Redrawing French Empire Comics

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Redrawing the colonial affrontier in French Algeria

Given the importance of colonial memory to contemporary French politics and national identity (Silverman 1992; Stora 1992), Pierre Nora’s editorial decision to more or less neglect colonial sites in his otherwise rich, monumental edited work, *Les lieux de mémoire* [Places of Memory] (1984–92), surprised many people. Many colonial sites are places of memory for significant numbers of people in France, even though such sites lack official recognition. Moreover, studies of colonial places of memory within and beyond France’s present-day borders would have been ideal candidates for Nora’s series since, according to his definition (1984: xxiv), “[1]es lieux de mémoire, ce sont d’abord des restes” [Places of memory are debris, first of all]. His decision to omit them has therefore been criticized. Like prose fiction and film, comics can serve as a *virtual* place of memory for colonial sites, as a substitute for lost or physically inaccessible places of memory. This function is perhaps accentuated for artists whose family members lived in Algeria, including the descendants of the colonized who emigrated to France in search of work and settled there, or of the European settlers who left Algeria. The special status of the Algerian colony for the French, the effects of deep settler colonization there (McClintock 1992: 88), and the nature of decolonization (the Algerian War and its sequels) have meant that the adaptation and assimilation process has been difficult for all the
minority groups that once lived in Algeria but now reside in France, whether Pieds-Noirs, Algerians, Jews, Muslims or Catholics.

Of course there have been crucial differences for the various groups undergoing this process: people of Algerian, and more generally of North African Arab or Berber, heritage have felt the brunt of neo-colonial racism, sometimes directed at them by some former European settlers and their offspring, but certainly also by many others in France. Pieds-Noirs have also reported mistreatment upon their arrival in mainland France at the end of the Algerian War. Generally speaking, as time passes and assimilation progresses, the links that younger generations from all these groups—but perhaps especially the Pieds-Noirs—have to their parents’ homeland become more tenuous and are contingent upon an access to the memory of parents and grandparents and, increasingly, to historical writing and archives, especially as those with direct memory of Algeria grow old and die. Nora (1984: xxiv) argues that this type of commemorative activity, by minority groups, is in fact exemplary of a more general trend affecting French society as a whole: “C’est pourquoi la défense par les minorités d’une mémoire réfugiée sur des foyers privilégiés et jalousement gardés ne fait que porter à l’incandescence la vérité de tous les lieux de mémoire. Sans vigilance commémorative, l’histoire les balaiert vite” [That is why the defense by minorities of a memory that has taken refuge in privileged hearths that are jealously guarded only brings the truth of all places of memory to incandescence. Without commemorative vigilance, history would quickly sweep them away].

In this chapter I analyze comics about colonial-era Algeria as a virtual place of memory. I begin by briefly tracing a genealogy of colonial-era representations in French-language cartoons and comics about Algeria from the initial invasion in 1830 up to formal independence in 1962. I then analyze extensively the first five volumes of the “Carnets d’Orient” [Oriental Sketchbooks or Notebooks] series by French cartoonist Jacques Ferrandez, a cartoonist of Pied-Noir heritage. The artistic richness as well as the historical and ideological complexity of his work have made it exemplary for other cartoonists working on the subject, including Didier Tronchet and Anne Sibran, in Là-bas [Down There] (see below, Chapter 4, and McKinney 2011a), and Joann Sfar, in “Le chat du rabbin” [The Rabbi’s Cat] series. I open my analysis of Ferrandez’s comics by recalling the importance of what art historian Todd Porterfield (1998) describes as “the allure of empire” in French orientalist painting. I argue that its imperialist allure continues in comics by Ferrandez, even in the sketchbook form that he adopted, partly as a way of producing some critical distance from the orientalist paintings that he redraws in his book. I then analyze in turn the ways that Ferrandez
uses three major sources of colonial iconography in his books: conquest-era engravings, orientalist paintings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and postcards. Each of these media are shot through with colonial ideology that Ferrandez negotiates with varying degrees of success, in his project to redraw colonial Algeria as a Pied-Noir place of memory. I conclude the chapter by comparing how Ferrandez handles colonial iconography with its treatment in historical comics drawn by Algerian cartoonist Benattou Masmoudi and French cartoonist Sfar. Their shared sources and similar approach indicate that despite the different ethnic and national perspectives that they articulate, the needs and difficulties that they confront are similar, including a desire to produce counter-memory, and a relative scarcity of colonial iconography for nineteenth-century Algeria. However, in the case of Ferrandez and Sfar, the similarities in materials and methods are so close that one can only conclude that the former supplied the memorial model for the latter, suggesting both a scarcity of memorial models and an economy of memorial sites (cf. Rigney 2005). Redrawing empire therefore means both that Masmoudi, Ferrandez and Sfar redraw shared colonial iconographic sources, and that Sfar redraws the model supplied by Ferrandez, adapting it to his own needs.

Masmoudi, Ferrandez and Sfar redraw the colonial affrontier in various ways and for purposes both different and similar. Reproducing it allows Masmoudi to represent an Algerian national identity resisting French colonialism long before the beginning of the Algerian War in 1954. Paradoxically, he does so by repeating colonial artistic gestures while redrawing colonial documents. Ferrandez redraws the colonial affrontier to reconstitute, in historical fiction about the colonial past, a Pied-Noir community now assimilating into French society, and also to mourn the historic separation of French colonials and Algerians by the colonial affrontier, because that division—in addition to being violent and unjust (effects which Ferrandez generously condemns)—led to the disappearance of French Algeria and the departure of the Pieds-Noirs. This double aim is paradoxical and even contradictory: without the colonial affrontier the settler group that Ferrandez celebrates would not have existed as such, but it was that same affrontier that eventually led to the downfall and departure of the group. By retracing the colonial affrontier Sfar foregrounds Sephardic Algerian Jews, who although already present episodically in Ferrandez’s series from virtually beginning to end, had never been the primary focus of a comic-book series. Sfar represents the colonial affrontier as being produced in part by Jewish French Ashkenazim, when they require Algerian Jews to assimilate into French culture as part of a project meant to enlighten them. But here too the reconstruction of the colonial affrontier is paradoxical, insofar as
Sfar also selectively celebrates modernizing, secularizing and Frenchifying aspects of colonial assimilation: this tendency is incarnated by the eponymous cat of the series, but is visible in the transformation of several other characters, including the rabbi and his daughter (cf. Eisenstein 2008; Harris 2008).

Taken together, the work of these three artists therefore exhibits some of the most complex and interesting ways that cartoonists redraw empire and retrace the colonial affrontier today.

A genealogy of French Algeria from conquest to tourism in comics and cartoons

The iconographic archives from which cartoonists have borrowed in recent years to create their own comics about French Algeria include comics and caricatures stretching back to the conquest. As we shall see, several French cartoonists, but especially Ferrandez, have demonstrated their familiarity with some of the very earliest material, from the time around the French conquest of Algiers, by pointedly borrowing and redrawing images from it. Some of this historical material has reappeared in print, but even when it has not been republished or otherwise been widely made available again (e.g., on the web), cartoonists can gain access to it through a variety of sources, including the French national library (Bibliothèque nationale) in Paris. This is one of the places where Ferrandez researched material for the first volume of his “Carnets d’Orient” (Ferrandez 1996). Some contemporary cartoonists who have published comics about French colonialism may not have not borrowed from, or even examined, earlier comics on the same theme. In some cases it is impossible to determine with certainty whether they did, for example, by examining their art work. Still, it is still useful to analyze past representations of colonialism in comics and cartoons, because they are part of a cultural formation to which today’s comics on the same theme belong: they share images and perspectives with other colonial-era material, including advertising, journalism, photography, prose fiction and film. Most contemporary cartoonists sift through at least some of this material as documentation for their comics with a historical, colonial theme (McKinney 2008b: 163; 2011b). Analyzing earlier texts allows me to create a visual-textual genealogy for post-1962 works. In this chapter I take as my starting point some comics and caricatures that were produced during and after the conquest of Algeria, by important artists in the history of European, especially French-language, caricature and comics. The pre-1962 works I examine here include: cartoons from the 1830 conquest of Algeria that were reproduced in a work published for a colonial exhibition;
an early-nineteenth-century comic book by Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846) that was redrawn by French cartoonist Cham (Charles Henri Amédée de Noé; 1818–1879) and serialized in Paris; a cartoon strip by Benjamin Roubaud (1811–1847); a book of cartoons by Cham; and a comic book by French cartoonist and painter Joseph-Porphyre Pinchon (1871–1953), best known as the artist of the Bécassine comics. Some of the works have been republished in recent years (for example, the comic books by Töpffer and Pinchon, and cartoons by Salomon Assus), whereas others have not yet, but all are accessible in one way or another in France today. Taken together with various other materials, they allow me to construct a genealogy for recent French comics about Algeria.

I hasten to say that I am well aware that such genealogies can have pitfalls; even Edward Said’s monumental _Orientalism_ (1994a), despite its huge impact on cultural and literary studies, has been criticized for presenting an overly homogenized and insufficiently historicized account of cultural attitudes and tropes about the Orient from Greek antiquity to the present (e.g., Rodinson 1989). However, these criticisms do not invalidate the contribution of genealogical research in Said’s work, including its ability to produce fundamental insights about imperialist discourse and ideology. Porterfield (1998: 32) quotes Said (1994a: 176) and follows his critical, hermeneutic model in his study of “art in the service of French imperialism” from 1798 to 1836: “This becomes apparent in a close reading of the strategic formation of the imperial discourse, its strategically located, primary texts (the _Description de l’Egypte_ [Description of Egypt]), its strategically located witnesses to Egyptian history (Denon, Champollion), and now the diffusion of this ideology, without the slightest resistance, through [what Said calls] the ‘citation of antecedent authority.’” My aim in using a genealogical approach in this chapter, and throughout my study, is to trace certain colonialist and imperialist tropes and imagery in (mostly) French comics and cartoons up to the present, to analyze the ways, and assess the extent to which, the field of French comics still remains connected to colonialism and imperialism. As I do this, what interests me most is to understand the manners in which _today’s_ cartoonists redraw and rework pre-1962 material, including tropes found in comics and cartoons by Töpffer, Cham and Daumier. I do not analyze the older material at length, as some historians and art historians, on whose work I rely in part, have done (e.g., Bernasconi 1970; Kunzle 1990; Porterfield 1998; Childs 2004).

In many cultural areas the citation of antecedent authority is a key mechanism for cultural production and legitimation, but perhaps especially in a field such as comics, because it is considered by many, including some cartoonists, to be a minor art. As a technique, the citation of antecedent
authority is particularly important when the members of an artistic or cultural field wish to increase its prestige and prominence (cf. Boltanski 1975; Beaty 2007, 2008). This activity can take many forms, including manifestoes, visual quotations and other stylistic effects, mentions in interviews of mentors and artistic influences, as well as prefaces, postfaces and bibliographies inserted into comic books (see Chapter 1, above)—their peritexts (Miller 2007: 97). In the comics that are the focus of my study, the issues of positional superiority, strategic location and antecedent authority (Said 1994a; Nader 1989; Nochlin 1989)—which are already important for the reconfiguration of comics as an artistic field—are strongly inflected by the French history of colonial domination and imperialism, including through its imprint on comics and cartoons, images and texts, attitudes and ideas, received from past generations of artists and others. This is perhaps nowhere more striking than in the material that is the subject of this and the next two chapters (3 and 4, below), because of the specifically orientalist and colonialist nature of much of the older material about Algeria and French Indochina on which today’s cartoonists rely for documentation—it is very easy to perpetuate orientalist and colonialist paradigms and practices in this way. Paradoxically, this material, even though it is often heavily distorted by colonial and imperialist ideology, is prime source material for cartoonists who are striving for historical and cultural accuracy, in historical comics set in these former colonies. According to Porterfield (1998: 121–22), “the definitive quality of orientalism—reportage,” as exemplified by Eugène Delacroix’s landmark orientalist and imperialist painting Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement [Women of Algiers in Their Apartment] (1834), allows it to be regarded and passed off as “authentic, true to nature, even scientific.” When French cartoonists base their comics on material such as this, they face interpretive obstacles that are very similar to those of historians researching colonial archives for documents to help them create an historical account of the past, turning archival memory into working memory (Rigney 2005: 17–18; cf. Gauthier 1993).

Several caricatures produced on the occasion of the French conquest of Algiers, which began in 1830, were republished in the second of three volumes of the Iconographie historique de l’Algérie, depuis le XVIe siècle jusqu’à 1871 [Historical Iconography of Algeria, from the 16th Century until 1871], edited by Gabriel Esquer (1929) and published to coincide with the Centenaire de l’Algérie française [Centennial of French Algeria], in 1930. Ferrandez probably consulted this work in preparing his first graphic novel about French Algeria. Six of these caricatures thematize French fascination for women in harems and represent the conquest of Algeria as
either the seduction, kidnapping or rape of Algerian women by French soldiers.⁵ “Le sérail en émoi” [The Seraglio in a Flutter] by E. Forest, depicts six women and one man on a rooftop of a house in the casbah of Algiers, looking down at the French fleet in the bay. One of the women is peering through a telescope, no doubt to get a better view of the French soldiers and sailors on the ships (the phallic and voyeuristic symbolism of the optical instrument is obvious). The caption of the image suggests that this represents the seraglio of the dey of Algiers.⁶ The armed Algerian man in the lithograph, whose baleful look betrays a concern over the interest of the women in the approaching foreign invaders, could represent the dey himself or perhaps instead a harem bodyguard. In contrast to this image, which depicts a supposed attraction felt by harem women in Algiers for French men, some of the other caricatures, such as “Enlèvement de la sultane favorite” [Kidnapping the Favorite Sultaness] figure the invasion as kidnapping and rape (Porterfield 1998: 138–40): there, the favorite sultaness is forcibly carried out of the harem by French soldiers (Figure 2.1). “L’embarras du choix ou le sens de la hiérarchie” [Too many options, or the sense of hierarchy] suggests that Algerian women were indeed regarded as spoils of war, to be divided up among French soldiers according to their rank—here, one French soldier defers to another, no doubt his superior officer. The soldiers are choosing between two Algerian women who have begun to undress in preparation for sex with the Frenchmen. Rape of Algerian women by French soldiers was no doubt a common occurrence during the conquest, as were a variety of other brutal practices.⁷ However, one of the interesting aspects of some of these lithographs is the suggestion of consensuality and even eagerness of the Algerian women to have sex with the French invaders, obviously a case of wishful thinking. This imagery fits into a long history of French orientalist representations, in both images and written text, of women as prisoners in the harems of absolutist Muslim rulers—it thereby also participates in fictionalized representations of political power and gender relations in France itself (cf. Grosrichard 1979; Lowe 1991; Porterfield 1994; Said 1994a; Porterfield 1998). Figuring harem women as ready to welcome their supposed liberators with open arms, even if the latter are foreign soldiers, can be a way of celebrating the invasion, or, conversely, satirizing it. In any case, images of Algerian woman in various states of (un)dress in private spaces from which outsiders were generally excluded (e.g., homes and, more specifically, harems), and imagery about sexual encounters between French men and Algerian women (including in bordellos), are common to many French visual and textual representations, including comics, from the conquest on up through the present. As with other colonial themes, there has been a
Figure 2.1: Conquering Algiers as a French harem fantasy. A. Menut, “Enlèvement de la sultane favorite” [Kidnapping the Favorite Sultaness], in Gabriel Esquer, Iconographie historique de l’Algérie, depuis le XVIe siècle jusqu’à 1871 [Historical Iconography of Algeria, from the 16th Century until 1871] (Paris: Plon, 1929), vol. 2, plate CXXIV, no. 286. From the Collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.
general neglect, by critics and historians, of this tradition in comics and cartoons, although it has been studied extensively in postcards, painting and prose fiction.

Representations of Algeria have appeared in French-language comics from the conquest through the present. Töpffer, who has been consecrated by several comics critics, historians and institutions as the father of modern French-language comic book, was inspired by the French conquest of Algiers in 1830 for his Histoire de M. Cryptogame [Story of Mr. Cryptogame]. He modified the story in 1844 or 1845, a year or two before his death, but also arranged for it to be redrawn by Cham and serialized in L'Illustration, 25 January–19 April 1845. For art historian and comics specialist David Kunzle, “[t]he earliest manuscript responds to the initial French invasion of Algeria in 1830, and the course of publication of the first, much revised version coincides, with amazing precision, with the massive publicity at the French victory over their tenacious opponent, Abd-el-Kadr, in 1845” (in Töpffer 2007: 640–41). French-language versions of the story have been published repeatedly from the first, serialized, version up to the present (cf. Béra, Denni and Mellot 1996: 207; Töpffer 2007: 641–43). I refer here mainly to a version of the second Töpffer manuscript (from 1844–45), published by Le Seuil (Töpffer 1996) and prefaced by comics theoretician Thierry Groensteen (but cf. Kunzle 1990; 2007; Töpffer 2007).

According to Groensteen (in Töpffer 1996: 9), Töpffer’s choice of Algeria in 1830 was motivated by two things: “par la réputation des Algériens, tenus pour les champions de la polygamie, et par la conquête de l’Algérie par la France, en cette même année 1830” [by the reputation of the Algerians, thought to be the champions of polygamy, and by the French conquest of Algeria, in that same year of 1830]. One also finds the following motifs in the comic book: Algerian piracy and cruelty—reasons given by the French for their attack on Algiers (e.g., frames 53–55, 99, 104, 147; cf. Kunzle 1990: 66); the capture, ransoming and enslavement of Christians by Algerians (53–55, 143–56); an allusion to the Spanish Inquisition—some Danish whalers plan to sell Muslim Algerians to Spaniards to burn in autos-dafés (frames 87–88); despotic oriental rule (frames 136–41); the forcible induction of captured European women into the harems of Muslim men (frames 100–102, 142, 157–58); and Algeria as a wild region where lions roam (frame 165). Many of these motifs return in subsequent French comics and cartoons about Algeria. The original story from 1830, Töpffer’s revised manuscript from 1844–45, and Cham’s serialized version from 1845 need to be situated with respect to certain contexts, as Kunzle makes clear (1990: 66; cf. 2007: 104–5):
The continuing war to establish French control [in 1845], and the heroic resistance of Abd el-Kadr, kept Algeria and North Africa in the public eye. . . . At the same time, beyond the conquest of Algeria, Arab customs and barbarisms had long been considered exciting subjects, and there existed a historically nonspecific orientalist tradition in the arts, emphasizing harems and the enslavement of Christians.

Kunzle (1990: 66) also argues that we should read at least part of the Algerian episode as a parody by Töpffer of Swiss politics: “In 1844 he added a scene showing the terrible chaos caused by the janissaries’ method of choosing a new Dey, meant to mirror the anarchy Töpffer blamed on the electoral agitations of the Genevan radicals” (cf. Töpffer 1996: frame 167). Nonetheless, some of the internecine Algerian violence in Töpffer’s story might remind one of the real-life assassinations and plots around the transfer of power in Turkish Algiers, especially in the period preceding the rule of Hussein Dey (Ruedy 1992: 41). In Histoire de M. Cryptogame, the Janissaries must choose a new dey because—in order to escape from the harem of the old one, which she had been forced to join—Elvire, the main female character, kills the dey, as Judith killed Holoferne in the Biblical story (frame 158). Kunzle (2007: 103) also mentions as a possible source, and reproduces, The Virtuous Odalisque, an orientalist lithograph from 1833, which depicts a nude woman about to stab a clothed man in a harem. Women’s violent rebellion against Muslim men who imprison them in harems has long been an orientalist theme in French literature, such as in Les lettres persanes [The Persian Letters] (1721), the epistolary novel by Montesquieu and, before that, in the play Bajazet (1672), by Racine (cf. Kunzle 1990: 66). These works permitted reflection on both France’s relationship to rival powers (especially the Ottoman empire) and to foreign cultures, but also to charged power relationships within French society, including male-female ones and royal absolutism (cf. Grosrichard 1979; Childs 2004: 168–70). However, with the French conquest of Algeria, the French fascination with Muslim harems took on new, specific meanings, as we have already seen in the lithographs by E. Forest and others. Malek Alloula (1981, 1986, 2001) has famously analyzed how erotic harem fantasies were depicted and disseminated widely on French postcards during the early twentieth century. Although his work has been critiqued in important ways by feminists, it did provide some fundamental insights into colonialist representation (cf. Porterfield 1998: 207; and below). Among other things, this chapter shows how French cartoonists have reworked the theme of the harem, including attempts to penetrate it by ruse or violence to liberate its women from the despotic grip of their Algerian masters (as in Histoire de M. Crypto-
Soon after the serialization of *Histoire de M. Cryptogame* in *L'Illustration* was complete, in April 1845, its Parisian publisher (Töpffer’s cousin) printed another Algerian story, this time by Roubaud. The artist worked in Paris before moving to Algeria, where he accompanied Théophile Gautier when the latter traveled through the country in 1845 (Gautier 1973: 54; see below). Roubaud, who died in Algiers in 1847, published “Scipion l’Africain” [Scipio the African], a satirical, three-page comic strip about a French dandy’s trip to Algeria, in *L'Illustration* (issues of 21 and 28 June 1845). Kunzle (2007: 147) describes the story as “awkward”: it “obviously capitalizes on Töpffer’s Algerian episode and is interesting only for its audacious indications of sexual promiscuity (Paris or Muslim style?)” (cf. Kunzle 1990: 65). The reference to the Roman general who defeated Hannibal, during a time when the French were conquering Algeria, is satirical. At around the same time, *L'Illustration* was publishing other, propagandistic material on the conquest: for example, engravings including “Attaque du camp français de Sidi-bel-Abbès, par une troupe de fanatiques Arabes, le 30 janvier 1845” [Attack on the French Camp of Sidi-bel-Abbès, by a Troop of Fanatical Arabs, on 30 January 1845] (1 March 1845, p. 4), and a copy of Horace Vernet’s *Prise de la Smala d’Abd-el-Kader* [Capture of the Smala of Abd-el-Kader] (15 March 1845, pp. 40–41), a painting then on display in the Salon in Paris; or the sheet music for “Le jeune Arabe à Paris” [The Young Arab in Paris], a song by P. Hédouin and George Bousquet (15 March 1845, pp. 42–43). Roubaud himself contributed a painting entitled *Fête mauresque aux environs d’Alger* [Moorish Party on the Outskirts of Algiers] to the Salon of 1845 (copied in *L'Illustration*, 22 March 1845, p. 56). The satire of Roubaud’s “Scipion l’Africain” might be read as directed at himself: like his character, the artist goes to Algeria and indulges in orientalist fantasies, such as the dance scene he depicted in his painting for the Salon. Scipion, dressed in oriental attire and smoking a hookah in a Paris restaurant, is lured to Africa by the account of a “brave officer from Africa.” In Algeria, however, his attempt to go native brings him various indignities, including being unceremoniously man-handled by a tailor, a barber, and massagers at the baths, getting kicked in the rear by a French army officer who believes he is an Arab, seeing a ravishing odalisque whom he wishes to marry being taken away by another French officer (“un officier des zouaves”), being tricked into marrying a less attractive Algerian woman sight unseen, having his horse stolen by his servant, being beaten by a Bedouin, having his wife kidnapped by Algerians, and seven years later, after “many other adventures,” finding her again, only to discover that she
has had a son with a black man. Here already, as earlier in *Histoire de M. Cryptogame*, where Cryptogame and the Abbé “take the turban” to avoid being killed by the Moorish pirates, the decision by a Frenchman to cross the colonial affrontier and go native is perilous.

*A la guerre comme à la guerre* [Needs Must When the Devil Drives] (ca. 1846), a collection of thirty lithographs first published in *Le Charivari* [The Shivaree] by French cartoonist Cham, satirizes the conquest of Algeria by depicting the difficulties of French soldiers stuck there, struggling to capture the Algerian leader, Abdelkader:

But the misfortunes of the soldier extended beyond the worry of possibly being captured. The infantry had to bear the brunt of a war for which “peasants torn from their province to do their seven years” were not the least bit prepared. It was therefore the daily miseries of the footsoldier that satirical drawing strove to represent. PACOT [that is, the average soldier] has the same problems as in 1830: he dreams of his girl in a desert-like place under a burning sun while being stalked by a lion or a panther. Starving, tortured by thirst or stricken by malignant fevers, he cannot avoid forced marches and painfully slogs forward, burdened with sacks, bassins, kindling wood . . . , when he is not stuck up to his waist in desert sand.

(Benasconi 1970: 53)

One finds some of the same motifs here as in the conquest engravings and in Töpffer’s *Histoire de M. Cryptogame*. For example, lions appear in two of Cham’s lithographs, where they symbolize the wild and dangerous conditions that French soldiers faced in Algeria, and the difficulty of their mission. In “Pour faire un bon pot-au-feu” [How to make a good beef stew], a French soldier blithely sets out for a military cook the impossible task of catching, skinning and cooking a lion: “Tu te précipites sur ton lion . . . tu le tue [sic] . . . tu l’écorches . . . tu le laisse [sic] cuire douze heures, et t’as un bouillon excellent . . . c’est pas plus malin que ça la cuisine . . . ” [You jump on your lion . . . you kill it . . . you skin it . . . you let it cook twelve hours, and you have an excellent broth . . . cooking is no trickier than that . . . ] (4). In another cartoon (Figure 2.2), entitled “Une visite sous la tente” [A Visit under the Tent], a sleeping soldier is wakened by a ferocious lion that has put its head through the tent opening—the groggy soldier invites the lion in: “Entrez! . . . ” [Come in! . . . ] (8). If we take the lion as symbolizing Algeria itself (cf. Kunzle 1990: 301), the image suggests a reversal of the aggressor/victim relationship found in the earlier French lithographs (ca. 1830), in which soldiers kidnapped and raped Algerian women as easy spoils of war—here the French soldier, trapped in his tent, is the object of Algerian violence (cf. Sessions 2011: 169–70).
Figure 2.2: Algerian violence in the form of a lion threatens a French soldier during the conquest. Cham [Noé, Charles Henri Amédée de], "Une visite sous la tente" [A Visit under the Tent], *À la guerre comme à la guerre* [Needs Must When the Devil Drives], Paris: Aubert et cie (ca. 1846), p. 8.
From early during the French conquest and colonization of Algeria, the theme of the voyage in, of colonized Algerians traveling to France, responds to the theme of the voyage outward, of the French to Algeria. This is the case in cartoons about French units of colonized soldiers, especially the Turcos (Algerian soldiers). Cham, Daumier and other cartoonists depict French women visiting Turco and Zouave soldiers “under the tent” (and elsewhere) in their military encampment at Saint Maur, in the Bois de Vincennes, on the outskirts of Paris (Cham [n.d.], Spahis et Turcos; cf. Childs 2004: 82–91, 228–31). As I argue elsewhere (e.g., McKinney 2011b), the black Turco character in Léonce Petit’s Les mésaventures de M. Bêton [The Misadventures of Mr. Ninny] (ca. 1868), a comic book no doubt inspired by Töpffer’s comics (Kunzle 1990: 152–54; Groensteen in Töpffer 1994: 33), figures the unpredictable violence of the colonized, which is unleashed in the streets of Paris, wreaking bloody havoc in the Parisian capital, in order to produce a form of grotesque, carnivalesque humor (Figure 2.3).

By contrast with Cham’s A la guerre comme à la guerre, Les faceties du sapeur Camember [The Pranks of Sapeur Camember] (1898: n.p.; first edition 1896), by French cartoonist Christophe (Georges Colomb; 1856–1945), provides its readers with a humorous image of the lot of French soldiers in Algeria, but not a satirical one, Kunzle argues (1990: 186): “Sapeur Camember appeared as an attempt to neutralize an increasingly charged topic”—the antimilitarism associated with “socialist, anarchist, and pacifist movements.” The book was first published in 1896, at a significant remove in time from the bloody events on which its Algerian episode is based—“la révolte des Flittas” [the Revolt of the Flittas], which sets that portion of Christophe’s story in 1864 or thereabouts (cf. Julien 1964: 429–30). The sapeur Camember, a simpleton French soldier of peasant origin with a heart of gold, adopts a child that he saves from the ruins of a burning house in Kabylia, and eventually brings him home to France. The house may have been the home of French settlers; in any case, Camember (re)names the child Victorin, recalling the French victory over the rebellious Algerians. Similarly, the name of his fiancée and wife, Victoire, suggests a hoped-for victory over Germany that would return Alsace and Lorraine to French control (Kunzle 1990: 189).

French comics and cartoons soon incorporated tourism to Algeria as a theme, as part of a general trend in France to create comics about tourist trips and emigration to various places around the world, including French colonies, which Kunzle interprets as an expression of the movement—whether expected or real—of social classes (1990: 84–85, 108, 135–46). The images of Cham’s Les voyages d’agrément [Pleasure Travels] (1849) were first published in the Parisian satirical daily Le Charivari. The booklet
Figure 2.3: When a Turco, an Algerian soldier in the French colonial army, travels to Paris, he imports the potential of danger and wild adventure into the imperial capital. Here he climbs onto an omnibus and beheads several people, including the coachman. From Léonce Petit, Les mésaventures de M. Béton [The Misadventures of Mr. Ninny] (Paris: Librairie internationale, ca. 1868), p. 37.
includes eight pages depicting an organized tourist trip to London, followed by seven pages representing scenes from a similar voyage to Algeria. Every page consists of four self-contained drawings, each with a legend printed underneath it. Although the images do not exactly constitute a comic strip, they do form a more or less coherent whole that is based on the structure of the voyage, with a beginning (pre-departure preparations in France, train and sea voyage, and then arrival), middle (various tourist activities and misadventures) and end (return to Algiers and, from there, to France). Kunzle (1990: 85) has suggested that contemporary readers may have read Cham’s satire about mishaps of European tourists in Algeria as referring to the tribulations of French soldiers there. This could have been Cham’s way of getting around government censors in order to critique the effects of French imperialism on French soldiers, as he had done more directly in *A la guerre comme à la guerre*. Kunzle bases this argument in part on the assumption that there would have been few tourists in Algeria at the time. Nonetheless, *Les voyages d’agrément* does constitute at least an imagined tourist trip to the colony, which draws on contemporary images of the country, and helped inaugurate a theme that would continue over the decades of French rule, in subsequent French comics and cartoons.

In *Les voyages d’agrément* (1849: 11), the voyage out to the colony produces all kinds of identity reversals, beginning with the nature of the voyage itself—upon seeing Algiers from the harbor, a tourist who is on the wrong boat wonders why the city does not resemble London, which he had intended to visit. The transforming nature of the voyage is spoofed by Cham in the following cartoon (Figure 2.4), where “Un voyageur ayant une fâcheuse ressemblance avec Bou-Maza, se voit refuser l’entrée de l’Algérie” [A voyager bearing an unfortunate resemblance to Bou-Maza is refused right of entry into Algeria]. This topical reference alludes, humorously, to a leader of an Algerian rebellion in 1845–47 against French colonial forces (Julien 1964: 201–3; Ruedy 1992: 65, 67). On the next page, Cham has a French tourist voluntarily adopt Biblical identities for himself and his wife (12.4), satirizing the colonialist, romantic trope enunciated by Delacroix, which associated North Africans with classical antiquity, that is, with Europe’s pre-history. Cham (1849: 15.4) satirizes another recurring trope from orientalism and the French conquest of Algeria—the association between going native and sexual fraternization with the Algerians: a Frenchman, accompanied by three veiled women, encounters his wife, who exclaims, “Comment, mon scélérat de mari se promène avec trois femmes! . . . ” [What, my scoundrel of a husband is walking around with three wives! . . . ]; to which he replies, “Ma chère, il faut se faire aux moeurs du pays, la loi du prophète m’autorisait même à en prendre six . . . mais je te
“compte pour trois” [My dear, one must adapt to the local customs, the law of the Prophet even authorized me to take six of them . . . but I’m counting you as three]. No matter that Muslim law has been misquoted here (by mistake or in jest), the Frenchman nonetheless ends up with the reglementary maximum of four wives.16 This illustrates one of the most common orientalist tropes, seen already in the conquest lithographs: the association in imagery (and in real-life) of conquered North Africa with sexual availability and license that became increasingly standardized, codified and commodified (X 1927; Said 1994a: 184–90; Taraud 2003), as in the series of twentieth-century erotic postcards analyzed by Alloula (1981, 1986, 2001).17

The opportunity to change identities thanks to a tourist trip to Algeria also appears in my last example from pre-1962 French comics and cartoons about French Algeria, a comic book titled *Gringalou en Algérie* [Gringalou...
lou in Algeria] (n.d.), drawn by Emile-Joseph Porphyre Pinchon (a.k.a. J.-P. Pinchon), scripted by Jean Noé, and serialized in the Belgian children’s publication *Wrill*, nos. 99–129 (Evrand and Roland 1992: 123), in 1947. Published approximately a century after Cham’s imagined tourist adventures to Algeria, *Gringalou en Algérie* naturally depicts an Algeria that is far removed in some ways from the country as seen in *Les voyages d’agrément*. In Algiers, the Parisian tourists, Gringalou (a French boy) and Professor Cincinnatus, are clearly on French-dominated territory: guided everywhere by a shoeshine boy named Bab Ouch (cf. *babouche* [slipper]), they walk down a street (Bab Azoun) that reminds them of the Parisian rue de Rivoli, view a statue celebrating the conquest (the duc d’Orléans, in the Place du Gouvernement [Government Square]), see automobiles and ride a bus, sleep in a comfortable hotel, and board a train at the station (5–8). They visit Gringalou’s cousin, whose wealthy father owns a flourishing orange plantation, for whom Algerians are of course the principal source of labor. On the other hand, Pinchon and Noé also included (stereo)typical elements found already in Cham’s earlier work: a colorful population of veiled women and of men wearing fezzes, robes and turbans; an encounter with Muslim beliefs; a fantasia (25; cf. Cham 1849: 13.4); camels in the desert (28; cf. Cham 1849: 12.1, 12.4, 16.1); a sandstorm (29; cf. Cham 1849: 13.3); and various difficulties of tourism in an exotic African locale, including run-ins with wild animals and arguments with the locals. The perils of late-colonial tourism are far less severe than in Cham’s conquest-era comics: for example, the wild animals are only mischievous monkeys at a local tourist destination, the Ruisseau des singes [Stream of the Monkeys] in the Gorges de la Chiffa (11), not the ferocious lions that eat some of Cham’s tourists and carry another away in its mouth (14.2, 15.3); instead of being held by the forbidding members of a “tribu insoumise qui exige six mille francs pour votre rançon” [unsubjugated tribe that demands six thousand francs for your ransom] (Cham 1849: 14.4), Gringalou and his friends are more mundanely robbed by a couple of camel drivers in ragged clothes, who demand a bribe [*bak chich*] before letting the bus that the Parisians are riding cross a bridge (10)—their lives are never in danger; nor is the health of Cincinnatus seriously compromised by the fatigue caused by their various tourist excursions, followed by the rigorous workout that he gets in a hammam (21–22), by contrast with the heavy, sometimes fatal, toll that “les fièvres, les Arabes, les lions et autres cas de détérioration particuliers au climat d’Afrique” [the fevers, the Arabs, the lions and other cases of deterioration specific to the African climate] take on Cham’s voyagers (10; cf. 14, 16). The difference in the tourist experience between the two is obviously due in part to the transformation of Algeria in the century that elapsed between
the publication of the two works, but no doubt also thanks to the fact that *Les voyages d’agrément* was for adults, one presumes, whereas *Gringalou en Algérie* is a children’s book: as a consequence there are no sexual allusions in the latter. On the other hand, *Gringalou en Algérie* does depict its Parisian protagonists indulging in the possibilities for temporarily changing identities that a trip to the colony offers: they don Algerian hats to sell back their earlier purchases in the souk of Algiers (6); and disguise themselves as Algerians to surprise their friends upon their return to Paris (32). In a scene that recalls an earlier visit of the Pieds-Nickelés [Leadfoot Gang] comics characters to West Africa, Cincinnatus is even mistaken for the French Minister of Colonies come to visit Algeria (25).

I turn now to a group of post-1962 comics that rework various elements from the comics and cartoons that I have analyzed so far, in their depiction of *l’Algérie française* [French Algeria], from 1830 to 1962.

**Post-colonial orientalism and the allure of empire in the “Carnets d’Orient”**

Ferrandez is the creator of a well-known series of comic books about Algeria as a French colony. As the Pied-Noir community assimilates into the majority, it risks disappearing as a separate group with a distinct identity, which lends urgency to commemorative projects such as that of Ferrandez. His reworking of colonial-era history and representations may be indicative of how Pied-Noirs and their offspring are transforming their past into a version of colonial history more in tune with the cultural and historical sensibility of the French majority (Martini 1997). Indeed, his reworking arguably attempts to inflect mainstream history, but it remains highly problematic when he tries, unwittingly or not, to justify once again the colonial project (cf. Stora 1992: 294–96).

By now, the ongoing debate over the significance and nature of orientalism in literature, film and other arts has generated a substantial body of work. Said’s (1994a) provocative, ground-breaking study of orientalism, originally published in 1978, paid scant attention to visual representation. However, the ideological dimension of orientalism (MacKenzie 1995: 45) in visual art has since been studied by critics, who have mostly focused on painting (e.g., Nochlin 1989; MacKenzie 1995; Porterfield 1998; Benjamin 2003a, 2003b), photography (e.g., Graham-Brown 1988), both of these media (e.g., Goldberg 1999), cinema (e.g., Bernstein and Studlar 1997) or postcards (e.g., Alloulia 1981, 1986, 2001; Prochaska 1990a, 1990b, 2003; Sebbar and Belorgey 2002). One of my aims in this section is to engage
in that debate by analyzing “Carnets d’Orient,” Ferrandez’s remarkable multi-volume series that chronicles the history of the French colonization of Algeria. Ferrandez borrowed heavily from colonial postcards for his documentation, and produced a re-evaluation of the orientalist tradition in painting (with references to orientalist travel literature as well). I hope that my analysis of this work will shed new light on discussions about orientalism and the visual arts, especially in the relatively neglected area of contemporary popular culture.

One of the most relevant studies of orientalism in visual art is by John MacKenzie (1995). It provides a powerful critique of many shortcomings in Said’s work and a fascinating account of ways in which orientalism might be seen as a contradictory, heterogenous and even positive force in European art. Despite his disagreement with many of Said’s views about orientalism, MacKenzie (1995: 50–53) nevertheless does concede that the tradition of orientalism in painting was strongly marked by French imperialist incursions into Egypt and Algeria. The extent and nature of this influence have been brilliantly explored by Todd Porterfield (1994, 1998), who sets aside MacKenzie’s critique as belonging to “the traditional view of Orientalism” (1998: 155n9) and, instead, convincingly demonstrates that the “allure of empire” motivated French imperialist invasions of Egypt and Algeria, and was embodied as well in artistic projects such as the installation of the obelisk at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, and in French works of art, including Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement, by Delacroix. The main function of empire’s allure, Porterfield (1998: 4–5) argues, was to create national unity by acting “as surrogate, mask, and displacement of the [French] Revolution,” whose specter haunted France for decades thereafter. We also know that, much later, the Algerian War shook the very foundations of France’s “imagined community” (Anderson 1991), provoking a change in government (De Gaulle’s return to power and the creation of the Fifth Republic), attempts by the Organisation Armée Secrète [Secret Armed Organization] (OAS) on the life of the French president, and—with the OAS rebellion—the resurrection of imagery from the French Revolution and the Second World War (cf. Stora 1992: 109–13), which had pitted groups of French people against each other. In other words, the apparent end of empire caused a tear in the French national fabric (Stora 1992: 113), one that has not yet disappeared.

Paradoxically, neither has empire’s allure vanished; in fact, it is often uncritically recreated in comics that retell the story of French imperialism—specifically here, the colonization of Algeria, from 1830 to 1962. Moreover, it is still available to serve a neo-imperialist purpose, that is to unify the, or some, French people today in a common, nostalgic vision of a glorious
colonial past. Not surprisingly, as with the original imperial project, it is the Algerians who are excluded from the alluring dream of empire, and must again pay a price for French national unity when it is founded on that basis. Although I agree with MacKenzie (1995) when he argues, as have others, that orientalist works may exhibit heterogeneity, internal contradictions, and serve counter-hegemonic purposes, I still maintain—with Said, Porterfield and others—that orientalism may, and often does, function as a discourse that ultimately limits criticism—*even when a generously minded critique of colonialism is (also) attempted*, as is the case in Ferrandez’s comic books.

Ferrandez is a successful French cartoonist born in Algeria in 1955, but taken to France when his parents moved there a few months after his birth (Poncet and Morin 1996: 69)—in that sense, he is essentially a member of the second generation, that is the offspring of *Pieds-Noirs*. He is the author of a multi-volume comic book series entitled “Carnets d’Orient,” which recounts the story of “l’Algérie française” as a national epic. It provides an excellent case study of how comics can function as a virtual place of memory for the *Pied-Noir* community in France. In his series Ferrandez attempts to deal with the vagaries of colonial history in a serious and sustained manner. His project, which necessitated many years of work (published 1986–2009), is complex and has won praise from historians Anne Roche (1990: 526; cf. Ferrandez 1988), Benjamin Stora (according to Ferrandez 1996; cf. Stora in Ferrandez 1994d) and Michel Pierre (in Ferrandez 2005a), among others. Moreover, as part of his extensive documentary research, Ferrandez made use of visual materials that have been the focus of critical debate by scholars: orientalist paintings and French colonial-era photographs, including ones printed on postcards. Indeed, the main character of his first book is an orientalist painter who is partially modeled after Delacroix; other characters are borrowed from photos on postcards. Significantly, one book that Ferrandez used as part of his large corpus of source documents is Alloula’s *Le harem colonial: Images d’un sous-érrotisme* [The Colonial Harem: Images of a Sub-Eroticism], whose publication in French (1981; 2001) and in English translation (1986) generated considerable discussion and debate in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Harlow in Alloula 1986; Woodhull 1991; Apter 1992; Boëtsch 1993; Lazreg 1994; Ferrié and Boëtsch 1995; Bal 1996). This recycling of material (the postcard images) from colonial popular visual culture, through a recent critical work, and back into contemporary popular culture raises interesting questions, which I will investigate later on in this chapter.

By analyzing Ferrandez’s approach to some of his sources, I will show the possibilities and problems of his comics as a *Pied-Noir* place of memory.
On the one hand, his reworking of historical material and of visual and print documents allows him to represent and criticize colonial-era attitudes and artistic visions. On the other hand, Ferrandez incorporates this borrowed material into what is finally and most basically a recuperative commemoration of French Algeria—this fact fundamentally limits his attempts to diverge from certain aspects of colonial society and the aesthetic movements that it helped to foster. Ferrandez explicitly formulates his commemorative project in his authorial preface to *Les fils du sud* [Sons of the South] (Ferrandez 1994c), the third volume in the series, which is based on his grandfather’s boyhood: “Tout cela, je ne voulais pas le laisser perdre” [I did not want to let all of that be lost] (15). I analyze Ferrandez’s reconstruction of French Algeria as a place of memory by looking at his reworking of nineteenth-century engravings and paintings about the military conquest, and his reevaluation of orientalist and colonialist visual aesthetics.

**Redrawing engravings from the conquest: Documentation and critique**

In a book chapter on historical imagery in comics, including *Carnets d’Orient* [Oriental Sketchbooks], Guy Gauthier (1993) analyzes “l’inspiration documentaire” [the documentary inspiration] of cartoonists such as Jacques Martin (“Alix”), Albert Uderzo (“Asterix”) and Hugo Pratt (“Corto Maltese”). Both Gauthier and Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle (1979) argue that historical references in many or most historical comics serve mainly as a pretext for creating a fiction that often diverges significantly from historical fact. Fresnault-Deruelle claims that historical documentation, whether visual or textual, serves mainly to “authenticate fiction” and to thereby create an “effet d’histoire” [history effect] (Fresnault-Deruelle 1979: e.g., 101; cf. Tribak-Geoffroy 1997). Fresnault-Deruelle clearly based his argument on Roland Barthes’s concept of the “effet de réel” [reality effect] (1985) as a means for understanding nineteenth-century realist prose fiction. In the first book of his series, *Carnets d’Orient* (1994a), Ferrandez used nineteenth-century lithographs and engravings, as well as many other documents, to authenticate his fiction in historical terms and thereby create an “effet d’histoire” (cf. Basfao 1990: 330–31). Gauthier describes Ferrandez’s use of orientalist paintings and the notebooks of painter-travelers (specifically, Delacroix) as a “pèlerinage aux sources” [pilgrimage to the sources] of French visual depictions of Algeria. Although Gauthier may have meant to imply as much, he does not explicitly state that this artistic activity is also an ethnic pilgrimage for Ferrandez, insofar as it constitutes
a return to the roots of the European colonial settler population of Algeria, in the French conquest (Carnets d’Orient is set in the period 1836–46). This adds to the importance of history in Ferrandez’s fictional reconstitution: historical authenticity, or faithfulness to history, has an ethnic dimension for Ferrandez, much as it holds a national dimension for Algerian artists, including cartoonists, attempting to exhume the roots of Algerian nation and nationalism in Algerian resistance to the French conquest. French and Algerian artists have borrowed from and reworked many of the same, early documents (limited in number) about colonial Algeria, although not always in the same ways or for the same ends. However, as I argued earlier, comics such as the “Carnets d’Orient” also exceed the limits of the history effect as Fresnault-Deruelle conceives it, insofar as they intervene in debates about French colonial and Algerian national history: instead of history simply authenticating fiction, such fictions contribute to a reevaluation of French colonial history (cf. Witek 1999: 36–45, 58–119).

In an analysis of “imperialist nostalgia,” anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989) explores the curious phenomenon of “mourning for what one has destroyed,” specifically the indigenous, Third World cultures to whose destruction western anthropologists and many others (missionaries, armies) have contributed to varying degrees and in different ways (cf. Branche and House 2010). In her seminal study of “the imaginary Orient” in orientalist painting, Linda Nochlin (1989: 50) similarly remarks on the fact that “[t]he society that was engaged in wiping out local [ Algerian] customs and traditional practices was also avid to preserve them in the form of records,” including visual ones. The primary feature of “Carnets d’Orient” is mourning for the loss of what French Algeria was and might have become: scenes of dispossession and rituals of mourning are staged repeatedly throughout the series. Are the “Carnets d’Orient” shot through with “imperialist nostalgia”? Despite the fact that Ferrandez himself did not participate in the colonization of Algeria, the short answer is “yes,” as I argue below. Still, his approach is complex and nuanced, as can be seen in his.redrawing of the visual records of the conquest left by nineteenth-century French artists, such as those we have already seen (above). Ferrandez does not always “miss [or avoid] their significance as political documents at a time of particularly active military intervention in North Africa” (Nochlin 1989: 56).

From the outset of Carnets d’Orient, Ferrandez uses French lithographs and engravings representing colonial Algeria. Several architectural views in “Carnets d’Orient” are based on images collected in Villes d’Algérie au XIXe siècle [Cities of Algeria in the 19th Century] (1984), a volume edited by Assia Djebar, the Algerian historian, novelist, essayist and member of
the Académie française. These images are important to both Algerians and Pieds-Noirs, because they constitute a visual record of Algerian urban and rural topography early in the colonial period and during the preceding, Ottoman period. On the first page of his narrative, Ferrandez (1994a: 11) copied views of Algiers from the sea and of the port (Djebar 1984: 23, 29). This might constitute a relatively neutral or objective use—simply documenting the historical setting accurately (historical verisimilitude)—were it not for the fact that he incorporates these images into a visual-textual narration problematically based on French orientalist and imperialist documents, including Delacroix’s notebooks and an illustrated travel narrative by Théophile Gautier (more on this below). Still, on the following two pages, one of Ferrandez’s characters, Mario Puzzo, criticizes the French for destroying the Algerian character of the city through construction projects, much as Théophile Gautier (1973: 183–84) and Delacroix did. Ferrandez (1994a: 13) then inserts a panoramic view of the port copied from another conquest-era engraving, but also includes in his comic-strip frame some French soldiers who are rebuilding the city (these are not in the old engraving). This inclusion emphasizes the point just made by Puzzo, that the French are rebuilding the city along European lines, which is a direct outcome of military conquest. By contrast, Puzzo would like to see original local topography preserved instead. The irony is that Puzzo—a parasitic bon vivant who has adopted Algerian ways, including clothing—earns his living by painting portraits of French military officers (this also offers him the opportunity to contract sexual liaisons with their wives; Ferrandez 1994a: 14, 17, 71). In other words, he laments a destruction in which he participates and from which he also benefits, albeit indirectly, as a social parasite. Indeed, he would not be in Algeria were it not for the French conquest. The attitude that Ferrandez gives to his character Puzzo is a form of imperialist nostalgia, which Joseph Constant, the main protagonist, shares by the end of the book. Ferrandez tries to negotiate the contradiction between Puzzo’s dependency on the French army and his critical attitude toward the French transformation of Algeria by having him only paint portraits of military and administrative figures [notables] (1994a: 71), thereby producing a documentation of the military conquest.

Moving from topographical engravings and lithographs to military images from the conquest as source material for Ferrandez, we can find examples that he redraws to produce a vision of the conquest that is more critical than that of the original documents, or otherwise shifts their perspective. For example, into one comic-book frame Ferrandez (1994a: 25) copies a well-known print entitled “Nous civiliserons ces gaillards-là . . . ” [We’ll civilize those fellows], by Auguste Raffet (reproduced in Esquer 1929:}
plate CXXXVIII, no. 322), in which French soldiers mock Algerians who carry the regiment’s heavy drums and packs (Figure 2.5). Raffet’s drawing ridicules the pretensions of the French army and its attempts to justify the conquest: civilizing the Algerians here boils down to exploiting them. A reading of the use that Ferrandez made of the drawing by Raffet must take into account a further level of complexity, especially the fact that France was ultimately forced against its will to withdraw from Algeria and, theoretically, recognize it as a co-equal nation. Algerian independence means that, for many of today’s readers, the notion of a French “civilizing mission” in Algeria is now or again problematic.

Moreover, in his image Ferrandez makes explicit a critique of class exploitation in the French conquest that, as we have already seen, also appears in Cham’s *La guerre comme à la guerre*: an awareness of the negative effects of the conquest for the French lower or lower-middle classes (cf. Kunzle 1990: 84–85, 299–300; Sessions 2011: 168–70). The two French soldiers in the foreground of Raffet’s drawing are officers—they wear épaulettes and have swords—whereas, in the background, soldiers who are not officers carry guns and are accompanied by another officer who is in the middle ground on the left and is more clearly delineated. In the foreground, on the left side of Ferrandez’s comic-book frame (Figure 2.6), he inserts two soldiers, visibly from the lower echelons of the army: they are not wearing épaulettes or carrying swords, and one has a pack on his back (their facial hair is also less well-groomed than that of the officers). They are complaining that their officers are living the good life in Algeria, while they and their colleagues lead a miserable existence:

—Tu as vu tout ce beau monde pour le bal du gouverneur?? . . . Et ces femmes!! . . . Autre-chose que des filles à soldats!! . . .

—Ouais. . . . Et pendant ce temps, nous aut’ on crève de faim, et on va nu-pieds!! . . .

[—Have you see all these fancy folks for the governor’s ball?? . . . And these women!! . . . Something else besides soldiers’ girls!! . . .

—Yeah . . . And meanwhile, the rest of us die of hunger, and go shoeless!! . . .]

In the middle ground on the right side of the frame, we see the two Algerian drum-carriers from Raffet’s drawing, surrounded by several French army officers, one of whom says “Allez, avance! . . .” [Come on, get going! . . .], to which another replies “Tu verras qu’on finira par les civiliser, ces gail-lards! . . .” [You’ll see that we’ll end up civilizing them, these fellows! . . .].
Ferrandez’s critique of classism invites us to side with the exploited, ordinary French soldiers against their hierarchy. Meanwhile, the implicit authorial condemnation of the attitude of racial or civilizational superiority expressed by the French officers, on the right side of the frame, encourages the reader to side with the exploited Algerians pressed into French military service. These two attitudes—of lower-class French resentment (directed at French superior officers) and upper-class French disdain (for ordinary Algerians)—are worked out in the rest of the chapter (25–36), which replays the disastrous first French expedition to conquer Constantine, under the leadership of Clauzel and on the advice of Yussuf (or Yûsuf; cf. Julien 1964: 131–37).

Among other conquest-era imagery that Ferrandez copies, we again find a reworked version of a lithograph by Raffet that—like the previous one—is reproduced in the *Iconographie historique de l’Algérie, depuis le XVIe siècle.*

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**Figure 2.5:** An 1836 lithograph by Raffet mocks both French soldiers and Algerians: the former view themselves as superior to, and able to civilize, the latter. Auguste Raffet, “Nous civiliserons ces gaillards-là . . .” [We’ll civilize those fellows . . . ], in Gabriel Esquer, *Iconographie historique de l’Algérie, depuis le XVIe siècle jusqu’à 1871* [Historical Iconography of Algeria, from the 16th Century until 1871] (Paris: Plon, 1929), vol. 2, plate CXXXVIII, no. 322. From the Collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.
jusqu’à 1871 (Esquer 1929: plate CLXXXIX, no. 447; Ferrandez 1994a: 36, top-left frame). This time, it is a battle scene, to which French historian Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer (1993: 35) apparently refers in the following quote: “Le courage tranquille face aux hordes déchaînées est le message de Raffet dans la retraite de Constantine” [Raffet’s message in the retreat from Constantine is calm courage in the face of unleashed hordes]. The lithograph by Raffet depicts a French battalion commanded by Changarnier protecting the retreat of the French army after its disastrous attempt to conquer Constantine in 1836 (Julien 1964: 132–35).

However, inserted into Ferrandez’s narrative, this image signifies not so much the cool courage of the French and the savage nature of the Algerians, but instead the needless carnage brought on by the foolhardiness of the maréchal Clauzel and his advisor Yussuf. Although in the following frames a French captain cries out “Arrière sauvages!” [Get back, savages!] and “Arrière infidèles. Dieu vous maudisse tous” [Get back, infidels. May God curse all of you], Ferrandez suggests that the French officer is in fact the savage, because he earlier brutalized first an Algerian servant boy in Algiers and then a French soldier named Triard who had revolted against the desperate and unfair (to the enlisted men) conditions of the march on Constantine (27, 31–32). By the end of the episode, the captain has been killed by Triard, who arrived on horseback with the Algerian army, having joined the North African enemy...
(36). So in Ferrandez’s fictional enactment of the French defeat, the Algerian “hordes déchaînées” [unleashed hordes] that Rey-Goldzeiguer sees in Raffet’s lithography actually include rebellious French soldiers (Constant as narrator of his “carnets” refers to many of them deserting to join the Arabs).

In a review article entitled “Un album qui insulte l’Algérie française” [An album that insults French Algeria], printed in Présent (Elbe 1987), a far-right French newspaper, Ferrandez is copiously insulted as a traitor and criticized for his visual replication, especially in regards to military uniforms: “Ce dont ne se vante pas l’auteur, c’est du pillage auquel il s’est livré de notre patrimoine d’imagerie militaire” [What the author does not boast of, is his pillaging of our patrimony of military imagery] (cf. Poncet and Morin 1996: 77). This reverses the notion of colonial pillage: for example, of the French army pillaging Algeria. I think quite the contrary, that Ferrandez’s carefulness in this aspect of his visual documentation is entirely to his credit: it proves that he is a conscientious artist who aims for historical accuracy. It is true that in some ways in Carnets d’Orient Ferrandez clearly betrays the imperialist spirit of French military sketches and paintings about Algeria during the conquest, both through his Mario Puzzo character and by the ways that he redraws some of the colonial imagery that he imports into his comic books. Throughout his series, Ferrandez tries to maintain a dual support for working-class Europeans in Algeria and for the Algerians themselves—he often presents both groups as victims of the larger forces of French imperialism. However, his parti-pris or support for the Pieds-Noirs and their heritage repeatedly tips the balance in favor of the settler community, so that commemoration often curbs his critique of colonialism.

Recuperating the orientalist aesthetic

In Carnets d’Orient (1994a), Ferrandez grounds the claims of future generations of European settlers to the right to live in Algeria through a foundation myth (cf. McKinney 1997b): the union of Constant, a French orientalist painter, and Djemilah, an Algerian woman, whom he first spies in a harem in Algiers (Ferrandez 1994a: 19; cf. Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 120–21), in a partial reenactment of Delacroix’s account of having visited the harem of the portmaster of Algiers in 1832 and of Léon Roches’s story about meeting Khadidja, the granddaughter of the portmaster, in the same year (Roches 1904: 9–15; cf. Buch 2005: 54). Roches (1809–1901) served as a secretary for Abdelkader in 1838–39, before becoming an interpreter for, and counselor of, the French General Bugeaud (Julien 1964: 180), and later a French
diplomat (cf. Henry 1991: 304). Ferrandez used Roches as a model for his fictional painter, borrowing extensively from his memoirs, whose historical accuracy was severely compromised, according to French historian Charles-André Julien (1964: 176): “The work, which established his glorious reputation, Thirty-Two Years across Islam (1832–1864), had a certain amount of credibility until the day when it was proven to be ‘only a novel, a pretty oriental novel,’ full of fabulations and falsifications.” In Carnets d’Orient, the harbor/harem master marries Djemilah to a Kouloughli, from whom Constant is determined to retrieve her (Ferrandez 1994a: 41–42; cf. Roches 1904: 16–31). The male rivalry for the hand of Djemilah symbolizes a struggle between competing Ottoman and French imperialisms in Algeria, and their associated forms of cultural and ethnic métissage [mixing] (cf. McKinney 1997b): the negatively connoted métissage of both Djemilah’s Kouloughli husband and his relationship with Djemilah (one type of mixed couple) are set against the positively marked pairing of her and Constant, a Frenchman. Roches (1904: 12) articulated a colonial-era discourse of national and racial mixing and hierarchy in the description that he provided of Khadidja’s origins:

She is the grand-daughter of the Minister of the Navy who took my husband’s place, Mamma Nefissa told me; her mother is a Georgian of princely race whom the sultan of Constantinople gave to him when she was yet a child, and he married her to his son, who was killed at Sidi-Ferruch, fighting the French. Her intelligence is far superior to that of the young Moorish girls. Her mother is equally far above the Algerian women. . . .

Among the many things that Ferrandez borrowed from Roches are the French-Algerian male rivalry over Muslim women, its roots in French imperialism, and language about cultural mixing in Ottoman-era harems in Algiers: “Sa mère était georgienne et fut capturée sur les côtes d’Anatolie par le père d’Omar qui la ramena dans son harem. Djemilah est née de cette union. . . .” [Her mother was Georgian and was captured on the coast of Anatolia by the father of Omar, who brought her into his harem. Djemilah was born of that union . . . ] (Ferrandez 1994a: 22: 12; my emphasis). However, he here also produces or reinforces a violent element that is not more than implicit in Roches’ story of pre-colonial mixing—Ferrandez describes Djemilah’s mother as having been kidnapped—to lend legitimacy to Constant’s attempts to liberate Djemilah from the confines of the harem and marry her. This addition resonates with the racist assertion, found in Roches, that Khadidja and her mother were far more intelligent than Algerian girls and women.
On the other hand, the comic book’s visual representation of the harem is primarily based on an orientalist painting by an English artist (see below). Roches (1904) too used the discourse of orientalism, including its visual representations, to describe his infatuation with Khadidja, for example in these two excerpts:

I had in my bedroom a very lovely illuminated lithograph that represented Greece. It sat close to the head of my bed. The Moorish women, seeing it, exclaimed: “That’s Khadidja,” and, indeed, there was some similarity between that image and the hair, the clothes and the general appearance of the young Moorish woman. (14)

This is no longer my little Khadidja of Braham-Reîs. This is the most perfect type of odalisque, about whom one dreams while reading the Thousand and One Nights. And her beauty [that of Khadidja, now grown up] was heightened even more by her emotion and her modest attitude. (21)

Moreover, the series title chosen by Ferrandez, “Carnets d’Orient,” is itself a transparent reference to the orientalist sketchbooks (usually referred to as carnets or albums) that Delacroix made during his trip to Morocco, Spain and Algeria (1831–32). They provide the model for Constant’s own sketchbook (Ferrandez 1995: 23). Pages from the latter are included at the outset of Carnets d’Orient (Ferrandez 1994a: 11) and regularly throughout the rest of the book. Moreover, through page layout and collage, Ferrandez underlines the fact that his multi-volume series is itself a series of “carnets,” which rely on many orientalist and colonial-era paintings and other visual source material, as is especially apparent in the first book and in the fifth one, entitled Le cimetièr des princesses [The Cemetery of the Princesses] (Ferrandez 1995).

Throughout his series, Ferrandez grapples with orientalist and colonialist aesthetics, and with colonial history, in productive but sometimes contradictory and often problematic ways. He also uses orientalist painters and their work in order to lend historical authenticity to his fictional characters, just as he tries to do with his copious documentation about battlefield scenes, military costumes and architecture. Ferrandez attempts a sustained critical evaluation of the orientalist paintings and tradition that he uses as sources for his comic book series, especially in the crucial first and fifth volumes: Carnets d’Orient (Ferrandez 1994a) and Le cimetièr des princesses (Ferrandez 1995). In the latter book a distinction is made between an orientalism that is “boursouflé” [puffy; swollen] and one that succeeds in representing “la vie [orientale] telle quelle dans des scènes naturalistes (non
dénuées de sensualité, d’ailleurs)” [(oriental) life as it is found in naturalist scenes (not shorn of sensuality, moreover)] (1995: 62)—this last comment refers specifically to Etienne Dinet, whose work is quoted visually by the cartoonist in the same frame. Ferrandez makes clear that the majority of Joseph Constant’s orientalist paintings, produced after his return to France, belong in the negatively connoted first category, because of the artificality imparted to them by his physical and therefore aesthetic distance from his subject matter (Ferrandez 1995: 62). By extension, this judgement on Constant might be read as applying to the orientalist paintings—by Henri Regnault, Jean-Léon Gérôme and others—from which Ferrandez borrows to represent the exotic and grandiose vision of the Orient that Constant creates on canvas after leaving Algeria and returning to France (Ferrandez 1994a: 39–40, 72–74). However, this leaves one wondering how to categorize Ferrandez’s own work, based on these same paintings.

The complexity of Ferrandez’s approach may be illustrated by an analysis of his insertion into Carnets d’Orient (Ferrandez 1994a: 50) of Henri Regnault’s orientalist painting Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Grenada (1870). Ferrandez (1996) points out that Regnault’s painting of a decapitation hangs in the Musée d’Orsay. Nochlin (1989: 52–53) describes it as an “irrational spectacle” characteristic of the Orient, according to the norms of orientalist painting. MacKenzie (1995: 46) takes issue with Nochlin’s selection of paintings, which he views as representative of ideological distortion, and instead puts (1995: 52) Regnault in a list of painters who represent how “Orientalism celebrates cultural proximity, historical parallelism and religious familiarity rather than true ‘Otherness.’” Ferrandez’s (1994a: 50) own perspective on this particular painting by Regnault is difficult to ascertain, as we will soon see. One of his main prose sources for Carnets d’Orient adds an additional level of complexity to his use of Regnault’s painting: the colonial-era description by Roches of beheadings ordered by Abdelkader. The cartoonist first inserts a reworked version of the orientalist painting into a narrative sequence substantially based on a passage by Roches (1904: 91–99) that recounts a battle between Abdelkader’s forces and a small group of Kouloughlis allied with the French, the condemnation by Abdelkader of eighteen surviving leaders of the resistance to his authority, the immediate execution of three men, and a pathos-filled conclusion in which the young children of the condemned successfully plead for Abdelkader’s mercy for the remaining fifteen, who are led away unharmed. A Muslim, Arab execution as spectacle is obviously the common theme in both Regnault’s painting—made in 1870, but depicting a scene set centuries earlier in Moorish Spain—and Roches’s prose account of an event purported to take place in 1837 in Algeria. This is surely what
led Ferrandez to meld the two in his graphic novel, to show the execution of a captured warrior—who is a Kouloughli and therefore ethnically related to Constant’s rival for Djemilah—that was ordered by Abdelkader, trying to assert his authority over various indigenous groups in order to concertedly resist the occupying French army. The particular Kouloughli group to which the condemned man belongs had been allied with the French and had refused to join Abdelkader in his rebellion against the invading Christian nation. After claiming that God is on his side, the defiant Kouloughli chooses death over slavery and is executed. Ferrandez’s version of Regnault’s painting is indeed “irrational spectacle” (Nochlin 1989: 52), insofar as it represents internecine blood-letting by rival groups of Muslims determined to pursue their specific interests, articulated in terms of a Muslim holy war (Ferrandez 1994a: 47).

Ferrandez sets up a series of contrasts between his French protagonist and the Algerian resistance. Constant is more courageous in battle than the Emir’s soldiers whom he helps lead against the Kouloughli group (Ferrandez 1994a: 48), urges clemency for the vanquished (49), and—most importantly—repeatedly encourages Abdelkader to make peace with his rival Algerians and with the French, as the only rational course of action (Ferrandez 1994a: 46, 51–52). According to the comic book’s version of Algerian history, the Emir’s failure to heed Constant’s advice seals his ultimate defeat. This is one in a series of what are presented as missed chances for French-Algerian entente, which—had they been seized—might have ultimately led to the formation of a multicultural nation from which the Pied-Noirs would never have been exiled. Despite its generous humanist motivations, this nostalgic reading of history of course downplays, elides or offers shaky solutions to all sorts of very real problems that it raises on several levels. To take just one example, Ferrandez never allows a confrontation between Constant and Djemilah’s husband; the closest he gets is through the execution of the Kouloughli, who could be seen as a proxy for Constant’s Algerian rival.

Regnault’s *Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Grenada* is depicted again at the end of the volume (Ferrandez 1994a: 72–73), as one of the problematic paintings that Constant made after his return to France. The transformation of the execution as it was originally witnessed by Constant in Algeria into a studio painting in France symbolizes a detachment of the historical event from its supposedly real context and its insertion into an artificial one, in other words, Constant’s later production of orientalist paintings that attempt to show “les mystères et les beautés de l’Orient” [the mysteries and the beauties of the Orient] (Ferrandez 1994a: 74). In fact, Ferrandez’s original presentation of the execution, as lived event, incorpo-
rates a self-referential gesture designed to disrupt the reality effect (Barthes 1985), or the history effect (Fresnault-Deruelle 1979): the frame depicting the execution is slightly rotated out of alignment with the other frames, and the setting as well as the executioner’s clothing are somewhat different from their state in the previous frames. Instead, the beheader’s garb corresponds to the clothing worn by the studio model who poses while Constant recreates the scene on canvas in France (Ferrandez 1994a: 72–73). The cartoonist’s rotation of the frame, which is the equivalent of a jump cut in a movie, suggests one or both of two things, that: even at the moment it actually occurs in Algeria, the execution is viewed by Constant through orientalist lenses, or the first representation that we see of the event is already a post-event reconstruction by the painter. However, neither of these seriously puts into question the supposedly real existence in the comic book of the execution itself, nor its symbolic value as a spectacle of the “irrational violence” (Nochlin 1989: 52) enacted by one group of Algerians against another one, though it is true that Ferrandez also shows, in a negative light, the irrational violence committed by Frenchmen against each other (Ferrandez 1994a: 30–36) and against Algerians (e.g., Ferrandez 1994a: 27). Ferrandez’s (1995) subsequent attempt at resolving the conflict between the two values (accurate historical document versus orientalist fantasy) that he attributes to orientalist art is not wholly convincing. The contradiction between them is most acutely obvious in the manipulation of orientalist paintings, such as Regnault’s, that are first integrated into the narrative as depicting or referring to real events in the comic book; it is far less so for the images first inserted as representations of Constant’s feverish delirium (Ferrandez 1994a: 39–40) and later transposed onto canvas. In those sequences Ferrandez does not aim to recuperate or reproduce the “attempt at documentary realism” of nineteenth-century orientalism (Rosenthal 1982: 8; quoted in Nochlin 1989: 33; cf. Porterfield 1998); instead, the cartoonist suggests there that orientalist painting was simply a form of self-delusion.

On the other hand, Constant ends up rejecting the “immanations orientales” embodied in his paintings and comes to believe that his sketchbooks are the only true reflection (“le témoignage authentique” [the authentic testimony]) of his experiences in Algeria (Ferrandez 1995: 77). If we once again extrapolate out from Constant’s art to the historical artifacts on which they are based, it is clear that Ferrandez views Delacroix’s North African sketchbooks to likewise be an unmediated, authentic reflection of his subject matter. That is why Ferrandez decides to model his own “Carnets d’Orient” after them and to draw a clear contrast within his series, between the unmediated accuracy of Delacroix’s vision in his carnets and the artificiality of later orientalist paintings, as Ferrandez explained in an interview (1996):
When I stumbled onto it, precisely at the French National Library, there was a facsimile edition of the Sketchbooks [of Delacroix], and I told myself “Well there you have it! My narration is in there.” . . . And it was precisely when I saw those books on orientalist painting that I realized, after having seen the Sketchbooks of Delacroix, that there was an enormous difference in their way of depicting, and of, finally, what the painters showed of the country, between the fleeting impression, the first impression, which was no doubt very close to reality, and then, after that, this kind of decor from the Thousand and One Nights.

According to Ferrandez’s account of his series’ genesis, the sketchbooks’ mixture of text and image appears to provide an ideal model for the hybrid art of the cartoonist. Moreover, Ferrandez describes his desire to find an accurate and non-orientalist vision of North Africa, especially Algeria, in Delacroix’s sketchbooks, which he opposes to the “Arabian-Nights decor” of orientalist painting. However, Porterfield (1998: 124–30) has convincingly argued that this widely held view of Delacroix’s notebooks is flawed: although Delacroix himself argued for “the documentary nature of his pictures from North Africa,” from sketchbook to finished canvas, this claim does not stand up to scrutiny. Neither his North African paintings nor his notebooks can be considered to be free from imperialist ideology and from orientalist techniques of observation and representation. Instead, Delacroix’s “documentary stance” and his notebooks belong to a tradition of orientalist observation, sketching and note-taking that evolved in part to justify French imperialist expansion (Porterfield 1998: 66–68). Ferrandez’s distinction between Delacroix’s notebooks and orientalist painting in general is one of the “authenticating strategies” (Porterfield 1998: 51; cf. Nochlin 1989: 38) that the cartoonist uses throughout the series, to lend ethnographic and historical credibility to his comic-book memorial to the Pied-Noir community and l’Algérie française. His solicitation of prefaces by celebrated intellectuals and writers associated with that ethnic group is another such strategy (see Poncet and Morin 1996: 73–74; Buch 2005: 67–73). Of course, Ferrandez’s use of Delacroix’s sketchbooks as a master model for his own “Carnets d’Orient” also stamps the comics with the cachet of high art.

After Ferrandez has finished separating what he considers to be artificial orientalist chaff from the kernel of authentic artistic perception, the reader is left with a handful of orientalist painters and works that are cited favorably, whether visually or verbally, within the series: the inaugural and innovative Delacroix (Ferrandez 1994a, 1995: 23–26), Trois Fellahs [Three Fellahs] (ca. 1835) by Charles Gleyre (1806–1874), the “naturalist”
Alphonse-Etienne Dinet (Ferrandez 1995: 62–63) and the “talented” Henri Matisse (Ferrandez 1995: 14). However, Ferrandez’s explicit distinction between authentic and inauthentic orientalist images, and his implied distinction between artistic representations of Algeria that are untainted by imperialism and others that are contaminated, are not entirely consistent—for example, much of Dinet’s production is orientalist kitsch, often in an erotic vein—and even break down, especially when subjected to the pressure of Ferrandez’s own longing for a lost homeland, l’Algérie française.

Despite the negative judgment on most of the paintings made by Constant, which are destroyed when his studio burns down (Ferrandez 1995: 35), his surviving harem painting of Djemilah becomes a lieu de mémoire within the comic book series and symbolizes the mythical (even Biblical) origins of the European settler community—symbolically issuing from, or founded upon, the union of Joseph Constant (a renegade French artist) and Djemilah (his Algerian lover) (Ferrandez 1995: 24)—and its dream of possessing Algeria “like a woman” (Ferrandez 1994a: 74), just as Joseph dreamt of uniting with Djemilah after having first seen her in the harem. From the beginning of the comic-book series, Ferrandez’s representation of Constant’s painting and the art-historical event that inspired it are problematic and can reveal something about the contradictions inherent in the cartoonist’s project. Ferrandez’s (1994a: 19) representation of the first encounter between Joseph and Djemilah is based on An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo (1869), an orientalist painting by John Frederick Lewis (1805–1875). The narrative conceit of Lewis’s painting involves the passing of a message encoded in flowers, sent to a woman in a harem but intercepted by another one, who now shows the missive to the harem’s master, whose authority over the women in the harem had been temporarily circumvented by the clandestine message, its author and its intended receiver. From An Intercepted Correspondence, Cairo Ferrandez borrows both Lewis’s lavishly colorful representation of the harem’s sumptuous decor and his ideologically charged allusion to the transgression of domestic oriental despotism (Figure 2.7). He combines Lewis’s narrative with Delacroix’s story: Joseph Constant, acting here as Delacroix’s double, takes on the role of the woman’s lover, who is absent from Lewis’s painting, although his implied existence is essential to the painting’s story and its references to orientalist notions concerning despotic oriental rule, the harem’s forced indolence, and the perversions that these produce. To this tale of domestic tyranny Ferrandez (1994a: 40–43) later explicitly attaches the political connotations that the notion of oriental despotism carries: in order to keep Djemilah away from Constant, the harbor master marries her off to a man associated with the Ottoman rulers of Algeria, who had been deposed by the French
invaders (as discussed above). This is part of what enables Ferrandez to paradoxically re-frame the motif of a Frenchman’s single-minded fascination with, and pursuit of, an Algerian woman as an anti-imperialist act, despite the fact that Constant’s (and Delacroix’s) initial access to the harem had been facilitated by French imperialism.

My analysis of the way that Ferrandez redraws Lewis’s painting and inserts it into his narrative suggests a reply to MacKenzie, who argued that orientalist painting is not generally denigrating, but instead is ambivalent in its depictions of its subjects, and often even quite admiring of the cultures it represents: for example, MacKenzie (1995: 62) sees “a return to craft values” mirrored in orientalist pictorial depictions of various finely wrought objects from the East. Ferrandez’s comic books betray a fascination with the colors, objects, landscapes and architectural details of colonial Algeria, but also with orientalist painting. In *Carnets d’Orient*, as in orientalist painting, “tiles and wooden lattices, *mashrabiyyah*, are lovingly portrayed” (MacKenzie 1995: 62). Yet the representation of the harem’s wooden lattices, in Ferrandez’s copy and in Lewis’s “original” (itself heavily indebted to earlier textual and pictorial descriptions of harems), is part of a eurocentric ideological structure for representing so-called oriental cultures as despotic in domestic and political realms. I am not arguing that eurocentrism is the only representational strategy or value attached to orientalist painting, nor that Ferrandez’s “*Carnets d’Orient*” constitute imperialist propaganda. My point is a subtler one: Ferrandez’s choice of this particular harem painting was probably motivated at least as much by the eurocentric narrative about the Orient that it makes explicit, but which is more or less shared by most or all European orientalist harem paintings, as by Lewis’s luxuriant depiction of a finely crafted, ornate oriental decor. In borrowing Lewis’s painting of what is supposed to be an *Egyptian* harem, Ferrandez was not so much concerned with historical or visual accuracy in depicting an *Algerian* interior as he was in recuperating and reproducing an enduring vision of despotic oriental men and desirable oriental women. Ferrandez loves to portray Algerian women at least as much as he does the *mashrabiyyah* through which Constant longingly gazes at Djemilah (her name means “pretty” in Arabic). The cultural heritage left by orientalist painters is wide open to this particular reinterpretation by Ferrandez, as well as to other ones that would be more critical of the eurocentric strands that exist in orientalist paintings and in the stories that surround them, like the visit said to have inspired Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*.

The transmission of Constant’s painting of the moment when he first saw Djemilah, as an inheritance handed down from one generation to the next, also helps to illustrate the settler community’s genealogical continuity
and thereby to legitimate the creation of a settler identity as an ersatz African and Algerian one that, in fact, negates the national identity of the indigenous peoples (Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 124): as one farmer-settler proclaims, “je suis devenu . . . un Africain, . . . un colon!” [I have become . . . an African, . . . a colonizer!] (Ferrandez 1994c: 74). Marianne, the main protagonist of *Le cimetière des princesses* and a member of the last generation of Europeans to reach adulthood on Algerian soil (that of Ferrandez’s parents; cf. Ferrandez in Poncet and Morin 1996: 76), receives a kind of
Chapter 2

inheritance from Constant when her friend and fiancé-to-be, Sauveur, buys Joseph’s sketchbooks at a flea market and gives them to her (Ferrandez 1995: 22–23). She then retraces Constant’s itinerary across Algeria in an act of memorial reconstruction that mirrors both Ferrandez’s fabrication of a comic-book homage by sifting through and pasting together colonialism’s relics (cf. Fresnault-Deruelle 1979: 103; Certeau 1994: 266–68), and a French reader’s experience of his five-volume series as an initiatory voyage back through France’s colonial history, presented as a national or ethnic epic, that of the Pieds-Noirs. In the fifth book, which closes the first cycle of the series, the apparent destruction of Constant’s notebooks in a fire (they miraculously reappear, undamaged, at the beginning of the second cycle of the series, in volume six), and of his harem painting in an earthquake, signals the loss of an artistic legacy and a settler identity memorialized by the comic books (cf. Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 127–28). However, Ferrandez’s recuperation of orientalist and colonialist aesthetics extends to colonial photography and is just as problematic as his treatment of orientalist painting.

Recycling colonial postcards

The cover illustration of the fourth volume, Le centenaire (Ferrandez 1994d) conveniently exemplifies some of the possibilities and limits of Ferrandez’s series (Figure 2.8). The tableau unites several secondary figures around the main character, and represents the two geographical poles around which the book is structured. Paul (no doubt partly modeled on Albert Camus), is the central, pivotal character who acts as the narrator of the fourth carnet. A young reporter for a French newspaper, he returns home to Algeria to write a series of articles on the 1930 centennial celebration of the French conquest of Algeria. On Paul’s left side (that is, in the part of the illustration that extends over the back cover) are various European characters, including one who has adopted Algerian dress and costumes, all set against the background of a southern oasis. On his right (on the front cover), against the background of the casbah of Algiers are two women with whom Paul is or was intimately involved: a fully clothed European woman, whom he will eventually marry, and a partially naked Algerian prostitute, Naïma, of whom Paul had previously been an occasional client, during his military service (Ferrandez 1994c: 79; 1994d: 17). The tableau is a complex attempt to represent the strongly gendered geographical, sexual and ethnic-national tensions that structure the volume: the rural south and the desert versus the urban north and the casbah of Algiers; adultery and endogamy (sex with
his brother’s fiancé, on the left) versus exogamy and prostitution (sex with the Algerian prostitute, on the far right); French versus Algerian women as incarnations of authentic Algerian-ness and its reproduction (cf. Calargé 2010: 114); going native versus French exploitation of the Algerians. As is often the case with comic book covers, this scene occurs nowhere within the covers of *Le centenaire* (Ferrandez 1994d); instead, it is a fantastic one composed by the artist to represent and sell his book.43

The right side of the tableau echoes earlier harem and bordello scenes in the series, which were inspired by colonial postcards as well as orientalist paintings and travel accounts. Naïma, who is not veiled and has a breast exposed (cf. Calargé 2010: 114), is an amalgam created by Ferrandez from colonial postcards in Alloula’s *Le harem colonial,*44 two of which are reproduced at the outset of *Le centenaire’s* narrative (Ferrandez 1994d: 12), as part of a collage. The reproduction of the postcards salvaged by Ferrandez via Alloula helps to demonstrate that this volume too is a “carnet d’Orient” into which the author pastes, redraws and rescripts scraps of material from the visual and textual archives of *l’Algérie française.* By redrawing Naïma in a street of the casbah on the front cover of his book, Ferrandez may seem to liberate her from the bordello to which she is relegated within his narrative (Ferrandez 1994d: 17), but the main thrust of the cartoonist’s gesture is to expose her for the (male) French reader, just as colonial photographers did by publishing the postcard originals.45

Like the photographers, Ferrandez obsessively returned to harem scenes, both within his comic-book series and in at least two other places: (1) in a group show entitled “Bulles d’Eros” [Erotic speech balloons], held from April to May 1993, at Les Larmes d’Eros, a Parisian art gallery, Ferrandez exhibited at least two erotic watercolors, again redrawn from postcards reproduced in Alloula’s study,46 and (2) later in the same year Ferrandez was finally able to imitate Delacroix by helping to produce a contemporary “Album d’Afrique du Nord” [North African Album] on site, when he traveled to Algeria for the first time since his departure while still an infant. He traveled there to produce images for *La colline visitée: La casbah d’Algiers* [The Hillside Visited: The Casbah of Algiers] (Mimouni and Ferrandez 1993), a book for which Rachid Mimouni, a well-known Algerian writer who was later forced into exile, wrote the text.


Delacroix’s experience of the harem [he visited in Algiers] and his audience’s experience of his painting [*Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement*] were highly mediated . . . [through] many illustrated accounts of the East that Delacroix knew before his trip. . . . This is to say that Delacroix’s pre-
Figure 2.8: Redrawing erotic colonial postcards on a comic-book cover. From Jacques Ferrandez, *Carnets d'Orient*, vol. 4: *Le centenaire* [Oriental Sketchbooks: The Centennial/Centenarian], preface by Benjamin Stora (Tournai: Casterman, 1994), cover. © Casterman. Reproduced with the kind permission of Jacques Ferrandez and Editions Casterman.
vious indoctrination and practice in the culture of Orientalism informed his project. Before going to the Orient, he knew how to paint it.

Similarly, Ferrandez’s own visit of discovery to the casbah of Algiers was mediated through his intimate knowledge of Delacroix’s North African notebooks and paintings, and more generally through the orientalist tradition in painting, but also by his familiarity with the postcards in Alloula and others (cf. Ferrandez in Poncet and Morin 1996: 76–77). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that to depict Algerian women in *La colline visitée: La casbah d’Alger*, Ferrandez redrew the same colonial postcards from Alloula (respectively 1981: 77 and back cover, 56; 1986: 121, 83), although for this cooperative Algerian-French effort with Mimouni, Ferrandez toned down the eroticism of his reproductions.

Ferrandez’s neo-orientalist representation relies on earlier published travel accounts, such as Théophile Gautier’s (1973) *Voyage pittoresque en Algérie (1845)* [Picturesque Voyage to Algeria (1845)], whose text and illustrations supplied the cartoonist with much of his anachronistic account of Constant’s arrival in Algiers (Ferrandez 1994a: 11–13), which Ferrandez situates on 24 May 1836, approximately nine years before Gautier’s actual visit of 1845, and four years after Delacroix’s of 1832 (Ferrandez 1994a: 18). Indeed, a significant aspect of Ferrandez’s neo-orientalist approach is his heavy reliance on the citation of antecedent authority in order to establish the legitimacy of his project. A perhaps even more telling example of this is Ferrandez’s quotation from Flaubert’s (1991: 281–88, cf. 70–77, 362–63, 366; 1996: 113–19) infamous description of his encounter with the Egyptian prostitute and dancer Kuchuk Hanem, which Said (1994a: 6, 186–87, 207–8) discusses at length, as a “widely influential model of the Oriental woman” (6). Ferrandez (1994a: 14–15) bases Constant’s visit to a bordello in Algiers on Flaubert’s influential prototype, going so far as to attribute to Constant, Flaubert’s exact words describing his sexual exploits (Buch 2005: 50–51). Here too, Ferrandez appears to have modeled his watercolor and line drawing of a prostitute on one or several postcards in Alloula (1981: 55; 1986: 81).

Clearly, colonial postcards from *l’Algérie française* are a place of memory on which many authors with a personal stake in the colonization and decolonization of Algeria have freely drawn, though not always in a critical manner. My principal criticism of Ferrandez’s use, in “Carnets d’Orient,” of colonial postcards purporting to depict colonized Algerian women is that he provides little in the way of a critique of the gendered and colonialist visual aesthetic that they emblematize, despite his recognition that the vision embodied in them is quite similar to that of many orientalist paint-
The most that he accomplishes in this regard is to make explicit the sexist logic that is often implicit in the originals: the women in the cards become prostitutes in his narrative (Ferrandez 1994a: 14–15; 1994d: 12, 17). There is not the type of sustained reflection on the production of colonial-era photographs and postcards that we saw earlier in Ferrandez’s treatment of orientalist painting: for example, although an unscrupulous French photographer is criticized, it is because he had manipulated and exploited the image of a French man (a military veteran), not an Algerian woman (Ferrandez 1994d: 72; see McKinney 2011b: 96–99); and there is no equivalent of the explicit critiques that characters make of orientalist painting. Recourse to the colonial archives, especially the visual ones, is a tricky business. A “hermeneutics of suspicion” is necessary, though perhaps not sufficient, to prevent us from participating in a neo-colonial “peepshow” when we look at the “visual exchange that informed colonialism” (Bal 1996: 217, 203, 222).

In “Carnets d’Orient,” we can see how the artist’s attitude towards the allure of empire—and the aura of orientalism—is expressed through the tropes of mourning and family reconciliation, which renegotiate the boundaries of the French national community and thereby recompose it. The apparent destruction of Constant’s sketchbooks in a car crash (Ferrandez 1995: 70–72) permits the reconciliation of two male rivals for Marianne’s affection: Sauveur, a settler, and Marnier, an orientalist painter from mainland France. Their reunion symbolizes a mending of the fractures that split the French national community into warring factions during the Algerian War. Indeed, it is at this juncture that the settler figure (Sauveur) definitively supplants the mainlander (Marnier) as Marianne’s legitimate suitor; in this way, Ferrandez symbolizes the erasure of the settlers’ violent opposition to the French nation, their reintegration into it and even their reincarnation as the Republic (Marianne is a settler, but also, obviously, the emblem of republican France, who is courted by her settler savior, Sauveur; cf. Tribak-Geoffroy 1997: 119, 128). So even today, long after the official end of empire, in a work that memorializes the existence and passing of l’Algérie française, empire’s allure in the form of orientalist art (Constant’s sketchbooks and harem painting) plays a role very similar to the one that Porterfield (1998: 4–5) saw it occupying at the outset of France’s occupation of Algeria, for example through Delacroix’s Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement: creating national unity by displacing the specter of a fratricidal conflict (the French Revolution; the Algerian War) that would otherwise endanger the nation’s very existence (the car crash from which Marianne and Marnier escape, by a miracle).

According to Stora (1992: 261), the absence of places of memory (he
calls them “espaces de mémoire” [spaces of memory]) is particularly painful for the Pieds-Noirs:

This feeling of going against the current or of having been placed outside of history increases with the disappearance of all the spaces of memory, especially the cemetery of the ancestors. The absence of spaces in France that would offer imaginary, historical reconstructions is painfully felt.

This sheds light on the role of Ferrandez’s project. The “Carnets d’Orient” provide a virtual lieu de mémoire to replace ones that were lost when the settler community left for France. To create his “sketchbooks,” Ferrandez sifts through the flotsam of l’Algérie française: colonial postcards, orientalist paintings and writings, history books, old newspapers and the like. Like other generously minded Pieds-Noirs (Stora 1992: 240), Ferrandez creates the ideal of a multicultural Algerian society that might have been but never truly was and, in at least one instance, looks forward to France’s multicultural society of today (Ferrandez 1994a: 17)—perhaps as a possible substitute for the lost Algerian one. He re-casts the history of France’s colonization of Algeria as a national epic, whose untarnished heroes were exceptionally generous-minded Frenchmen open to the people and culture of Algeria. He re-frames the road to decolonization as a tragic series of lost chances for French-Algerian reconciliation. Still, I wonder whether his nostalgia-soaked view of history, coupled with the severe limitations to his critique of orientalist and colonialist imagery, which lead him to produce what I have been calling neo-orientalist representation, signal a continuing difficulty in letting go of the myth of l’Algérie française. At stake is the possibility of imagining truly equal relations between Europeans and Algerians. It is certainly conceivable that the “Carnets d’Orient” make possible the mourning for a lost homeland, a disappearing imagined community (Anderson 1991) of settlers and an ethnic identity now perhaps vanishing through assimilation of the Pied-Noir minority into the French mainstream.

Nevertheless, in some ways it may also impede a more critical examination of the historical and aesthetic record, which is necessary for a peaceful resolution today of French-Algerian relations, internally within both France and Algeria, as well as between the two countries. Ferrandez waited several years before beginning to publish books in the second cycle of “Carnets d’Orient,” which deals with the Algerian War. It was only in 2002, after the war had once again become a burning topic of debate in France, that the cartoonist finally released La guerre fantôme (I analyze that work and subsequent volumes in the “Carnets d’Orient” in Chapter 4, below). Ferrandez’s prolonged difficulty in squarely confronting the drama of the Algerian
War—especially its both devastating and empowering effects on Algerians in France and Algeria—within the series could be symbolic or symptomatic of a more widespread limitation that has had negative consequences for the perception of the Maghrebi community in France (cf. Stora 1992: 281–301, 317–21).

Redrawing the French-Algerian affrontier in Algerian and French comics

There is a curious difference between French editions of La bar-mitsva [*The Bar Mitsva*], the first volume of Sfar’s “Le chat du rabbin” [*The Rabbi’s Cat*] series: an early edition (Sfar 2003a), lacks an indication that appeared in later ones. The cartoonist’s belated acknowledgment of a primary source—*Alger et ses peintres, 1830–1960* [Algiers and Its Painters, 1830–1960], a lavishly illustrated study by Marion Vidal-Bué (2000) explicitl—incribes his work in the corpus of French comics about North Africa that I have been analyzing. André Benhaïm (2007: 243; my translation) may be the first and is one of the rare commentators in the United States to point toward the painterly sources of Sfar’s art in the series, although he then sets aside this line of inquiry:55

Algeria becomes, in Sfar, a space at once “true” and imaginary, the land of “the 1930s,” the land of the father, born in Sétif, and of the paternal grandmother, and a land that the author has only seen in postcards and other orientalist painters, from whom he drew inspiration to illustrate his family stories.

My preceding analysis of Algeria in European, mostly French, comics helps us situate Sfar’s project within the general trend or genre of historical comics, and a specific tendency to return to the colonial past in them. It is a shared but conflictual, post-independence, project (cf. Rigney 2005: 22, 24) that dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s in France, and somewhat earlier in Algeria. The project both follows, and helps produce or inflect, the affrontier (see above, Chapter 1). We can explore this notion further by looking briefly at historical comics about Algeria drawn by Masmoudi (an Algerian)56 and Sfar (a Frenchman of Sephardic Algerian Jewish heritage on his father’s side). They and Ferrandez together represent three major groups that existed in colonial Algeria. Their shared references, sources and practice constitute a model that provides an ideal case study of how the affrontier functions and how cartoonists redraw French empire.
Their memorial model involves cultural mining and recycling, which entails crossing and reworking the affrontier to produce representations of the Algerian past that reflect contemporary concerns in France and Algeria. These cartoonists use comics as one of the available “mnemonic technologies and memorial forms” (Rigney 2005: 24). Comics are one of the “artistic media” that, “[b]y virtue of their aesthetic and fictional properties,” can move easily (“they are more ‘mobile’ and ‘exportable’”) and serve to help “re-define the borders of imagined memory communities” (25)—here, of the affrontier. Their visual-linguistic and narrative form render them a potentially powerful means for incorporating many types of recovered material from the past, and articulating it as or in a story. To recreate the Algerian past through comics, cartoonists have created a model that is reproducible and exportable (Anderson 1991; Rigney 2005: 25). It allows artists to cross, inflect the contours of, or reinforce the affrontier by sharing techniques and references: Rigney (2005: 24) observes that “models of remembrance may be exchanged among groups with a similarly marginalized position within the public sphere”—here, North African Sephardim and Catholic Pieds-Noirs in France, and Algerians in Algeria. Such imitation can involve cross-border raiding and smuggling across the affrontier, a form of cultural trabendo (an Algerian term for contraband smuggling). French and Algerian cartoonists are therefore sometimes and to some extent trabendistes [smugglers], and their comics a form of contre-bande-dessinée [contreband/counter-comics]: ones that traffic in counter-memories and archival material (forms of colonial loot; McKinney 2011b), and disrupt other memorial constructions and identities. Such smuggling is often cross-media or “transmedial” (cf. Rigney 2005: 20–21): cartoonists import imagery from other cultural forms into their art without always naming their specific sources (as in the early French edition of La bar-mitsva). It often entails recirculating colonial materials whose original or earlier meanings run counter to or exceed those for which the cartoonist retrieves and rearticulates them.

The artistic-historical model that these artists use involves: redrawing orientalist French paintings, especially by Delacroix or Dinet; using colonial engravings and postcards to produce ethnic authenticity and the historical effect; and inviting prominent historians to write prefaces to comic books, or even drawing ones that historians have scripted. Where did the model come from, and who produced it first? In the material under discussion here (which does not exhaust the available comics, the sources in these comics, or the media either—film, for example), we find it first on the Algerian side, in Masmoudi’s work (Bessaih, Bakhti and Masmoudi 1986); and then on the French side, by Ferrandez. By contrast, both far pre-date
the series by Sfar, for whom Ferrandez’s comics clearly constitute the influ-
ential model, even though this fact has been ignored almost completely,
especially in the Anglophone world, where Ferrandez’s work is still virtu-
ally unknown. Although not impossible, it is unlikely that Sfar would have
been familiar with Masmoudi’s book, because comics published in Algeria
are poorly distributed in France.

I have already shown here how Delacroix is the mediating, foundational
artist for Ferrandez. This is also true for Sfar: the cartoonist takes Delac-
roix’s North African notebooks and paintings as a first prestigious, paint-
erly contact with the country; and for Sfar, as for Ferrandez, the painter
represents the idea of documentary authenticity and reportage in oriental-
ism, a problematic one as we have seen. True, in his use of Delacroix, Sfar
draws closer to one kind of authenticity, because he implicitly foregrounds
the Jewishness of many of Delacroix’s human subjects and settings in North
Africa (clothing, furniture, etc.), but the cultural model that Sfar borrows
from Delacroix was in part from Morocco, not just Algeria. This produces
a detour along the affrontier: both Ferrandez and Sfar go virtually through
Morocco to get to Algeria, which exemplifies both the cultural mish-mash of
orientalist citation (Porterfield 1998) and the fractal quality of the affrontier

Like Ferrandez, Sfar imports material from other
famous orientalist painters and paintings into his first comic book about
colonial Algeria. In fact, he copies wholesale many orientalist paintings
from the single volume by Vidal-Bué mentioned above. Some of these bor-
rowings clearly articulate a Jewish connection to past, either via the subject
of the original painting (e.g., the synagogue of the Place Randon [Randon
Square]), the ethnicity of the painter (e.g., Armand Assus, Simon Mondzain)
or both. However, the range of subjects, the ethnic references and especially
the time periods represented in and by the paintings paradoxically obviate
any serious or general claim to historical and cultural authenticity in the
graphic novel through the copying. Instead, we see once again an ahistorical
orientalist practice of unanchored citation of antecedent authority.

Paintings by Dinet are important to both the Algerian cartoonist Mas-
moudi and the French cartoonist Ferrandez. For historian Claude Liauzu
(2000: 38–45), Dinet was an exemplary passeur de rives [shore crosser]
(cf. Henry 1991: 308; Benjamin 2003a: e.g., 92). He crossed the colonial
affrontier, and critiqued certain aspects of it, but without fundamentally
questioning French colonialism in Algeria (Pouillon 1997). Dinet furnished
official, post-independence Algeria with a problematic model of access to
a supposedly authentic cultural and artistic past from the French colonial
period (Pouillon 1997; Liauzu 2000: 44–45). For Algerians, recovering and
recycling Dinet’s paintings has often required evacuating or overlooking the
colonial, orientalist eroticism of much of his work, and substituting for it either the cultural authenticity that he was supposedly able to document in his paintings, or the later, pious religious images from after his conversion to Islam. However, this notion of authenticity in Dinet's paintings again rests on the problematic view of orientalist painting as an objective form of reportage that would somehow be substantially unmediated by preexisting artistic or cultural conventions of representation (Porterfield 1998).

For Masmoudi, Dinet's paintings apparently serve as a model repository of cultural authenticity and of an artistic style for depicting the Algerian south (cf. Benjamin 2003a: 96–97). Here, for Masmoudi, Algerian women personify suffering Algeria under French colonialism. The characters in his narrative have been displaced by an attack of French soldiers come to impose the building of a fort, as an advance outpost for the construction of a train track to the desert oasis in southern Algeria. This is problematic, insofar as the historical and cultural authenticity of Dinet's paintings appears to be unverified: Masmoudi uses paintings that the artist made several years after the revolt of Cheikh Bouamama, whose story Masmoudi recounts. Moreover, he moves Dinet's women some 600 kilometers southwest, from Bou Saâda to Tiout. In fact one comic-book image (p. 50, third panel) is a redrawn collage of elements from various paintings by Dinet, purporting to represent different scenes of pathos, none of which are connected in any obvious way by Dinet to resistance to French colonialism: a death-watch around a dying patriarch (Autour d’un mourant [Around a Dying Man], in Brahimi and Benchikou [1991: 73]); two old women speaking (Vieilles femmes [Old Women], in Brahimi and Benchikou [1991: 102]); women at a cemetery (Le vendredi au cimetière [Friday at the Cemetery], in Brahimi and Benchikou [1991: 130]); and, perhaps, a repudiated mother and her two children (La femme répudiée [The Repudiated Woman], Brahimi and Benchikou [1991: 107]). Dinet’s Algerian models may have been prostitutes, and the younger ones, who posed nude for him, were most likely training to become erotic Ouled Naïl dansers in Bou-Saâda, in southern Algeria (Pouillon 1997: 84–90; Benjamin 2003a: 94, 100–101, 165–67). Any shards of cultural authenticity that may have existed in Dinet’s paintings have been redrawn and reassembled in a way that is far removed from the originals. Masmoudi also ignores the erotic dimensions of the images, which become more salient when we compare them with other, overtly erotic, paintings by Dinet. What we are left with is kitschy French orientalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the cartoonist has anachronistically placed in the service of (then) consensual Algerian nationalism towards the close of the twentieth century. He thereby helps invent an artistic tradition for Algeria and its comics.
The shared references and materials of Masmoudi, Ferrandez and Sfar are therefore: (1) historical—a shared, conflictual past that simultaneously and alternately unites and divides; (2) cultural—a mutual heritage, with some areas of overlap, for example, the French language; and (3) artistic—most obviously, comics, but also key works and artists that cartoonists use as primary sources for their creations. The communities represented in, and constructed by or through, these works are both imagined and real (cf. Anderson 1991; Balibar, in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), multiple, and may partially overlap: they include ethnic and national communities, and reading communities. The cartoonists in question create invented tradition/s, in and around comics, which they attach to an appropriate and prestigious historical and artistic past (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1989; Beaty 2008)—especially that of orientalist painting. This involves actively retrieving and reconstituting a historical, cultural and artistic heritage, with the risks, costs and benefits of such activity. The affrontier is therefore a transnational, trans-media phenomenon in comics that involves the in/direct sharing of references, materials, and artistic model and practice. This is paradoxical because the artists are reconstructing perspectives on the past that overlap only partially and, in fact, sometimes confront each other (elles s’affrontent), at least virtually or implicitly: whereas Masmoudi and his co-authors provide an Algerian nationalist critique of French colonialism, the primary project of Ferrandez is to commemorate the Pied-Noir community in Algeria, while Sfar memorializes North African Jewish culture(s). The cartoonists studied here work to produce collective memory as cultural memory, based on “mediation, textualization and acts of communication” (Rigney 2005: 14) and on a scarcity of materials (16), not on a plenitude/loss model or a return of the repressed: there are a limited number of materials and models available from the past, a fact that has both productive and limiting effects on the reconstruction of cultural memory.

Connecting the lines from one colonial affrontier to another

The French colonial affrontier is most apparent and divisive with respect to Algeria, to a large extent because of the significant number of Pieds-Noirs and Algerians, and descendants of both groups, living in France. The participation of an entire generation of French men as conscripts in the Algerian War also contributes to the sensitivity of that part of colonial history, as does the fact that Algeria won its independence, thereby ending more than a century of French domination. The extreme violence and length of the war, the specific methods used in it, including torture and terrorism, and the
long wait for official French recognition of the war and its nature have also helped maintain the colonial affrontier with Algeria. However, the colonial affrontier also exists to a lesser extent with Vietnam. Border conflict along that part of the affrontier flared up in 1991, when French veterans formally accused university professor Georges Boudarel of crimes against humanity, for his actions in a Viet Minh prison camp that held French military captives. In the following chapter I analyze several comics that depict French Indochina and the Indochinese War. Comic books published from wartime to the present bear the trace of the affrontier in French Indochina. As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, there are several lines connecting the colonial affrontier from French Indochina to French Algeria: for example, a detective novel in prose about the Algerian War and Vichy France was apparently the model for a comic book about the Indochinese War. The authors of that book then produced a graphic novel about the Algerian War that recycled the same basic detective-story structure. This again supports the observation that memorial models are scarce and therefore are recycled in different contexts (Rigney 2005).