of *Azrayen'* (1998), their two-part comic book about the Algerian War. Stora also prefaced *Octobre noir* [Black October] (Daeninckx and Mako 2011), which recounts the infamously violent police repression in Paris of a peaceful demonstration on 17 October 1961 by Algerians against a curfew imposed on them. An appendix by Jean-Luc Einaudi, whose historical studies have contributed much to public knowledge of the event (e.g., 1991), lists the North Africans who were killed or disappeared in the Paris region in fall 1961. Historian Pascal Blanchard wrote a preface for *Le chemin de Tuan* [Tuan's Way], by Baloup and Jiro (2005), which focuses on anti-colonial activism, including of Vietnamese students in interwar Paris. Blanchard, a co-editor of *Le Paris Asie* [The Paris Asia] (Blanchard and Deroo 2004), has been in the forefront of historical research and debates on French colonial representations, along with Nicolas Bancel, Sandrine Lemaire and other members of ACHAC (Association pour la Connaissance de l'Histoire de l'Afrique Contemporaine [Association for the Knowledge of the History of Contemporary Africa]). And Maximilien Le Roy included an interview with Alain Ruscio, a specialist of French colonialism in Indochina, at the end of *Dans la nuit la liberté nous écoute* [At Night Liberty Listens to Us] (2011), which recounts the real-life story of Albert Clavier during the Vietnamese war of liberation against the French.

These documents constitute, among other things, clear signals that historical publications by these authors helped inspire the cartoonists. As Bart Beaty (2007) has shown, accredited academics and researchers who intervene in comics production and consumption can lend cultural capital to cartoonists attempting to reconfigure their field. This kind of legitimation and support can be especially important to artists and works dealing with issues as contentious as colonial history. This is no doubt part of the reason why Ferrandez and Joann Sfar have sought out other public figures (prose novelists, actors, etc.) associated in some way with the history of Algeria and the Middle East: nine of the ten volumes in Ferrandez's "Carnets d'Orient" have such a preface; as do three of the five original French volumes of Sfar's "Le chat du rabbin" [The Rabbi's Cat] series.<sup>26</sup> Algerian novelist Yasmina Khadra prefaced *Turcos: Le jasmin et la boue* [Turcos: Jasmine and Mud] (Tarek, Payen and Mouellef 2011), about Algerian soldiers fighting in the French army during the First World War. Colonial-era cartoonists and comics publishers also sometimes had recourse to the knowledge of experts, although this is often difficult to ascertain today: for example, Alain Guillemain (2006: 174–75) plausibly speculates that the authors of "Parachutés au Laos" [Parachuted into Laos] (Verdon and Perrin-Houdon 1951–52)

may have partially based their comic on a published account (*Parachuté en Indochine* [Parachuted into Indochina], 1947) by Guy de Chezal, a French secret service officer, about his real-life, wartime experiences;<sup>27</sup> and *Bayard*, where the comic was serialized, touts the expertise of Perrin-Houdon, deriving from his status as an officer in the French colonial army (“Parachutés au Laos,” no. 274, 2 March 1952, p. 2).

Historians have occasionally been associated with exhibitions of comics related to colonialism and imperialism. They have thereby helped frame how these historical themes are apprehended. For example, in conjunction with an exhibition about comics on the Orient held at the Institut du Monde Arabe [Institute of the Arab World] in Paris, Pierre (1992) published an article about the topic in the French comics magazine (*A Suivre*) [To Be Continued]. More recently, historian Sylvain Venayre curated the exhibition “Le remords de l’homme blanc” [White Man’s Remorse], held at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, in Charleroi, Belgium on 12 February–3 April 2005. It focused on European colonialism as represented in the comics of Ferrandez (French), Hugo Pratt (Italian), Jean-Philippe Stassen (Belgian) and Peter Van Dongen (of Dutch and Indonesian heritage). He also wrote most of the exhibition catalog (Pasamonik and Verhoest 2005), providing a useful historical context for, and interpretation of, comic books by the cartoonists.<sup>28</sup> Stassen and Venayre collaborated on an illustrated edition of the French translation of Joseph Conrad’s classic colonial text *Heart of Darkness*, published by Futuropolis/Gallimard in 2006. Book reviews by historians and in history periodicals also help draw attention to French-language comics about colonialism and imperialism. The reviewer’s reputation and perspective, the choice of books reviewed, and the nature of the publication where the review appears are obviously all significant factors for assessing its potential impact. Pascal Ory, a prominent French historian at the Sorbonne, has a regular column reviewing comics for the generalist, literary magazine *Lire*.<sup>29</sup> He has published short, generally positive reviews there of several recent comics that revisit the colonial past in a more or less critical manner, including *Azrayen*’ (Lax and Giroud 1998), *La guerre fantôme* [The Phantom War] (Ferrandez 2002) and *Là-bas* [Down There] (Tronchet and Sibran 2003), which all retell the story of the Algerian War (Chapter 4, below, and McKinney 2011a). Historian Thierry Crépin (2003), who studied with Ory, reviewed two of these same comics in *Vingtième siècle* [Twentieth Century], a French history periodical. One finds, on the far right of the political spectrum, a glowing review of *Les rivages amers: L’Algérie—1920–62* [The Bitter Shores: Algeria—1920–62] (Joyaux-Brédy and Joux n.d.) and the four volumes that preceded it—a colonialist, *Pied-Noir* comic-book series about the creation and loss of French Algeria

(1993–98)—by Dominique Venner (2003), a long-time far-right extremist and the editor of *La nouvelle revue d'histoire* [The New Review of History], a widely disseminated, glossy monthly that provides a regular forum for pro-colonialist accounts of French history by professional historians and others (Chapter 4, below).<sup>30</sup> Venner's review is primarily aimed at an audience that shares his defiantly positive vision of France's colonial presence in Algeria and contests recent, critical assessments of that past by historians such as Stora: "Commence ensuite la guerre d'Algérie à partir de 1954, telle que l'ont vécue les Français d'Algérie et non comme la racontent les historiens" [Then begins the Algerian War, from 1954, in the way that the French of Algeria lived it, and not as historians tell it]. The irony of this statement is that Venner was not only a professional soldier who volunteered to fight in the Algerian War and was imprisoned by the French government for his subversive activity, but he printed this criticism of historians in a journal with historical ambitions. His review of the *Pied-Noir* comic continues his own wartime activities in another way, because he helped publish what were probably the very first comic books about the war—two pro-OAS works, the first of which presents itself as having been drawn in prison during the war (Coral 1962, 1964).<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, it is surprising that historians and cultural critics have paid so little attention to imperialism and colonialism in French-language European comics (and to comics in general)—whether Belgian, French or Swiss—given the long and continuing presence of such themes in the medium, and the fact that comics are an ideal place for studying how imperialism and colonialism are embedded in popular culture. It is all the more astonishing because the important anti-imperialist writer and Third World revolutionary Frantz Fanon (1986: 27) once pointed to European colonial-era comics and—more broadly—to popular culture and mass media as a place where colonial racism and imperialist ideology were rife: "Le nègre doit, qu'il le veuille ou non, endosser la livrée que lui a faite le Blanc. Regardez les illustrés pour enfants, les nègres ont tous à la bouche le 'oui Missié' rituel" [The Negro must, whether he wants to or not, don the livery that the white made for him. Look at the illustrated magazines (i.e., magazines containing comics) for children, where Negroes all spout the ritual "yes Mista"] (cf. Fanon 1986: 119; Pigeon 1996: 136; Miller 2007: 172–75).

## Drawing on the colonial archives

To some degree there was not a radical break between the new wave of comics with (post-)colonial themes and colonial-era ones. In the past, comics in

France often encouraged positive attitudes towards colonialism and imperialism, despite a long history in France of anti-colonial attitudes, activism, iconography and writings (Biondi and Morin 1993; Liauzu 1993; Girardet 1995). This was due to many factors, including the conservative and reactionary political tendencies of some cartoonists and comics publishers, censorious laws and institutions (Stora 1992: 25–73; Stora 1997: 111–25; Crépin and Groensteen 1999), a paucity of cartoonists or publishers from oppressed groups until recently, the domination of comics publishing by a few large publishers unwilling to take risks with a product directed almost exclusively at children until recent decades, the recycling of formulaic plots and character types in a mass-media form, and the related push to maximize profit through slavish imitation of best-sellers.

Fanon's critical remark quoted above, published in 1952, was directed at racist imagery in colonial-era illustrated children's periodicals ("les illustrés pour enfants" [illustrated magazines for children]) that have by now mostly disappeared from circulation. Jumping forward in time to our period when direct colonial rule by European nations has mostly (but not completely) disappeared, one finds in some comics a longing for a bygone era of colonial adventure and grandeur. In 1993 (46), Laurent Gervereau remarked that French artists had easy access to the archive of colonial representations. Since his observation was published, the availability of colonial-era material has arguably increased greatly, with the transfer of much imagery to the web, but also through the publication—by scholars and collectors—of colonial-era texts and imagery, such as journals, songs, postcards, paintings and comics. Drawing on or mining colonial archives can serve dissimilar and even conflictual purposes.<sup>32</sup> For example, colonial archives may provide material for explaining and critiquing unequal relations today between the dominant majority in France and ethnic minorities from colonized regions. Alternatively, they can be used in attempts to argue that French colonizers treated the colonized well and cohabited peacefully with them. Although both are forms of cultural archeology, their objectives in drawing on the colonial archives are different and even opposed. Critics and publishers have also treated colonial-era comics as a repository of influential graphic styles and techniques, which deserve to be better known because of their artistic qualities and the decisive influence that they have exerted on the comics field and other cartoonists. Some may view the colonial archives simply as a source of income: material retrieved there at low cost can be repackaged and sold today for a tidy profit. Therefore colonial-era comics constitute a multi-faceted colonial inheritance, which is transmitted and redrawn in various ways. For example, stumbling upon a colonial inheritance is still a theme for French cartoonists, some of whom

unmistakably borrow the motif from Alain Saint-Ogan or Hergé, both consecrated as founding fathers of French-language comics (McKinney 2011b). In *Le cimetière des princesses* (1995: 22–26), Ferrandez figures the colonial past as an inheritance of his family and ethnic community through the theme of Constant's colonial notebooks, which Marianne and her boyfriend discover in a flea market, just as Tintin discovers a model of the *Unicorn*, the ship of Captain Haddock's ancestor, Sir Francis Hadoque (François de Hadoque; see below, Chapter 2; cf. Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 124). In post-1962 French comics this colonial heritage has been redrawn at times as a nostalgic story about the loss of the colony, represented, for example, as the disappearance of family possessions in Algeria (Ferrandez 1995: 83–84), or the death of a Vietnamese mistress in French Indochina (Stanislas and Rullier 1992: 40). In such works, all that remains are the visual, textual and oral fragments from which cartoonists and their characters piece together their stories of loss, disappearance, exile, return and remembering: letters, half-remembered family lore, maps and photographs. This is unsurprising given the transition to formal independence of most French colonies, even though France continues to exert considerable political, economic, military and cultural influence on many (former) colonies, helping to arrest their transition, and that of France itself, away from colonialism. In this study I explore the ways in which cartoonists have redrawn colonial material, including history, iconography and adventure stories.

I focus mainly on comics published over the last few decades, including ones originally produced before 1962 and reissued since then. I wish primarily to elucidate how the colonial era has been represented in comics since the majority of French colonies gained formal independence. However, European and other varieties of colonialism and imperialism are clearly by no means finished today. For example, the United States has taken on much of the imperialist role formerly played by Britain and France (Said 1994a). France continues to exert neo-colonial influence over many of the foreign territories that it once ruled directly and openly as colonies (Verschave 2000, 2001). Colonialism and arrested decolonization have left their mark on French comics: one finds both striking continuities and significant differences between those produced at various points in time, so it is important to study their transformation and relationship to history (cf. Nederveen Pieterse 1992). Although French (neo-)colonial influence and activity have not ended, the transition of most French colonies to formal independence created a measurable shift in representations of colonialism in comics. I therefore make a rough distinction between comics published before and after 1962.

Of course most colonial-era comics have not been reprinted in recent years and are now found mostly in specialist libraries, private collections and at rare-book sellers. They are remembered mostly by a few comics specialists, historians and older readers of comics. I refer here to the old stories mainly to make comparisons with newer ones and to reconstruct the genealogy and evolution of important themes and events in comics related to Algeria and French Indochina. On the other hand, those colonial-era comics that are republished today should be analyzed for the ideologies that they transmit, the choices made by publishers and editors (why some colonial-era comics are chosen instead of others) and any justifications given for reissuing the works. Republished colonial-era comics help me interpret the consecration, reworking and contestation of colonial-era paradigms and figures in more recent comics and by cartoonists working today. For example, what remains of the trio once a staple of colonial-era comics: the missionary, colonial administrator and soldier, representing the conjugated might of the church, the government and the army? What did they symbolize in French comics before 1962, the year that France lost formal control over its Algerian colony? What do they represent in today's comics that recreate that epoch? And which characters have supplanted them in other recent publications?

### Techniques of redrawing empire in comics and graphic novels

Today cartoonists often represent colonial history in their comics to intervene in debates about contemporary France and its current relationships to its (former) colonies. By their nature and tradition, comics are uniquely configured to participate in these sometimes contentious discussions. Colonialism generated an immense amount of visual imagery and verbal-textual productions—mostly for, but sometimes against, colonialism—much of which can be incorporated into comics today, in one form or another, because comics are generally narratives made of both words and images. Its visual-verbal format allows it to include colonial-era visual representations, and rework or otherwise comment on them, especially through narrative. The dialogical, narrative and visual capacities of comics allow cartoonists to re-view and re-tell the colonial past in ways that are much more difficult, or even impossible, for other sorts of artists: for example, prose novelists and essayists such as Leïla Sebbar (1985) or Djébar (1986)—both authors of Algerian descent who publish in French—usually do not directly *show* readers the orientalist paintings that they critique. Instead they describe them

with words, although sometimes there is a reproduction of an orientalist painting on the book's cover. By contrast, cartoonists redraw orientalist paintings in their comics, or use collage techniques to directly insert reproductions into their visual-verbal narratives in ways that are germane to the mixed medium.

Much has been written over the past two or three decades about the visual material left by colonial-era photographers and painters. For French-occupied North Africa, this includes postcards, photographs, paintings, posters, maps and caricatures. These may constitute series, some of which have been reproduced—even many years after they were created—by artists or collectors. For example, Marc Garanger (1982, 1984, 1990) has published books of photographs that he took as a French soldier during the Algerian War, including of Algerian women for mandatory French identity cards, for which they were obliged to unveil. Prefaces by Francis Jeanson, who assisted the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) against France during the Algerian War, and by Sebbar help contextualize and interpret Garanger's photographs for us. During the Algerian War Pablo Picasso also famously created a series of paintings entitled "Algerian Women" [*Femmes d'Alger*], after the two well-known paintings bearing the same title that were made by Delacroix in the preceding century (cf. Porterfield 1998: 148–49). Several critics and collectors have published collections of, and interpretive essays on, colonial postcards about North Africa and its peoples. However, these series of photographs, paintings or postcards do not constitute narratives in and of themselves in the same way that comic strips and graphic novels do. Instead, reassembled by producers, collectors and critics, these colonial documents often provide variations on a theme: in postcards, different ethnic types of Algerians (Azoulay 1980), or various colonial monuments in a colonized Algerian city (cf. Prochaska 1990a); a series of Algerian women all photographed in the same place and pose, in Garanger's pictures; or different but related artistic and ideological visions of Algerian women in interior spaces, in paintings by Delacroix, Picasso and Houria Niati (Porterfield 1998: 143–51). By contrast, a comic set in colonial Algeria, for example, does not constitute a series in the same way as the photographs, postcards or paintings do, even when it relies on the latter for documentation. Instead it tells a story.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the painters, photographers and printers who created the series of images almost never produced visual narratives about the production or contestation of (neo-)imperialist discourses in the ways that some cartoonists do today in their artwork, through the narrative sequences of images and words that make up most comics. Theoreticians of comics, including Benoît Peeters (2002b: 24–29) and Thierry Groensteen (1999:



5–6), have convincingly shown the radical differences between the ways that paintings and comics usually produce meaning. The capacity of the comic strip or book to narrate in manners that paintings, engravings or photographs cannot is one of the most significant differences between these media. In some comics from the 1980s and 1990s one finds representations of colonial-era visual artists at work, for example: colonial photographers in Morocco, in *Coeurs de sable* [*Hearts of Sand*], by Loustal and Paringaux (1985, 1991), and in Algeria, in *Le centenaire* [The Centennial/Centenarian], by Ferrandez (1994d; see McKinney 2011b); and orientalist painters and their models in *Carnets d'Orient* (Ferrandez 1994a), *L'année de feu* [The Year of Fire] (Ferrandez 1994b) and *Le cimetière des princesses* (Ferrandez 1995). One already finds colonial-era photography as a motif in *Gringalou en Algérie* [Gringalou in Algeria] (Pinchon and Noé n.d.: 28), serialized in 1947. The artist-within-the-text functions as a reflexive device in comics, as a *mise-en-abîme* of the process of representation, of (re)drawing or representing empire. In some cases this produces a critique of imperialist ways of seeing in the colonial-era imagery used by the cartoonist as documentation for his or her own work. The sequential and narrative capacities of comics can allow cartoonists to represent in detail the production of colonial imagery and reflect on it. Even when there is no artist in the text, cartoonists may use the visual-textual and narrative capacities of the medium to draw attention to the relationships between representation and colonialism or imperialism. Examples of this, which I will analyze in detail in subsequent chapters, include the scrapbook or artist's sketchbook, used throughout Ferrandez's "Carnets d'Orient" series (Chapters 2 and 4, below), and the photo album, found in many French comics about the Indochinese War (Chapter 3, below) and the Algerian War (Chapter 4, below).

There are some similarities between the ways that film and comics function, for example their ability to offer us the visual viewpoint of a character.<sup>34</sup> The spatial layout of sequential frames in the comic strip and on the graphic-novel page, and the separation between them, allow artists to make visual juxtapositions, ellipses between contiguous frames, and other effects that are much more difficult or impossible to achieve in film, whose frames are projected rapidly onto the same space (the screen) and immediately vanish, one after another. Of course the special capacities of the comics medium are double-edged in an important respect that is related to my field of inquiry: they offer unique opportunities to reproduce and perpetuate colonial ideologies, images and discourses, as well as to critique them. The ways and the degree to which they do one or the other tell us a great deal about the place of imperialism and colonialism in French society.

## Redrawing French empire in comics: An overview

In this study I focus on the reconstruction of French national and ethnic identities in comics, in reaction to decolonization, and especially the wave of recent works—some by ethnic minority French artists from (former) French colonies—which increasingly provide critical reflection on the historical links between comic books, imperialism and colonialism. My main subject throughout this book is French comics. I chose a national framework for the coherence that it permits: colonial history has national specificities with important effects that continue today—for example, the history of migration flows from (former) French colonies to France, and the resulting constitution of post-colonial ethnic minority groups there. Nonetheless, the book does have a substantial comparative aspect, between the representation of colonialism in French comics about Indochina and Algeria.<sup>35</sup>

This volume is my second on colonialism in French comics. The preceding one, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (McKinney 2011b), focuses on the pervasive but insufficiently acknowledged presence of colonialism within a canon of French comics that has been constructed over roughly the preceding four or five decades. I examine colonialism and imperialism in comics by Hergé, and also especially by Saint-Ogan, who has been given foundational status in French comics by editors, critics and cartoonists, partly because he inspired Hergé, who borrowed ideas freely from the older and—at the outset—more popular French cartoonist (Groensteen 1996). To foreground the colonialism of Saint-Ogan's comics and show how cartoonists have reworked the colonial heritage of French comics over many decades, I analyze two events that have inspired much critical inquiry in recent years: the 1924–25 Croisière noire [Black Journey], a trans-African road trip sponsored by the Citroën car company, which was a massive multi-media event, and the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition, as well as related events before and after it. I thereby bring into critical dialogue the theoretical and historical analysis of colonialism and that of comics, two fields of research that rarely intersect despite many potential points of engagement. I show how the colonial heritage of French comics continues to exist today, not as something completely stable or unchanging, but instead as an archive of representations that cartoonists redraw, affirm and contest. In the terms that Rigney (2005: 17) borrows from Aleida Assmann, this is the transformation of archival memory into working memory and cultural memory.

*Redrawing Empire in French Comics* continues that critical inquiry, this time regarding two other important areas of colonial history and comics production. Chapter 2 (below) focuses on Algeria, whose French colonial

history extends over more than a century (1830–1962). Although French-language European comics and cartoons representing Algeria have been produced across that entire period and on up to the present, no published study before this one has surveyed the corpus. I show that some French cartoonists who rehearse Algerian colonial history today persist in retelling it from a standpoint of the colonizers. The contradictions inherent in the impossible position of the leftist or liberal colonizer (Memmi 1985: 47–69; 1991: 19–44; Dine 1994: 64–106) are perhaps nowhere more acutely apparent in the post-colonial era than in the case of a descendant of former colonial settlers who critiques colonialism while commemorating the existence and passing of the settler community. My main example is the remarkable comic-book series “Carnets d’Orient,” by Ferrandez, born in Algeria during the war but raised in France. His comics elicit positive attention in France far beyond the bounds of comics fandom: for example, several volumes in the series were prefaced by well-known authors, including a leading French authority on the Algerian War (Stora) and a prominent specialist of the Islamic world (Gilles Kepel). By analyzing Ferrandez’s use of his source materials, especially nineteenth-century European orientalist paintings and colonialist postcards, I show that the artistic vision contained in his comics remains bound in key ways to the worldviews of French colonial settlers, despite his laudable humanitarian intentions. This chapter engages with important ongoing debates about (post-)colonialism. For example, I document how Ferrandez borrowed erotic images of colonized women from a classic of colonial discourse studies (Alloula 1981, 1986, 2001)—itself forcefully critiqued by feminists (e.g., Woodhull 1991, Bal 1996)—and from erudite studies of orientalist paintings (e.g., Thornton 1985). Following these connections informs us about the degree to which colonial culture and nostalgia survive today in popular culture and the relationships between the latter and scholarly investigation. I analyze Ferrandez’s work at length because of its artistic achievement, ideological complexity, and exemplarity as a model for reworking colonial memory in comics. I end the chapter with a brief analysis of other works that strikingly resemble Ferrandez’s series: a comic book that three Algerians, B. Bessaih, B. Bakhti and Benattou Masmoudi (1986), published the year that Ferrandez partially serialized the first volume of his “Carnets d’Orient,” Joann Sfar’s “Le chat du rabbin” [The Rabbi’s Cat] series (2003–6), which is far better known internationally but was published later, and Morvandiau’s *D’Algérie* (2007). It is not clear whether Ferrandez was influenced by Bessaih, Bakhti and Masmoudi, or vice versa, but the three Algerian and three French artists draw on, and redraw, some of the same colonial-era historical and artistic sources. Moreover, Ferrandez’s series, focused on Catholic

*Pieds-Noirs*, was clearly a model for Sfar's work, whose main subject is Algerian Jews.

Chapters 3 and 4 study the traces of some of the most violent wars of decolonization in French comics: the French war in Indochina (1946–54) and the Algerian War (1954–62). Their outcome remains especially present and painful for certain groups in France, including the European settler community (*Pieds-Noirs*), the North African communities (Algerian immigrants and *Harkis* [Algerian soldiers in the French colonial army]) and refugees from South-East Asia (especially Vietnamese). To garner votes some political parties (especially the National Front) manipulate resentment over France's loss of prestige from decolonization. This context lends a particular relevance to my analysis of comic-book stories about the wars, in a medium that for generations almost exclusively championed French imperialism and colonialism. Several French artists have a strong personal link to colonization and the bloody wars that brought about its transformation: some are children of the colonized, others of the colonizers, and a few are even former combatants, or their offspring. These artists' depictions of the wars and the preceding colonization of these two regions are often different, sometimes radically so, from the way that comics traditionally presented colonialism, and therefore provide a powerful case-study of the recent transformation of an artistic tradition and of the conflicting positions taken on the divisive issue of France's colonial history.

There are many commonalities between these two wars, including their length (about eight years each), France's ultimate concession and withdrawal, and the fact that many French professional soldiers served in both of them: Raoul Salan and Marcel Bigeard spring to mind. Salan began his military career in French Indochina and later commanded the French war there against the Viet Minh (Ruscio 1992: 185–88), following which he helped direct French fighting during Algerian War, before taking part in the failed putsch of 1961 and then heading the OAS, the French terrorist group, in an attempt to keep Algeria French, even if it required overturning the French government and assassinating President De Gaulle. Bigeard was captured at the battle of Dien Bien Phu (Ruscio 1992: 198), which signaled the end of the Indochinese War, and then went on to take part in the Algerian War—his role included helping to oversee the torture of Algerians during the Battle of Algiers. The war in French Indochina contributed greatly to the determination of many French officers to win the Algerian War at all costs. Several cartoonists explore these connections in their depiction of the Algerian War. However, as Ruscio (1992: 96–97) has pointed out, there were massive differences between the Indochinese War and the Algerian War: for example the much smaller number of French families with a fam-

ily member who fought in the Indochinese War (all professional soldiers) as compared with the Algerian War, in which virtually all draft-age Frenchmen participated, and the much larger number of French civilians—about one million *Pieds-Noirs*—affected by the Algerian War, by contrast with the some 34,500 French citizens in French Indochina.

Correspondingly, although I point out important similarities between representations of these two wars in comics, I also analyze differences, including a curious, inverse relationship in comics production: during the Indochinese War a few French comics depicted it explicitly in longish stories; by contrast, there was an almost complete blackout on the representation of the Algerian War in comics while it was unfolding. On the other hand, the post-war production of comics about the Indochinese War is generally much thinner than for the Algerian War, both in terms of quantity (number and length of stories) and the array of perspectives represented by the authors and their works. Partly as a consequence, my chapter on the Algerian War is much longer and more detailed than the one about the Indochinese War. Moreover, there are so many French comics on Algeria that I devote separate chapters to those about the colonization of Algeria (Chapter 2) and the Algerian War (Chapter 4).

In my conclusion (Chapter 5) I rework Said's notion of the "voyage in" to outline some of the ways in which new ethnic, post-colonial minorities are complicating the ways that French empire has been drawn in comics. The post-colonial voyage in is the obvious corollary to the colonial voyage out. Both help define the ways in which cartoonists are redrawing French empire in comics.

It should already be clear, but nonetheless bears stating, that my own perspective on colonization and imperialism is that they are violent and reprehensible collective projects and systems, despite the good intentions of many specific individuals who participate in them or any positive effects that result from them, as cultural critics such as Fanon, Albert Memmi and Said have convincingly argued. My goal here is to analyze comic books, especially those drawn or republished after 1962 and the formal independence of most French colonies, as a way of ascertaining whether and how French popular culture is post-colonial: by redrawing empire, are cartoonists buttressing the colonial affrontier or working to move beyond it, toward an affrontier of peaceful, post/colonial relations, no longer characterized by affronts or confrontations [affrontements] linked to colonialism and imperialism? I therefore range widely, examining works ranging from the artistically complex to the rudimentary, and of all political stripes. I am most interested in those that articulate a critical, dialogical vision of the colonial past with skillful artistry. There is an increasing number of them. However,

I also freely recognize that there is no necessary connection between political persuasion, historical vision and artistic accomplishment: what I consider to be bad politics can certainly yield what I believe to be good art and vice versa. I spend considerable space analyzing works despite or even because of their historical or artistic limits.