



John Ruedy. *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. xiv + 327 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-20746-3; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21782-0.

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Algeria and the Ambiguities of Value Judgments in History

A collateral result of the post-September 11, American-driven war on terrorism and military engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq has been a growing interest among Americans and others in the history of French involvement in North Africa, particularly the Algerian War of Independence. Alistair Horne's 1977 study of this war, *A Savage War of Peace*, with a revised preface by the author evoking Afghanistan and Iraq, has just recently been reprinted (2006). Gillo Pontecorvo's 1965 film, *The Battle of Algiers* has been made widely available on DVD. Both are required reading and viewing for U.S. military and civilian officials involved with Afghanistan and Iraq.

The publication of the present work, the second edition of *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (originally published in 1992) appears to be directed at a similar readership (despite the author's more modest claims); but it also responds specifically to a growing concern about the post-1992 Islamist insurgency in Algeria. For certain observers, this insurrection appeared to be, at the same time, part of a worldwide Islamic war against the West and a continuation of the War of Independence that the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) had fought against the French Army between 1954 and 1962 to win Algerian independence.

Thus John Ruedy has made a serious effort to update his book. He has revised chapter 8, "The Bendjedid Years-Readjustment and Crisis," to account for the social and economic crisis, the failed liberal reforms of the 1979-92 period, and the assumption of power by the military-dominated Haut Comite de Securite, following the forced resignation of President Chadli Bendjedid on January 11, 1992. Ruedy has added a ninth chapter, "Insurgency and the Pursuit of Democracy," which chronicles the responses of a succession of military-dominated governments to the

Islamist threat and describes the major political, social, and economic developments in Algeria through the April 2004 re-election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as president of the Algerian Republic. Ruedy has also revised the bibliographical essay and the bibliography which conclude the book. Like the first edition, the second continues to have particular significance for Anglophone readers in a field that is still dominated by French-language literature.

Currently an emeritus professor at Georgetown University in Washington D. C., Ruedy established his reputation as one of the few American specialists on Algerian history with the publication of his doctoral dissertation, *Land Policy in Colonial Algeria: The Origins of the Rural Public Domain* at the University of California, Los Angeles (1967). One suspects that it was his scholarly encounter with the dark underside of French land policy in Algeria (in fact, the organized theft of Algerian lands for the benefit of the European *colons* or settlers) that led him to adopt the very negative view of the whole French project in Algeria—"five generations of colonial exploitation" (p. xi), as he labels it—that permeates the first seven chapters of his book.

Ruedy's aim, as he explained in the preface to the first edition, was to write "a work of historical synthesis" to serve as "an introductory history of modern Algeria suited to serve the needs of the general reader and useful in university classrooms" (p. xi). Since what interests Ruedy is the history of the contemporary Algerian nation, he devotes all but two chapters of his study to the post-1830 period, tacitly recognizing that it was the French-Muslim dialectic that gave the principal impetus to the development of Algerian nationalism that came progressively into existence "in a sociological sense" between 1871 and 1920 (p. 4).

Like Henri Pirenne in his search for the origins

of the Belgian nation, Ruedy, in his introductory chapter, digs deeply into the North African past, struggling to identify the first germination of an Algerian nation, even though the name itself—Algerie, coined by the French *philosophe*, Bernard le Bouyer de Fontenelle in the early eighteenth century—did not become official until made so by French Royal Ordinance of October 14, 1839.[1] In rapid succession, Ruedy evokes the Berber kingdoms of classical antiquity, the Masaesytes, the Massydes, and Numidia that rose and fell on future Algerian territory. Consistent with his negative view of French rule in Algeria, Ruedy has almost nothing positive to say about the five centuries of rule by the Latin predecessors of the French, despite the impressive Roman archaeological remains that dot the Algerian countryside. Roman Numidia, he maintains, was a land of vast *latifundia* owned by Roman and Romanized Berbers, worked by exploited Berber *coloni*, that exported grain to Europe just as French Algeria would export wine. Ruedy suggests that the successful efforts of St. Augustine of Hippo to suppress the so-called Donatist heresy, one that was very popular among Berber Christians, led to the de-Christianization of the latter and prepared the way for the nearly total Berber adoption of Islam, despite fierce Berber resistance to the Arab conquest itself. The final pages of the introductory chapter concentrate on the post-A.D. 740 succession of Islamized Berber dynasties that flourished on Algerian soil: the Rustamids, the Zirids, the Hammadids, and the 'Abd el Wadids.

This same chapter also includes a brief presentation of the author's view of nation-building as a "contrast between segmentation and integration" (p. 2), the progression from one to the other being particularly distorted and delayed in the cases of settler colonies. (For Ruedy, it is an indisputable fact that Algeria was a French settler colony of the most exploitive type even though the French authorities never designated Algeria as a colony in the formal legal sense nor administered it as such, declaring it, instead, an integral part of France by decree of March 4, 1848.) Chapter 2, "Ottoman Algeria and Its Legacy," describes the rise and fall of the Regency of Algiers (1519-1830). Ruedy's detailed presentation of the political, social, and economic history of this entity makes a strong argument that, decentralized though it was, the Regency, by 1830, had evolved into a true state. Ruedy speculates that it might have become a nation had its development not been cut short by the French "invasion."

The third chapter, "Invasion, Resistance, and Colonization, 1830-1871," discusses the French conquest through 1871, stressing the resistance of such new men as Emir Abd el-Kader whose state, for a while, dominated the western Algerian Tell, and the equally tenacious resistance of such traditional rulers as Ahmed Bey of Constantine. European settlement that began almost as an afterthought following the capitulation of Algiers developed, early on, a dynamic of its own. The chapter ends with an account of the French suppression of the Kabyle rebellion of 1871, an event that is conventionally taken as marking the end of primary resistance in the Algerian Tell and the northern Sahara, the end of French military rule (the so-called *regime du sabre*) in this part of Algeria, and the establishment of settler-dominated civilian rule that would remain unshaken until after 1954.

Like many historians who have described the French military occupation of Algiers of July 1830, Ruedy emphasizes the contrast, on one hand, between the terms of the Treaty of Capitulation of July 5 (by which the French Commandant and War Minister, Count Louis de Bourmont, guaranteed the inviolability of the property, the businesses, and the industries of the local population, as well as the free exercise of Islam and the protection of women), and, on the other hand, the generalized looting and raping that actually occurred including the theft of more than half of the Regency's treasury. Unfortunately, Ruedy fails to explain how and why Bourmont lost control of his army, making it possible for these outrages to occur. He does, however, draw a parallel between these events occurring at the start of French rule and the spontaneous seizure of French properties by Algerians in July 1962 as French rule ended.

Chapter 4, titled "The Colonial System and the Transformation of Algerian Society, 1871-1919," chronicles and describes the different ways in which the almost total ascendancy of the *colons* in French Algeria, and the power base they developed for themselves in the parliamentary system of the French Third Republic, completed the de-structuring and pauperization of native Algerian society. While the result for the native Muslim population in general is what would lead the liberal French Governor-General, Jules Martin Cambon (serving between 1891 and 1897) to refer to Algerian society as "a kind of human dust," a small elite of Algerians did learn to co-exist successfully with the French regime.[2] Some of its members who formed the Young Algerian movement sought equality with the *colons* and greater

assimilation of Algeria and its whole population to France. Others formed the so-called “Vieux turban” neo-traditionalist group. The era also witnessed the beginning of the migration of Algerian workers to France and attempts at French reforms that were timid at best and almost completely stymied by the *colon* parliamentary delegation in Paris. Chapter 5, on “The Algerian Nationalist Movement 1919-1954” that follows, details a very significant French failure, the inability of the Popular Front government of 1936 to adopt and impose the Blum-Violette reform proposals.

Most of chapters 3, 4, and 5 parallel and borrow from the author’s doctoral dissertation as well as from the works of such French scholars of the liberal school of Algerian historiography as Charles-Andre Julien and Charles-Robert Ageron and a student of the latter, Benjamin Stora. The main task of chapter 5 is to pick up and follow the threads of the nascent Algerian nationalist movement: the post-World War I Young Algerians (particularly the period of ascendancy [1919-23] of Emir Khaled, Abd el-Kader’s grandson) in Algerian *evolue* politics and the political itineraries of such second generation *evolue* leaders as Mohamed Salah Bendjelloul and Ferhat Abbas. Ruedy also explores the rise of the Islamic *salafiyya* reform movement leading to the founding of the Association des ’ulama musulmans algeriens (AUMA) in 1931, the creation of the Etoile nord-africaine (ENA) in 1926, the Parti du peuple algerien (PPA) in 1937, and the Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertes democratiques (MTLD) in 1946, leading to a political impasse as a result of continued settler intransigence that only revolutionary warfare could break.

Regretfully Ruedy, while giving Messali Hadj, the principal founder of the ENA, the PPA, and the MTLD, his due as a founding figure in Algerian nationalism, says little about how he might have been influenced by his French wife, a member of the French Communist Party, who designed a flag for the PPA that became the flag of the independent Algerian nation. At the same time, however, Ruedy is careful to attribute the *kalima sariha* (sincere declaration): “Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language; Algeria is my fatherland,” which eventually became the official motto of independent Algeria, to the *salafi* intellectual, Ahmed Tewfik El-Madani (pp. 134-135), not, as is more usual, to the first president of the AUMA, Abdel Hamid Ben Badis.

Chapter 6, “The War of Independence, 1954-1962,” gives a fairly standard account of the war (that the French authorities never officially declared as such nor recognized as having been a war until 1999). Ruedy explains how the inability of the French Fourth Republic to bring this war to a timely end led to the accession of General Charles de Gaulle to the presidency of France in 1958, and how the latter came to favor a negotiated peace leading to Algerian independence in July 1962.

The final three chapters chronicle the post-independence years: first the presidencies of Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-65) and Houari Boumediene (1965-78); then the mounting socioeconomic problems characterizing the Chadli Bendjedid presidencies (1979-1992); and finally the responses of the Algerian government to the Islamist challenge leading to armed conflict in 1992; the brief interim presidency of Mohamed Boudiaf, assassinated on June 29, 1992; the Lamine Zeroual presidency 1994-99; the presidencies of Abdelaziz Bouteflika beginning in 1999; and the passage and application of the Law of Civil Concord of 2000 that the new president strongly promoted. The backdrop to this struggle was a national economy that had been failing since the mid-1980s, growing unemployment, and turmoil between Berbers, particularly the Kabyles, and Arabs, as well as between the francophone elite and the Arabized masses, all of it, however, accompanied by growing political pluralism.

Two aspects of this book are troubling. First, the book is not pedagogically friendly. Although intended to be “useful in university classrooms” (p. xi), Ruedy’s approach makes it useful only for persons having a great deal of prior knowledge of North African and Algerian history as well as current events. The final three chapters read like briefing papers prepared for diplomats, military assistance personnel, or businessmen anticipating a posting to Algeria or seeking analogies with other countries. The names of the *dramatis personae* come and go with little in the way of an introduction for most of them. For instance, Louisa Hanoune, an Algerian leftist, feminist politician, who was a presidential candidate in Algeria in 2004, makes a sudden appearance in a brief description of the Sant’Egidio peace initiative of 1995 in which she participated (p. 266). Ruedy gives the reader no information about her background other than mentioning the problems which post-1962 Algerian women have had to face when trying to participate as the equals of men in civil society. Her name

does not appear in the index.

This book, moreover, lacks a glossary of terms and names. The transliterations of Arabic terms and names are not consistent. The Muslim Holy Book appears as both the “Koran” and as the “Qur’an.” The Algiers citadel and native quarter are rendered both as “Qasba” and “Casbah.” The name of the principal nineteenth-century Algerian emir and state-builder appears as “Abd al Qadir” even though the French transliteration, “Abd el-Kader,” more nearly approximates the way Algerians pronounce his name. Ruedy includes seven sketch maps that he lists separately in the table of contents; however, he fails to provide a separate listing for the twenty-three tables dealing with such matters as land use, population, income distribution, and the like, drawn mostly from official sources and scattered throughout chapters 4-9. Unfortunately, Ruedy has not provided any illustrations.

The second troubling aspect of this book is the author’s overly teleological commitment to Algerian nationhood and independence as an Arab-Islamic state. The period of French rule, for him, was illegitimate and destined to end violently. Ruedy’s attitude reflects the view that, in history, the winner is always right and that the loser is always wrong, and that what happened was foreordained and for the best. Thus, per force, he treats in a favorable light the cynicism and brutality of the FLN that succeeded in achieving national independence. He condemns the brutality of the French countermeasures—that nevertheless had their moments of success—because, in the long run, they did not (and could not, he implies) prevent French withdrawal from Algeria.

In attempting, for instance, to justify the FLN-initiated Philippeville massacres of August 20, 1955, a recognized turning point in the Independence War, Ruedy explains that the decision taken by the two leaders of Wilaya II, Youssef Zighout and Lakhdar Ben Tobbal, “to carry the war to civilians was the result of a cold strategic calculation that heightening the level of inter-communal violence would accelerate the process of mass mobilization, upon which the turning of an insurrection into a revolution depended” (p. 162). Many French women, children, and old people were indiscriminately killed and their bodies mutilated, especially in the nearby mining compound of El-Halia.

What is very poignant about the El Halia affair, as described by authors as diverse as Alistair Horne

and Paul Aussaresses, was the deliberately provoked violation of trust and good faith between Muslims and *pieds noirs* (colloquial term designating the European settlers of Algeria) that it entailed in a setting in which the two groups had gotten along well. As Aussaresses, many years later, described the situation at El Halia prior to the massacre, “two thousand Muslims cohabited with one-hundred-and-thirty Europeans. Both groups were remunerated at the same rate and received the same fringe benefits. This situation was exactly what the FLN could not tolerate.”[3] Because of the occurrences of such incidents, Aussaresses and other French officers who struggled to prevent them from occurring opted to use torture against suspected terrorists, hoping to prevent brutality by recourse to brutality. Ruedy never condemns the actions of this sort taken by the FLN with the same fervor with which he condemns the French countermeasures. But then, the FLN “won,” and the French “lost.”

It is notable that only in a footnote in the final chapter, that details the Islamist insurgency of the 1990s, does Ruedy offer a definition of a terrorist: “in this book the term *terrorist* is applied to individuals deliberately targeting noncombatants for ideological, political, or tactical reasons” (p. 261). Does his definition not include Youssef Zighout and Lakhdar Ben Tobbal as they planned the Philippeville actions and Saadi Yacef as he helped to plan and execute what became known as the Battle of Algiers? Or, is the reader to understand that the independence struggle as fought by the FLN within Algeria was not terrorism? Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that once terrorism appears to be winning and has achieved its aims, and a certain number of years have passed, it and its results become acceptable, then respectable, and eventually heroic. It is notable that one of the principal housing complexes in Constantine, Algeria, is named “Cite du 20 aout 1955.”

By placing this footnote in the final chapter that deals with the post-1992 Islamic insurgency, rather than in chapter 6 covering the liberation war, Ruedy is making a statement about what is and is not terrorism. But even while placing the footnote where he did, Ruedy is careful to avoid expressing any clear judgment about the insurgency and the countermeasures taken by the Algerian government, for as the book went to press in 2005, the final outcome of the insurgency was still in doubt.

As for the rights of the *colons*, nowhere does

Ruedy consider how long settlers must live in a given territory and what proportion of its total population they must constitute before their presence can be considered “legitimate.” The question is particularly germane to any American studying the history of Algeria, given the settler origins of the United States.

Likewise, other than referring to the Muslim “collaborators” killed by the FLN and mentioning that at the start of the Independence War the FLN was killing around six Muslims to every one European (p. 164), Ruedy never considers how many pro-French Muslim Algerians there needed to be before what he and others insist on calling a “revolutionary” war can be legitimately viewed as a civil war. In this context, one observes that Ruedy never mentions the *Harkis*, Algerian Muslim auxiliaries who supported and fought with the French forces during the Independence War. According to some estimates, there may have been up to 236,000 of these auxiliary troops. With dependents included, the number might be as high as one million. Indeed, it has been claimed that there were more Muslims fighting with the French than fighting with the FLN.[4]

Other than synthesizing the standard accounts of the end of the Algerian War of Independence, Ruedy does not subject de Gaulle’s motivations for ending it as a French defeat to much scrutiny or consider the reality, that became more evident when de Gaulle published the final volumes of his memoirs, that he never had any desire to have large numbers of Muslims integrated into French society, which for him was and should remain predominately Roman Catholic and of *hexagone* European origin.

There are revealing continuities between the Independence War and the Islamist insurgency, most of them not evoked by Ruedy. It is known, for instance, that the attitude of the future leader of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), Abassi Madani, in 1962 was that Algeria, having eliminated the French, should complete the revolution by eliminating the francophone *francisant* secularists who had seized, and from his point of view, betrayed the revolution, the ultimate outcome of which should have been the establishment of an Islamic Arab republic governed according to *sharia* law. The movement that Madani would help to found many years later, following an initial period of imprisonment by the Ben Bella regime and then doctoral studies in the United Kingdom, proposed to do just that. Ruedy avoids any discussion as to whether or not one should view the francophone

(and in some cases francophile) elite, particularly the Algerian Army officer corps, as one-on-one successors to the French settlers and the French Army.[5]

The value for readers of this second edition of *Modern Algeria* depends to a great extent on their linguistic breadth. There are certainly better books on Algerian history, albeit more specialized, written in French by Algerian and French authors. This reviewer has a particular penchant for the writings of Charles André Julien, Charles Robert Ageron, and Benjamin Stora.[6] And certainly, to get a more balanced view of the Algerian War of Independence and of contemporary lessons to be learned from it, Anglophones (and others, it having been translated into French and Arabic), should read Alistair Horne’s *A Savage War of Peace*. Nevertheless, to get a broader picture, monolingual Anglophones may want to read the present volume, but they will need to have acquired some prior background in Algerian and French history in order to avoid being overly influenced by the author’s biases.

Notes

[1]. See Pierre Montagnon, *La Conquete de l’Algerie: les germes de la discorde 1830-1871* (Paris: Pygmalion, 1986), 130, n. 11; 222.

[2]. See Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algerie contemporaine*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979), 56.

[3]. Paul Aussaresses, *Services Speciaux Algerie 1955-1957* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), 61.

[4]. See <http://www.answers.com/topic/harki>, accessed March 23, 2007. One is surprised that Ruedy, who seems to relish every chance he can get to bash the French, has not mentioned the grim fate of the *Harkis* following Algerian independence. Despite the guarantees embodied in the Evian Accords that there would be no reprisals taken by either side for actions engaged in by anyone during the Algerian war, those *Harkis* and their families who were unable to leave Algeria were the victims of vicious reprisals. Somewhere between 50,000 and 150,000 *Harkis* and their families were massacred. It seems that while the French Government enabled the French settlers who wished to leave Algeria to do so, it either did nothing to help the *Harkis* to do the same or indeed prevented them from doing so, on the orders of General de Gaulle himself. The 91,000 or so *Harkis*, along with their families, who did get to France most often owed their escape to French officers who disregarded orders (see <http://www.answers.com/topic/harki>, accessed

March 23, 2007). According to one of the reviewer's informants, a senior French businessman whom he met in Romania in the 1990s, officers, like himself, who had been involved in the Algerian war as a result of their required periods of military service and were planning to undertake civilian rather than military careers later on were the ones most willing to help *Harkis* escape to France. He himself claimed to have rescued 1,200 *Harkis* and their family members.

[5]. Nevertheless, Ruedy's revised and expanded bibliography includes the account of a young dissident Algerian army officer, Habib Souaïdia, who fled to France in 2000. In *La Salle Guerre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 124-127, Souaïdia draws a parallel between the counter-insurgency tactics of the leadership of the Algerian army today and those of the French army during the Independence War. The Algerian army still functions predominantly in the French language and is increasingly outfitted by France. Ruedy

even quotes in a footnote a remark made by an official of the U.S. Department of State in 1996 that "Algeria is French territory" (p. 262).

[6]. See, for instance, Charles-Andre Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord: Tunisie, Algerie, Maroc*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Paris: Payot, 1968-1969); and *Histoire de l'Algerie contemporaine: La conquete et les debuts de la colonization 1827-1871* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964). Also see Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algerie Contemporaine*, vol. 2, *De l'insurrection de 1871 au declenchement de la guerre de liberation (1954)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979); and *Les Algeriens musulmans et la France, 1871-1919*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968). See Benjamin Stora, *Messali Hadj pionnier du nationalisme algerien (1898-1974)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986); and *La Gangrene et l'oubli: la memoire de la guerre d'Algerie* (Paris: La Decouverte, 1991).

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