

Cinquante Cinq Millions de Français?:
French Propaganda During the Algerian Revolution

Amaya Escandon
Lafayette College

In the late 1950's to early 1960's, the visual landscape of Algerian communities would have included walls plastered with various posters and pamphlets in both French and Arabic urging them to "talk," or to enlist in the French Army, or to "say yes to France and Algeria," or to say "Yes to Peace." During the Algerian Revolution, a conflict of urban warfare, terrorism, torture, and no detectable enemy for the French to target, both sides recognized that the war would be won through political control of the population. One of the ways they fought for this control was through visual propaganda. In this paper, I analyze and compare pro-French and pro-independence propaganda produced by French organizations. I argue that over 100 years of justification of French colonial rule in Algeria resulted in both pro-French and pro-independence French people appealing to the civilizing mission and colonial ideas about Algerians in order to make their arguments.

In the late 1950's to early 1960's, the visual landscape of Algerian communities would have included walls plastered with various posters and pamphlets in both French and Arabic urging them to "talk," or to enlist in the French Army, or to "say yes to France and Algeria," or to say "Yes to Peace." These images would have depicted their fellow Algerians either as villainous combatants or good Francophile citizens. All of these images asked indigenous Algerians to do what was best for Algeria. As the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale fought to end French colonial presence in Algeria, the French, pro-French or pro-independence, needed to convince their audience that they knew what was best for Algeria. In a conflict of urban warfare, terrorism, torture, and no detectable enemy for the French to target, both sides recognized that the war would be won through political control of the population. One of the ways they fought for this control was through visual propaganda.

French propaganda during the Algerian Revolution actively challenged long-standing myths regarding the Frenchness of Algerians. In her book *Imperial Identities*, Patricia Lorcin studies the mechanics of marginalization and racism as a justification of imperialism by studying

the case of Algeria. She argues that from the early days of colonization, the French colonizers created a narrative about Muslim Algerians in which Muslims could never be truly French. The French saw Islam and Muslim society as incompatible with French society; this view created a level of hostility and suspicion towards indigenous Algerians throughout the colonial period.¹ But as France began to see that it was at risk of losing its colony, pro-French propaganda created an image of Algerians as French so as to convince both French and Algerian people that Algeria should remain under French rule.

I am examining propaganda created by French organizations during the Algerian Revolution, both pro-French and pro-independence. I am analyzing three general topics and themes as they appear in propaganda created by the French Army, the French Communist Party, and a handful of other French organizations. I am primarily concerned with analyzing and comparing pro-French and pro-independence propaganda produced by French organizations. I will analyze my sources thematically based on these categories: anti-Front de Libération Nationale, unity and defining France, and women and youth. French colonial policy often reveals the contradictions present in conceptions of French nationalism, republicanism, and universalism. These three categories of analysis reveal how it was difficult for the French, both pro-French and pro-independence, to convince both their Algerian and French audiences of a shared goal and shared values without appealing to colonial conceptions of Algerian race and culture. In analyzing visual propaganda of the Algerian Revolution, those contradictions in French values become visible in the imagery employed by both pro-French and pro-independence entities so long as those entities were French.

Current scholarship examines those contradictions in other contexts. Todd Shepard examines the Algerian identity in opposition to Frenchness in the context of the Revolution and argues that the Algerian Revolution required France to examine French identity and republican universalism.² I add to this discourse by examining pro-French and pro-independence propaganda together in order to understand how both pro-French and pro-independence entities conceptualized French and Algerian national identity in a similar framework. I also approach these questions differently than the current scholarship by focusing on visual propaganda, as current scholarship typically finds these debates in other forms or in literary propaganda. Nacéra Aggoun, for example, examines psychological propaganda in French Army pamphlets.³ Visual propaganda reaches a much larger audience than other forms of propaganda, so it can tell us a lot about public opinion and the ideas and values most important to those who produced it.

Unfortunately, this paper is lacking the Algerian/Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) perspective on this debate of French and Algerian nationalism. The FLN and Algerian

¹ Patricia M. Lorcin, "Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society" *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria*, New Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 53-55.

² Todd Shepard, "Muslim French Citizens from Algeria: A Short History," in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 19-54.

³ Nacéra Aggoun, "Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War- Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets," *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62, Experiences, Images, Testimonies*, ed. Martin S. Alexander and Martin Evans (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 193-199.

Communist Party did not have the same access to mass media and other resources as the French government, French Army, and French Communist Party, and therefore may not have produced propaganda on the same scale, if at all. It may also have to do with the clandestine nature of the FLN and the fact that operations were kept so secret so as to prevent the French from discovering who was involved. Any sort of production or site of production may have compromised the security of the FLN structure. It may also be a matter of preservation of sources, and FLN propaganda may not have been archived.

While I have been able to find sources diverse in themes and imagery, I am limited in some of the claims I can make about these sources due to a lack of information. For some posters, I do not have information about who produced them, which sometimes makes it difficult to determine if that poster is pro-French or pro-independence. In those cases, I compare the taglines or imagery to other posters in order to make an inference regarding the intention of the propaganda. Some of my sources are not dated, and therefore I cannot make definite claims about how the themes of those posters relate to the development of the Revolution. The themes of some posters may allow me to make educated guesses as to when they were produced; this is especially true of propaganda related to the 1962 referendum for Algerian independence. I would also like to highlight the heavier focus on anti-FLN propaganda. I have found it interesting to look at the way this category of propaganda aims to make appeals to indigenous Algerians while also painting another category of Algerians, that being the FLN, as a natural enemy.

Anti-Front de Libération Nationale

The Algerian Revolution began in November of 1954 and ended when the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) declared independence in July of 1962.⁴ The war left hundreds of thousands of Algerians and thousands of French dead.⁵ The FLN was the main nationalist organization which declared the intent of Algerian Liberation in 1954, marking the beginning of the Algerian Revolution. The French considered Algeria to be an integral part of the French state, largely due to the large settler population and generations of French who had been born there. It was inconceivable that France would lose Algeria, and thus there was a “fundamental sense of crisis in France.”⁶ Still, the French Army did not anticipate much difficulty in defeating a group of untrained guerilla fighters. They quickly learned otherwise.

Lacking the resources of a national army, the FLN used urban guerilla warfare to fight the French. Undercover FLN members carried concealed weapons and bombs into restricted French quarters in order to target French civilians.⁷ Much of French Army propaganda aimed at Algerians focused on discrediting the FLN in order to weaken their support base among Algerian civilians because the FLN recruited from Algerian civilians and was dependent upon their

⁴ "Algerian War," Oxford Reference, Accessed May 6, 2021.

⁵ Marian Aguiar, "Front de Libération Nationale," *Encyclopedia of Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Aguiar, "Front de Libération Nationale."

⁷ Ibid.

support. Significantly, propaganda of this theme is all pro-French. Early on in the war, the French Army was fairly confident in the fact that they had the upper hand when facing the FLN which did not have the same access to manpower or resources. Though none of these posters or pamphlets are dated, it is likely that the French Army produced them in or after 1958 as they came to realize the balance of power between themselves and the FLN was becoming more and more even.⁸ As the French Army realized that the FLN was succeeding through the support of common Algerians and untrained fighters, they aimed to convince the indigenous Algerian public that the FLN was a dangerous enterprise.



Figure 1. Pierre Vallaud, *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance, 1830-1962*, (Paris: Acropole, 2006), 209.

Corruption of the FLN was a central theme in much of French Army propaganda. In Figure 1, a propaganda poster by the French Army, two FLN soldiers are depicted stealing money from an Algerian man and sending it to a table where a French man, French woman, and Algerian man sit toasting with glasses of champagne. The poster reads in both French and Arabic: “The *fellagha* assassin steals your savings. Abroad, the rebellion leaders have fun with your money.” *Fellagha* is an Arabic word meaning “bandit;” it was used to describe Arab guerillas of the FLN and to symbolize the enemy in French army propaganda.⁹ This poster aims to discourage Algerians from providing financial support to the FLN by claiming that FLN leaders were scamming them and using the money for their own personal benefit. As the FLN was an underground guerrilla organization, they derived their resources and support from other indigenous Algerians. Aggoun discusses how this image of the *fellagha* Arab guerrilla fighter was used to symbolize the enemy and the FLN as a whole in anti-FLN propaganda.¹⁰ The

⁸ Aggoun, “Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War- Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets,” 196-197.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 196.

fellagha became a symbol in this type of propaganda signifying corruption and barbarity of the FLN as we will see in other figures.¹¹ Figure 1 demonstrates the barbarity of the *fellagha* as they threaten the common Algerian man into compliance and force him to do their dirty work; the *fellagha* do not touch the money, they only direct someone else. The message is that the FLN is coercive, manipulative, and exploitative of Algerians.



Figure 2. Vallaud, *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance, 1830-1962*, 131.

The French Army produced several propaganda posters featuring Algerian civilians with the goal of manufacturing a distrust of the FLN among Algeria's rural population as the FLN often relied on that population for support.¹² This category of propaganda painted the FLN as corrupt and ill-intentioned while portraying the French Army as trustworthy. In Figure 2, which reads in both French and Arabic, "The Jackals Eat Each Other," two FLN soldiers stand over the bodies of two Algerians while pointing guns at each other. Not only did the French Army aim to portray the FLN as corrupt, deceitful, and exploitative of other Algerians, they portrayed them as an internally divided organization in which members betrayed each other. The goal was to demonstrate to current or potential FLN members that being a part of that organization would essentially be a dangerous act of self-destruction. Joining or remaining a member of the FLN would get you killed by your own. Through this message, the French Army hoped to prevent more Algerians from joining the ranks of the FLN.

Again, we see the trope of the barbaric *fellagha* who senselessly kills. This trope of the untrustworthy Muslim Algerian was part of a larger history of French conceptions of Muslim Algerians in general. Patricia Lorcin argues that because the French saw Muslim society as incompatible with French society, they felt a level of suspicion and hostility towards indigenous Algerians throughout colonization. The French ultimately viewed the Muslim Algerian as licentious, deceitful, and indolent in opposition to traditional French values.¹³ As a result, pro-

¹¹ Aggoun, "Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War- Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lorcin, "Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society," 53-55.

French entities portrayed the FLN soldier as the embodiment of that incompatibility of Algerian and French society in pro-French propaganda. Through this representation, the French Army asked Algerians to reject that which represents Algerian society in favor of the preservation of French society in Algeria. These posters assume that the latter is preferable to their Algerian audience.

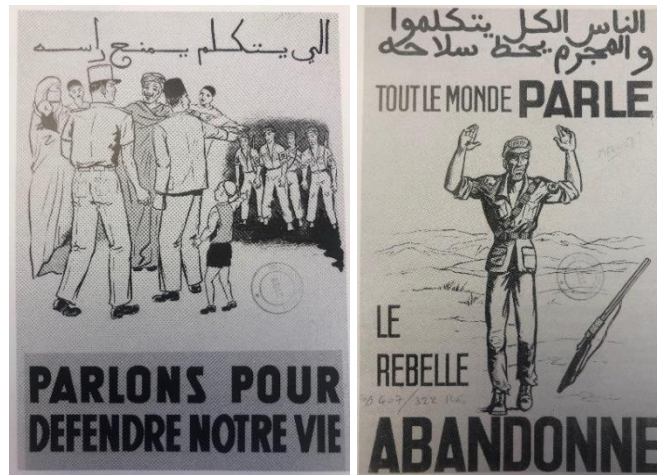


Figure 3A-B. Laurent Gervereau, Jean-Pierre Rioux, and Benjamin Stora, eds, *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*, (Nanterre: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, 1992) 93.

Creating distrust of the FLN among Algerians was only the first step in weakening the FLN's support base. Another category of French Army propaganda focused on fostering loyalty to and trust of the French Army among Algerians. The structure of the FLN was designed so that members would not be able to incriminate one another should they be caught by the French.¹⁴ As a result, the French Army sought informants from the local population in order to combat the FLN. The first poster in Figure 3A is a French Army poster which shows an illustrated scene of Algerian civilians, including a woman and child, turning in FLN soldiers to a French soldier. It is captioned in both Arabic and French "Talk to defend our life." Many of these types of posters are written in both Arabic and French in order to reach the target audience while asserting French superiority at the same time. While the French Army acknowledged that some Algerians did not speak or read French, it was expected that at least some did. Other posters by the French Army also urge Algerians to "Talk," or turn in FLN members as a sort of service to the French Army. One even displays an illustration of Algerian farmers chasing FLN soldiers, presumably seeking refuge at their farm, off their property with guns.

This category of French Army propaganda suggests a sense of the responsibility of the civilizing mission and a paternalism towards Algeria. The French Army asserts that they know what is best for the indigenous Algerians while also implying that their audience of indigenous

¹⁴ Martin S. Alexander, Martin Evans, and J.F.V. Keiger, "The 'War Without a Name', the French Army and the Algerians: Recovering Experiences, Images, and Testimonies," in *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62, Experiences, Images, Testimonies*, (New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 19-21.

Algerians also believe that the French know what is best for them. These posters also suggest that turning in FLN members or assisting the French Army was a way Algerians could earn or prove Frenchness. However, the contradictions of universalism and colonialism are present in these posters. By suggesting that there is a “Notre Vie” to defend, the propaganda asserts that the way of life for the French in Algeria and for indigenous Algerians is something shared. In creating these posters, the French army assumes that their audience will agree that it is in their best interest to remain under colonial rule. Unlike some other French propaganda, these posters do not suggest an embrace of a multicultural French Algeria; instead, they ask for loyalty to the French empire in exchange for protection.

I would also like to address one particular character in Figure 3A: the veiled Algerian woman. This was the only place where I found any women present in anti-FLN propaganda despite the fact that women played a central role in FLN guerilla tactics due to their ability to infiltrate French spaces without suspicion.¹⁵ They are never portrayed as the enemy in the way their male counterparts are. The woman in Figure 3A is veiled and holding an infant indicating how the French perceived her role in Algerian society: as submissive and as a mother. Her presence here and the absence of women elsewhere in anti-FLN propaganda demonstrates how the French Army failed to understand their enemy, Algerian society, and its audience. The French conceptualized war as masculine, therefore they conceptualized their enemy, the FLN, strictly as men in these images. I will show later on in this paper how the French did use women in propaganda for different reasons and why men are absent from those images.



Muslims my brothers. Yes it's me, Mokrani Mouloud "Sota" speaking to you: I decided to come to the French side. You see, the French didn't hurt me. Do as I have! They won't hurt you either. Leave the mountains or you will suffer for nothing. Come with confidence. Report to the French posts with your weapons and show this card. You will be treated well and you will finally be able to resume a calm and peaceful life.

Figure 4. Gervereau, Rioux, and Stora, *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*, 93.

¹⁵ Aguiar, "Front de Libération Nationale."

Some pro-French, and specifically anti-FLN propaganda, created an image of loyal, trustworthy, and patriotic Algerian combatants. In an attempt to weaken the FLN and strengthen their own ranks, the French Army produced propaganda encouraging Algerian men to enlist in the French Army and reject the pull of the FLN. Figure 4 is a leaflet produced by the French Army which targeted FLN fighters hiding out in the Aurès Mountains, though it is unclear how this was distributed or displayed. The rugged terrain of the Aurès made it a refuge for the guerrilla fighters of the FLN.¹⁶ This leaflet was part of an effort to convince FLN fighters hiding in the mountains not only to defect from the FLN but also to enlist in the French Army. However, it is unlikely that FLN defectors would have been greeted so kindly as this leaflet suggests; the French Army's primary strategy against the FLN was to capture and torture combatants in order to obtain information about the clandestine organization and its leadership.¹⁷ Propaganda promoting enlistment with the French Army was likely an attempt to collect information more so than to add to their own ranks.

Although it is difficult to know if any of the information on this leaflet is true, it is nonetheless important to examine the construction of this piece of propaganda. The portrait of "Mokrani" shows a young Algerian in a beret and scarf, showing that he has adopted French dress, and this clothing may have been provided to him by the French Army. His portrait looks professional, and he looks relaxed. This leaflet invites FLN fighters to become French as "Mokrani" has; all they have to do is give up the cause of independence. Their own conception of an independent Algerian identity separate from the French is the only thing holding them back from full integration and legal and social equality in French Algerian society.

It is also important to note the way this leaflet chooses to address its audience: *Musulmans*, or Muslims. Throughout French colonial rule of Algeria and the Algerian Revolution, the French saw Islam as a significant identity marker of Algerians.¹⁸ As is evident in other categories of propaganda, race and ethnicity were meaningful markers in determining who was French in Algeria during the Revolution. Islam served as one of these markers which, for the French, defined Algerian identity and made it incompatible with French identity and ideals. Thus, this leaflet shows some of the contradictions present in how the French tried to convince Algerians to abandon ideas of independence. They invited Algerians to adopt and embrace Frenchness while still highlighting a feature of Algerian identity which they had long held to be incompatible with French identity.

¹⁶ Alexander, Evans, and Keiger, "The 'War Without a Name', the French Army and the Algerians: Recovering Experiences, Images, and Testimonies," 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁸ Lorcin, "Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society," 53-55.

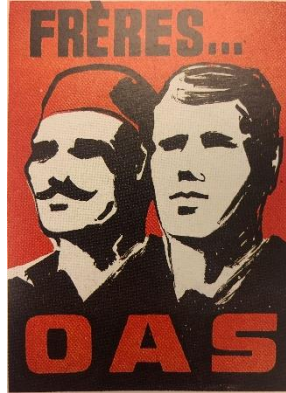


Figure 5. Gervereau, Rioux, and Stora, *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*, 181.

Towards the end of the Algerian Revolution, as independence appeared a likely outcome, right-wing French colonists formed the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), a paramilitary group which sought to kill suspected FLN supporters with the goal of preventing Algerian independence after the Evian Accords of 1960 granted Algeria political autonomy while preserving rights for French settlers.¹⁹ Figure 5, produced by the OAS, shows an Algerian and a French man side by side with the caption: “Brothers... OAS.” While both figures are colored white, the figure on the left wears a red fez and a mustache which identify him as Algerian. The clean-shaven man on the right wears no analogous markers of French identity, yet his lack of identity markers next to the identity markers of the Algerian imply that he is French. In this way, the artist has racialized the Algerian figure through these cultural markers even though both figures are of the same skin color.

While this poster is not overtly anti-FLN, it implies anti-FLN motivation given the ideology of the organization which produced it and the image overall. Like the French Army posters above, this poster aims to suggest that loyalty to the French is in the best interest of the Algerians. The use of the word “Brothers” invokes a sense of familial loyalty between these two figures despite their obvious cultural and racial differences. It also creates an appeal to the French ideal of *fraternité*. It implies a bond that cannot be broken, and it also challenges the image of the *fellagha* as a “bandit” or as someone untrustworthy. Here, he stands with a sense of dignity next to the French man. Despite the fact that the Algerian figure is orientalized in this image, he is placed at the same level of equality as/on the same footing as the French figure. He is not represented as barbaric like the Algerians in French Army propaganda, but he stands dignified next to his “brother.” They stand next to each other looking in the same direction as if they were both looking towards the same goals. Here the OAS is trying to convince Algerians that they should stand with the French and honor that brotherhood instead of supporting independence and the FLN.

¹⁹ Aguiar, “Front de Libération Nationale.”

These images show a belief among pro-French organizations that indigenous Algerians could be convinced that the French cause was also their own. They demonstrate either a hope or a belief that the Algerians had come to adopt the French's myth of the civilizing mission as true. As evident in posters centered on themes of unity and definitions of French identity, pro-French entities also found it necessary to convince French people in the metropole and Algeria of the importance of Algeria to the integrity of French national identity.

Unity: Defining France

Unlike anti-FLN propaganda, both pro-French and pro-independence entities produced images in this category. This category of propaganda demonstrates a desire to identify Algeria as French while at the same time highlighting and embracing a multiculturalism which was not acceptable before France encountered the Algerian conflict. Both pro-French and pro-independence entities demonstrate an appeal to French ideals of universalism and republicanism in their propaganda. As a result, some pro-independence propaganda produced by French entities suggest values of the civilizing mission despite their advocacy for independence.



Figure 6A-C. Gervereau, Rioux, and Stora, *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*, 35, 102, 287.

One way in which French propaganda portrayed French and Algerian unity was through geographic representations. Figure 6A depicts a Cross of Lorraine with the words “55 MILLIONS DE FRANÇAIS” and “FRANCE” overlaying a photo of a dense crowd composed of French and Algerians; a French flag flies in the top right-hand corner. During World War II, the Cross of Lorraine became the symbol of Free France and the Free French Forces led by Charles de Gaulle as an opposition symbol to the swastika. Here, the cross overlays outlines of France at the top of the poster and Algeria at the bottom, displaying the town names of Dunkerque and Tamanrasset. The utilization of the Cross of Lorraine as a symbol of unity during the Algerian Revolution was a deliberate choice to combat anti-colonial narratives

coming out of the opposition movement. As Todd Shepard argues, the Algerian Revolution required France to critically examine French identity and republican universalism.²⁰ During the Algerian Revolution, race and ethnicity were meaningful markers in determining who was French in Algeria. As the pro-independence movement was arguing that racial and religious differences allowed the French to deny Algerians full acceptance as French, pro-French propaganda utilized the Cross of Lorraine as a symbol of unity and acceptance of the multiculturalism of Algeria.

The basic concept of this poster, imagery representing France and Algeria seemingly linked by the Cross of Lorraine, was fairly common of French propaganda posters during the war. The “*55 millions de français*” refers to a combined population of France’s 45 million and Algeria’s 10 million in the 1950’s. The overlaid Cross of Lorraine visually acts as a connector between the two landmasses almost as if to show that the two are connected by the French ideals represented by the Cross of Lorraine. The Cross connecting the two points of Dunkerque and Tamanrasset suggests an image of one nation in which Dunkerque is the northernmost city in France and Tamanrasset the southernmost; all points between those two are French. As the maps and Cross overlay a crowd of Algerians and French, the message translates to the people as well; all people between those points are French.

Figure 6B, produced by the Union Pour Le Salut et Le Renouveau de L’Algérie Française, or the Union for the Salvation of French Algeria, in 1957, also depicts an aerial map of France and Algeria. It depicts the metropole and the colony both splintering and breaking as a grenade explodes over Algeria. In the Mediterranean, between the two landmasses, the poster reads “No More French Algeria, No More France.” Produced only a year into the Revolution, this poster reflects the anxieties of the proponents of a French Algeria. It highlights the unique relationship which the French perceived to exist between Algeria and French in that the French conceptualized Algeria as a part of the metropole while other colonies were not given the same treatment in the French consciousness.²¹

This poster takes French colonial rule in Algeria for granted. Though several generations of French people had been born in Algeria and even identified as Algerian rather than French, Algeria was not always French. These *pieds noirs* did not need convincing of supporting French rule in Algeria, historian Lauren Taylor argues that the waning interest of the people in the metropole regarding the events in the colonies required France to revise the public’s understanding of colonialism’s purpose.²² The Union aims to show French people in the metropole that the fate of Algeria should matter to them because they should consider Algeria to be a part of France as much as the metropole just as the Algerian born French settlers did.

²⁰ Shepard, “Muslim French Citizens from Algeria: A Short History,” 45.

²¹ Philip Dine, “*A la recherche du soldat perdu*: Myth, Metaphor and Memory in the French Cinema of the Algerian War,” in *France at war in the twentieth century: propaganda, myth, and metaphor*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 142-144.

²² Lauren Taylor, “On Posters and Postures: Colonial Enlistment Posters and the Nationalist Imagination in France,” in *Visualizing Empire: Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2021) 151.

Figure 6C utilizes many of the same themes and symbols as 6A and 6B, except it uses buildings to represent France and Algeria. This pro-French propaganda poster reads “One Heart, One Flag / 53 million French.” The Cross of Lorraine takes the center of the poster, similarly acting as that north-south connector as it does in Figure 6A. The Eiffel Tower sits above a mosque, representing the geographic positioning of France and Algeria. Different trees stand next to each structure to indicate the difference in landscape, yet the two structures seem to occupy the same space because of the Cross connecting them. The French flag flown atop the Eiffel Tower sits above everything else in the image, asserting the idea that the metropole and Algeria are both under the French flag.

The representation of France as the Eiffel Tower and Algeria as a mosque demonstrates French attitudes about French superiority and French and Algerian culture. When the Eiffel Tower was built, it was first celebrated at the World’s Fair as an example of France’s position as a modern nation. The French celebrated the Tower as a feat of French engineering and industry; it was to serve as an example of France’s greatness. Coupled with the representation of Algeria as a mosque, the Eiffel Tower in this poster represents French superiority and modernity. In this context, the Eiffel Tower represents a secular, scientific, and modern France while the mosque represents France’s view of Algeria as a backwards, religious society.²³ In this attempt to claim that France has “one heart, one soul,” this poster still highlights French colonial attitudes towards Algeria.



Figure 7. Gervereau, Rioux, and Stora, *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*, 180.

Other types of propaganda in this category rely on images of people combined with traditional symbols of French nationalism. Figure 7 is a poster created by French graphic designer Pierre Paul Darrigo for the 1962 referendum concerning the independence of Algeria. The poster advocates for an independent Algeria, displaying the words “Yes to Peace.” As the referendum was held in Algeria, Darrigo’s target audience appears to be *pieds noirs* living in Algeria given the imagery he employs. The poster portrays the profile of two children facing

²³ Lorcin, “Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society,” 53-55.

towards the right with a stalk of wheat and flowers in the tri colors of France in the bottom right corner. This image invokes themes of prosperity, growth, and the future. The image of these children looking towards the right gives the impression that they are looking forward, towards the future. The stalk of wheat indicates prosperity and growth. As the wheat sits among the tri-colored flowers, it indicates that peace in Algeria will bring prosperity and growth to France.

One of the most interesting features of that poster is the uniformity of the two figures; color is the only distinguishing feature between them. The difference in color is the only feature which suggests that one figure is French and the other is Algerian. The facial features of both figures are more stereotypically French than North African. Skin color serving as the only racializing feature of these figures suggests that Darigo aimed to convey that France and Algeria were nearly one and the same. Depictions of Algerians by the French during colonization typically highlighted racial and cultural differences of Algerian society. A major factor in determining the way the French conceptualized Algerians was orientalism. Western conceptions of Islam, the “Orient,” and modernity all worked to create an image of the Algerian as the other.²⁴

A common way for French artists to convey the racial and cultural differences of Algerians was through their clothing. The French portrayed Algerian women as covered and veiled and men wearing a fez or other headcovering and mustache as in Figure 5. These articles of clothing serve not just to highlight cultural differences, but even more importantly, religious differences. Algerian culture was incompatible with French society more so because of France's secularism than its Christian culture. The French saw Islam as deeply engrained into Algerian society whereas the French prided themselves on their secular society. Secularism was also associated with modernity; therefore, Islam was associated with a lack of progress and demonstrated a need for French presence and the civilizing mission. Darigo eliminated that opportunity for racializing in his poster as neither figure wears clothes; their chest and shoulders display what appears to be like a brick pattern.

By minimizing the differences between representations of each nation, and by making both “French,” Darigo asks the audience to disregard, or perhaps just does not aim to draw attention to, racial and cultural stereotypes commonly assigned to Algerians. While Darigo does not call upon stereotypes which the French used to alienate Algerians from Frenchness, his choice to give European features to the Algerian figure asserts an idea about the potential Frenchness of Algeria and Algerians. In this way, much of French pro-independence propaganda still, consciously or not, utilized colonial ideas in advocating for independence. The white, French child also stands in front of the Algerian child, as if shielding them. Whether or not this was a conscious choice by Darigo, it conveys a sense of protection; France is protecting Algeria by granting independence.

This poster seeks to appeal to ideas of unity and patriotism while still advocating for an independent Algeria. At first glance those ideas may seem contradictory, but the Algerian nationalist movement often relied upon these types of appeals to French values in order to

²⁴ Lorecin, “Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society,” 53-55.

convince their opponents of their cause. Many Algerian nationalists aimed to show that colonialism was at odds with French universalism and republicanism in order to convince the French that Algerian independence was both an acceptable and respectable political stance in France. By not including any indication of cultural differences, Darigo may aim to convey that those cultural differences are not so relevant in that the Algerians have become similar enough to the French that the civilizing mission has been achieved. The civilizing mission was meant to end at a point, and this is what many pro-independence entities believed the debate to be: Were the Algerians still in need of the civilizing mission or not? Was it too early to end French presence or had the Algerians earned their independence through cultural assimilation?²⁵

The propaganda in this category shows that both the pro-French and pro-independence entities in France were able to make appeals to unity in order to make their arguments. Through their words, they aim to suggest that France and Algeria are one entity, yet through their imagery they often highlight, either consciously or unconsciously, those characteristics which had made Algerian society incompatible with French society.

Youth and Women for Unity

Though this type of propaganda seeks to achieve many of the same goals as the propaganda I analyzed in the previous section, this category is unique in that it is the only category in which women and children appear as the central subjects in the images. Men are absent with the exception of Charles de Gaulle in Figure 9. As I addressed earlier, I only encountered one depiction of a woman in the anti-FLN propaganda, in Figure 3A. The absence of women in anti-FLN propaganda coupled with their presence in more unity focused propaganda demonstrates French misconceptions about Muslim Algerian women and their role in Algerian society. French-made propaganda actually personified peace as women despite the role Algerian women were playing in the fight for independence.²⁶ The French also saw women as producers of children, and thus producers of new French citizens. Thus, women and children come to represent the future of France and French Algeria. Men, however, represent war, as I discussed previously, and therefore they are absent from these representations of peace, the future, and unity.

²⁵ Todd Shepard, "Introduction," in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian war and the Remaking of France*, (Cornell University Press, 2006), 6.

²⁶ Aggoun, "Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War-Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets," 196-197.



Figure 8. Vallaud, *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance, 1830-1962*, 252.

In 1958, as the Revolution began to turn in favor of the FLN, French Army propaganda began to turn to an image of a modernized, progressive France. The vision for the future was associated with the value of youth, and thus youth became the subjects of propaganda.²⁷ Figure 8, captioned “For our children/ Peace in Algeria,” shows a candid photo of two smiling children: a dark skinned Algerian girl in Western clothing and a white, blond French boy with his arm around her. Though this image is not dated, it was likely produced around the time of the 1962 referendum for Algerian independence. It is also unclear who produced this image; while it is not explicitly stated to be pro-independence, posters advocating for “peace” rather than, say, a “New Algeria” or “France and Algeria,” tend to be pro-independence. The French boy’s arm around the Algerian girl shows a protective and almost paternalistic relationship of France and Algeria. The civilizing mission had an aspect of paternalism to it in which Western powers/France believed they were responsible for almost “raising” their colonies by bringing progress to them and overseeing their growth. Aside from making an easy appeal to emotion, this image invokes a sense of *fraternité* or *amitié* between the two children despite their differences.



Figure 9. Vallaud, *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance, 1830-1962*, 220.

²⁷ Aggoun, “Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War-Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets.”

In September of 1959, French President Charles de Gaulle announced his support for Algerian “self-determination” and opened up negotiations with the FLN.²⁸ At this point, pro-French entities were confronted with the real possibility of losing Algeria through a vote for self-determination. Figure 9, produced in December of 1960, shows General de Gaulle shaking hands with two young boys, one French and one Algerian, French women, and veiled Algerian women. The large text reads: “Yes to France and Algeria.” The bottom right-hand corner reads: “Their future is in union and in peace. Only General de Gaulle can reconcile them and unite them in the new Algeria.”

The cropped French flag across the top of the image evokes this idea of the people in the photo as being unified under the French flag, literally in this image and figuratively in the sense that they are all citizens of France. The target audience appears to be both French *pieds noirs* and Algerians given the mixed demographic of the image. The women and children all wear red, white, blue, or some combination of the three. Unified under the French flag, these women and children celebrate and welcome French rule in Algeria. The prevailing theme of this image is that of the civilizing mission, or this idea that the French are saviors of the Algerians. De Gaulle, in effect, is the representation of France in this image, and the Algerian women and children enthusiastically welcome him and appear eager to express their gratitude.

Here, the trope of clothing used to indicate racial and cultural differences between Algerians and French coupled with the idea of children as beacons of progress and modernity. All the Algerian women in this photograph wear uniform, and white, full body coverings with only their faces and hands exposed. The two white French women, the French child, and the Algerian children all wear Western or modern clothing. Just like in Figure 5, clothing was an effective means for creators of French propaganda to highlight the religious identity of Algerian subjects. As Lorcin highlights, the French often used the status of women under Islam as a justification for colonialism.²⁹ Pro-French entities proclaimed that Algerian women wanted emancipation and integration into French society.³⁰ They viewed polygamy and veiling as backwards and incompatible with Frenchness; they launched several political initiatives to discourage veiling.³¹ This is why it is important that the Algerian women in this photo appear grateful. The photograph showing veiled women eager to greet de Gaulle sends a message that Muslim Algerian women are eager to accept French rule and looking to be saved from what the French perceive to be the oppression from their religion and culture.

It is also important that the Algerian children wear “modern” Western clothing like the French child. While the adult Algerian women all wear Algerian clothing, the Algerian children are dressed in the same fashion as the French child and French women. If the Algerian children are representative of the future of Algeria, then the message here is that their future is a modern

²⁸ Todd Shepard, “Inventing Decolonization,” in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian war and the Remaking of France*, (Cornell University Press, 2006), 75.

²⁹ Lorcin, “Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society,” 64-67.

³⁰ Aggoun, “Psychological Propaganda during the Algerian War- Based on a Study of French Army Pamphlets,” 197.

³¹ Ibid.

one as represented by their modern style of dress. Even though the Algerian women are still stuck in the past as signified by their clothing, there is hope for the future of the Algerian children and therefore Algeria. It would be irresponsible for France to abandon Algeria at that point without seeing it through that those children reach their full potential as modern citizens.



Figure 10. Vallaud, *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance*, 1830-1962, 132.

Figure 10 is an example of peace represented as women, both French and Algerian. This is a poster produced by the French Communist Party in 1962 following the referendum for independence. It reads: “12 million French Voted on January 2 for Peace in Algeria/ Their Will Must be Respected.” A white hand, presumably a man’s hand given the suit and shirt sleeve on the arm, drops the ballot which reads “La Paix en Algérie” into the ballot box. The ballot box displays an image of Marianne with an Algerian woman. Marianne shakes the Algerian woman’s hand while placing her other hand on the other woman’s shoulder as if to comfort and reassure her. The poster sports the French tri-colors through the red background, the red cap of the Marianne, the white dress of the Marianne, the blue dress of the Algerian woman, and the blue background of the ballot box. The relationship between the Marianne and the Algerian woman is emblematic of the colonial relationship between France and Algeria. The Marianne appears to be assuring the Algerian woman that she will see to it that her will would be respected. Therefore it becomes France’s responsibility to see that Algeria’s fate is secure. The women also represent French attitudes about French women as opposed to Algerian women. The Marianne is less covered in her sleeveless dress and hat than the Algerian woman in her robe and veil showing that both France and French women were freer than Algeria and Algerian women. Even though the Marianne is regarding the Algerian woman with respect, she is still placed above her because she is portrayed as more liberated through her clothing. These were either subconscious choices, or the French Communist Party knew its audience would be responsive to appeals to colonial ideas.

Women and children made useful subjects for unity focused propaganda because they invoked the idea of future, growth, and peace. At the same time, Algerian women were used as

subjects for the French to make claims about the nature of Algerian and Muslim society. Despite Algerian women's active role in the fight for independence, the French used them as symbols of peace, portrayed them primarily as mothers, and believed them to be in need of saving.

Conclusion

The Algerian Revolution shook French society and challenged the superiority of the French empire. Algeria is larger than the metropole itself, and the French considered it to be just as much a part of France. For 130 years, the French exploited Algeria's resources and Algerian labor, all while insisting that Algeria was France, but Algerians were not French. After over a century of insisting that Algerians were not fit for full integration in French society, pro-French entities now had to convince the public that Algeria was an integral part of France. Pro-independence entities faced the challenge of convincing their audience that Algeria was deserving of independence. Over 100 years of justification of French colonial rule in Algeria resulted in both pro-French and pro-independence French people appealing to the civilizing mission and colonial ideas about Algerians in order to make their arguments.

On March 18, 1962, the FLN signed a peace agreement with France signaling a new, independent Algeria, an end to the seven-year Revolution, and an end to 130 years of French colonial rule there. To this day, the memory of French Algeria and the Algerian Revolution impacts French politics and the lives of North African immigrants in France. The debate surrounding Islam and French nationalism continues to intensify as French legislators create Islamophobic laws in the name of secularism.³² The descendants of colonial subjects fight for their rights in French society in the face of these laws and through the *sans papier* movement. These debates are as old as French colonial rule in North Africa.

In this paper, I was not able to address the perspective of Algerians in this debate to the extent that I would have liked to. Today, it is much easier to access the voices of the victims of the French colonial legacy, and therefore easier to see what their perspectives are on their place and identity in French society. While it appears it may be difficult to find visual representations of the Algerian/FLN perspective on this debate of French and Algerian national identity, it would be interesting to find their perspective through other means. Finding their voice on the matter and putting it in conversation with the French would provide a richer understanding of this debate and the impact it had on the Algerian public.

³² Haadiya Ahmed, "French Secularism: A Veil for Islamophobia," *Foreign Affairs Review: A Johns Hopkins International Studies Publication* (January 12, 2021), <https://jhufar.com/2021/01/12/french-secularism-a-veil-for-islamophobia/>.

Bibliography

- Aguiar, Marian. "Front de Libération Nationale." In *Encyclopedia of Africa*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-9780195337709-e-1567>.
- Ahmed, Haadiya. "French Secularism: A Veil for Islamophobia." *Foreign Affairs Review: A Johns Hopkins International Studies Publication*, January 12, 2021.
<https://jhufar.com/2021/01/12/french-secularism-a-veil-for-islamophobia/>.
- Alexander, Martin S., Martin Evans, J.F.V. Keiger, ed. *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62, Experiences, Images, Testimonies*. New York City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Dine, Philip. "A la recherche du soldat perdu: Myth, Metaphor and Memory in the French Cinema of the Algerian War." In *France at war in the twentieth century: propaganda, myth, and metaphor*, 142-158. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.
- Gervereau, Laurent, Jean-Pierre Rioux, and Benjamin Stora, eds. *La France en guerre d'Algérie: Novembre 1954-Juillet 1962*. Nanterre: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, 1992.
- Lorcin, Patricia M. "Security and reconnaissance part 2: Islam and society." In *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria*, New Edition. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
- Shepard, Todd. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Taylor, Lauren. "On Posters and Postures: Colonial Enlistment Posters and the Nationalist Imagination in France." In *Visualizing Empire: Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation*, 136-154. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2021.
- Vallaud, Pierre. *La guerre d'Algérie: de la conquête à l'indépendance, 1830-1962*. Paris: Acropole, 2006.