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**“A New Israel”: Colonial Comparisons and The Algerian Partition that Never Happened**

“Un nouvel Israël”: la comparaison coloniale et la partition de l’Algérie qui n’eut jamais lieu

**Abstract***: In 1960-62, French officials considered partitioning Algeria between European- and Muslim-majority areas, much later and more seriously than the existing historiography shows. Even its supporters, however, remained ambivalent considering it to be a “foreign” approach to decolonization, opposed to French principles of territorial unity and racial equality. Thus, they discussed partition by comparing Algeria to foreign models, in particular the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine that led to the creation of the state of Israel. Drawing on the private papers of Prime Minister Michel Debré, the writings of Alain Peyrefitte, as well as archives from the ministries of Algerian and Foreign Affairs, this article argues that partition plans were failed attempts to deflect colonialism by looking sideways. To do so, the supporters of partition made use of comparison, a longstanding tool of the colonial administration.*

En 1960-62, le gouvernement français envisagea de partager l’Algérie entre zones de majorité européenne et musulmane, bien plus sérieusement et plus tard et plus que ne le décrit l’historiographie actuelle. Mais même les partisans les plus ardents d’une partition restèrent relativement ambivalents face à ce projet, qu’ils considéraient comme une solution “étrangère” de décolonisation opposée aux principes français d’unité territoriale et d’égalité raciale. Ils évaluèrent ainsi la partition potentielle de l’Algérie en la comparant avec de nombreux modèles étrangers, en particulier la partition du mandat britannique de Palestine qui donna lieu à l’état d’Israël. S’appuyant sur les papiers du premier ministre Michel Debré, les écrits d’Alain Peyrefitte et les archives des ministères des affaires algériennes et étrangères, cet article montre que les projets de partition furent des tentatives ratées de se détourner du problème colonial en regardant au loin. Pour ce faire, les partisans du partage firent usage de la comparaison, un vieux outil intellectuel de l’administration coloniale.

On June 17, 1960, the French President Charles de Gaulle received the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion at the Élysée Palace. Their conversation was wide-ranging, as suited the heads of two states with very close relations. They talked of problems with Nasser’s Egypt, of the two countries’ nuclear cooperation, and of Israel’s recent capture of former Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann in Argentina.

At one point, Ben-Gurion volunteered a piece of advice on France’s troubles in Algeria, where war against the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) had been raging for nearly six years. Algeria, he advised, should be split up between the French and the “Arabs”. The French should create their own “zone” with a corridor between the Mediterranean and the Sahara, while the rest could become independent. It was crucial, he added, that in doing so they should not rely on Arab labour. This was how the Israelis had succeeded in creating their own state: “one cannot buy nor conquer a country” he summarised, “one must build it for oneself.” Ben-Gurion encouraged de Gaulle to “inspire French youth” to go and build a new bit of France in Africa. “This is the only definitive solution to the Algerian problem.”

De Gaulle acknowledged that this idea had “already occurred to him”. However, if France created a “French Israel” in Africa, he suggested, “this would provoke the same fury on behalf of the Arabs that the existence of Israel does.” They moved on to discuss other topics. Preserved in the private papers of the French Prime Minister Michel Debré, the discussion is only one instance among many of de Gaulle and other French officials discussing the partition of Algeria in order to create a “new Israel” or a “French Israel”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the last days of French Algeria, partition hovered on the edge of possibility, giving rise to official reports, secret maps, newspaper articles, demonstrations, and UN declarations. Some members of the French government, facing the mounting military costs of controlling Algerian territory as well as the rising political costs of abandoning the European population of Algeria, considered having it both ways: they would retain areas heavily populated by Europeans and abandon others to the control of the FLN. In the end, Algeria was never partitioned, and the entire country gained independence under the FLN in July 1962. The problem of what to do with the roughly one million “European Algerians”, as they were known, who made up some 10% of Algeria’s population, was resolved unexpectedly as they fled en masse to France, where they came to be known as the *pied-noirs*.

This article looks back on an event that never happened, excavating plans to partition Algeria between areas loyal to France and those loyal to the FLN in 1960-62. It argues that these plans were primarily comparative exercises, attempts by the French administration to make sense of Algeria by evaluating it alongside other foreign models in which partition had been implemented. Comparisons were an intellectual tool to manage the boundaries of French policy, importing models deemed pertinent while dismissing those deemed as excessively un-French. However, comparisons could not ultimately make sense of the Algerian case, leading to a general uncertainty around the possibility of partition.

The hypothetical partition of Algeria was rarely discussed solely on its own terms, but more often as a potential repetition of previous events elsewhere, in particular the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine that had led to the creation of the state of Israel. Despite contemporary Algerians politics’ appetite for conspiracy theorists involving Zionists, partition plans do not reveal any grand master-plan between de Gaulle and Ben-Gurion.[[2]](#footnote-2) The initiative of these comparisons very much came from the French themselves: as de Gaulle put it, the idea had “already occurred to him” before he met Ben Gurion, and beyond the 1960 meeting there was little Israeli involvement in these plans.

Comparisons, as Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out, were essential to colonial statecraft. By choosing what models constituted acceptable referents and which did not, officials could control what was exceptional about government in the colonies. Rather than attempting a comparison between Algeria and Israel, it is important to take comparisons “not as a methodological problem but as a historical object”.[[3]](#footnote-3) Within the French context, for instance, several studies have shown how comparisons with more or less imaginary “Anglo-Saxon” models form a discourse in and of themselves, participating in the creation of French exceptionalism.[[4]](#footnote-4) The use of comparisons in elaborating partition plans must be seen as the tail-end of longstanding colonial practices of administrative thinking.

By contrast, within the ample historiography of the War of Algerian Independence, partition plans seem only marginally important.[[5]](#footnote-5) They are drowned in a host of other alternative institutional solutions that were considered but never worked out - a blip in the panic of decolonisation.[[6]](#footnote-6) Instead, by placing these partition plans within the wider context of Algeria’s colonial history, this article shows that these plans were not a last-minute panic. Far from reflecting the end of a belief in a purely French Algeria, partition plans were typical of French colonial rule in Algeria. Algeria’s legal status as part of France had never prevented officials from assessing its problems internationally and French officials had built up the idea that Algeria was an exceptional case by comparing it with other places. [[7]](#footnote-7) In its decolonization too they sought to keep it separate by denying that Algeria was like any other colony, but in the words of Michael Rothberg, “assertions of uniqueness thus actually produce further metaphorical and analogical appropriations.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

More recent scholarship on the War of Algerian Independence has rejected the teleology of all events leading to inevitable independence under the FLN, exploring how a number of alternative solutions seemed plausible to actors at the time, and put uncertainty back into the final years of the war.[[9]](#footnote-9) On one level, this article builds on these works by examining the previously unexplored option of partition, and shows that it was seriously considered at the highest levels of the French government until the very last minute. However, these newer studies, most prominently in the work of Todd Shepard, still remain committed to a narrative of crisis, in which the war shook fundamental French values. The partition plans, by contrast, suggest a sense of bureaucratic continuity, in which officials during the Algerian conflict drew on much older colonial imaginaries even as they invented decolonization.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The article is split into three parts. The first part sets the context for the emergence of partition plans at the end of the War of Algerian Independence from 1959 to 1962. It shows that partition remained possible until the very last minute, and yet that even its supporters were ambivalent about its feasibility. The second part explains this ambivalence by focusing on the writings of de Gaulle’s close adviser Alain Peyrefitte and bureaucrats of the Ministry of Algerian Affairs. These men elaborated partition plans through comparisons, attempting to figure out a more expert, scientific form of decolonisation following long-standing techniques of colonial administrators. Comparisons allowed them to indulge in looking at foreign solutions that they could then dismissed as un-French: partition, for instance, they deemed to be an excessively racial, “Anglo-Saxon” form of decolonisation. The third part focuses more closely on the Israeli analogy. Here it becomes clear that comparisons proliferated because Peyrefitte and others were unable to make sense of events in Algeria. Following a longstanding problem in colonial thinking, it was unclear what kind of colony Algeria was and what was the relationship of the settlers to the colonial government. Because of this, the equally ambiguous Israeli case proved especially fertile ground for comparison, but this also made the success of a potential partition seem uncertain.

I. Partition: the second-best way to end the war

Partition plans emerged late in the War of Algerian Independence. Indeed, the possibility of partition seemed strongest at the very end, around the time of the negotiations that would eventually lead to the ceasefire between the French army and the FLN in March 1962. Partition plans came out of a sense of increasing confusion as to how to end the conflict, and while detailed partition plans were drawn up, even the staunchest advocates remained highly ambivalent about the viability of this solution.

In the existing historiography, partition plans appear only as a cynical ploy for de Gaulle to put pressure the FLN, an empty threat which he never intended to put into practice. However, the archives of the French Ministry of Algerians Affairs as well as the private papers of Michel Debré reveal that these plans enjoyed far more widespread support among the French government until the very last minute. The partition plans were a last-resort option for those most attached to maintaining Algeria within the Republic - if they could not keep all of Algeria, they would at least retain part of it. It was partly a political solution, partly a military plan to concentrate Europeans in easily-defensible coastal areas where most of them already lived and to abandon the costly and messy occupation of the mountainous interior.[[11]](#footnote-11)

While the idea had been floated since at least 1956, it is in the endgame, when the independence of Algeria under a “Muslim” majority became more plausible, that partition switched to being an official possibility.[[12]](#footnote-12) De Gaulle’s landmark speech on September 16, 1959 advocating the “self-determination” (*autodétermination*) of Algeria officially hinted at partition for the first time. De Gaulle offered three options to Algerians: “association” of an autonomous Algeria with France, “francisation” or the complete integration of Algeria into France, and most dramatically unilateral independence or “secession, where some think they might find independence”.[[13]](#footnote-13) All three of these terms, “association”, “francisation” and “secession”, were ambiguous.

“Francisation” denoted the full assimilation of Algeria on equal standing into the French Republic, a prospect that de Gaulle privately considered unrealistic as it would involve giving full political rights to Algerian Muslims. The supporters of “francisation”, however, had been those who had brought de Gaulle back into power the previous year by staging a coup in Algiers on May 13, 1958 that had precipitated the end of the Fourth Republic. By September 1959, from his choice of words (using “francisation” rather than the previous “assimilation”), de Gaulle made it clear that he thought “association”, or some kind of close cooperation between France and Algeria, was the most reasonable solution, though it was unclear what this enduring French presence would mean in practice. This flew in the face of his closest allies, the most die-hard supporters of *Algérie française*, who were committed to maintaining Algeria French at any cost, including now the total assimilation of its Muslim population.[[14]](#footnote-14)

As for “secession”, de Gaulle was keen to insist it did not simply mean Algerian independence: “in this unfortunate hypothesis, it goes without saying that those Algerians of all origins that would wish to remain French would do so, and that France would organise if necessary their relocation (*regroupement*) and their installation (*établissement*).”[[15]](#footnote-15) As his Prime Minister Debré woud elaborate, “Secession, in reality, is partition”, as the French government would protect and preserve the rights of those who wished to remain French in Algeria.[[16]](#footnote-16) Secession would thus only apply to those areas which supported independence, not to the whole of Algeria. These public proclamations by the president and the prime minister hinting at partition had two goals. On the one hand, they were intended to reassure the European population, which was opposed to the very idea of self-determination, that the French government would not abandon them even if the majority of Algerians voted for independence. On the other hand, partition was a useful way of putting pressure on the FLN by making independence look unappealing without the full consent of the French government and the European minority.

The threat of partition to safeguard the European minority in the north of Algeria was especially useful to boost French plans for the Sahara. While the Southern desert territories had always been administered differently from the north of Algeria, the French government increasingly argued that the Sahara had never been part of Algeria at all. 1957 marked a turning-point with the creation of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS), an attempt to establish a common administration for the Sahara separate from Northern Algeria.[[17]](#footnote-17) This new arrangement would allow France to retain control over two recent strategic interests: oil, discovered in massive quantities in the Sahara in 1956, and nuclear testing-grounds, where the French government detonated its first atomic bomb in 1960.

A hypothetical partition in the north intersected with these better-known plans for the Sahara. In some versions of the plan, partition of the north in areas of high European population density might allow the French government to create a corridor between the Mediterranean and the vast new resources of the Sahara in the west of Algeria around the new oil terminal at Arzew, as per Ben-Gurion’s suggestion. Another major strategic interest was retaining French military bases in Algeria, especially the major naval base at Mers el-Kébir, near Oran. As Oran was the only city with a European demographic majority in Algeria, plans to partition Algeria to safeguard the European minority might usefully combine with military priorities. [[18]](#footnote-18)

At the very least, the threat of partition in the north, de Gaulle thought, might push the FLN into agreeing to let go out of the south. Indeed, de Gaulle thought that the possibility of partition would force the FLN to concede ground to the French government on key sticking-points in negotiations, namely guarantees for the European minority, the status of the Sahara and the presence of French military bases.

To de Gaulle, partition was useful as a façade to scare the FLN, but it was not a solution to the conflict. At best, it was just a continuation of war by other means. Instead of “partition”, he used the word *regroupement*, a spectacularly vague term suggesting that French Algerians would be concentrated in some areas.[[19]](#footnote-19) Partition would thus be a less costly way of continuing the war by focusing on those areas of high strategic interest and European population density.

Other members of the government, however, were far more enthusiastic about partition than de Gaulle. Michel Debré had always been more committed to the idea of a French Algeria than De Gaulle, and eventually resigned in April 1962 over disagreement with the Evian Accords that established Algeria’s independence. When negotiations between the French government and the FLN were stalling, Debré explicitly voiced his support of partition. In a letter to de Gaulle in September 1961, he wrote that “if it appears in the coming weeks that negotiation, as we understand it, is not possible (…) it seems necessary to me (…) to take clearly the path of partition.”[[20]](#footnote-20) To some (an admittedly small group), partition had to be given a more positive content beyond a mere military tactic.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In the summer of 1961, when negotiations were stalling, de Gaulle asked a young *député*, Alain Peyrefitte, to investigate and publicise the idea of partition.[[22]](#footnote-22) Peyrefitte, later to become one of de Gaulle’s most trusted ministers, started out with a discrete press campaign, which gradually grew larger with a series of articles in *Le Monde* in October 1961, followed by a book, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie?* (Should Algeria be partitioned?) in January 1962, along with television interviews to publicise his arguments.[[23]](#footnote-23) The debate went well beyond the confines of the Élysée Palace, splashing the pages of the French press.[[24]](#footnote-24) De Gaulle was dismayed that Peyrefitte’s attempt at publicising the ideas had worked too well.[[25]](#footnote-25)

These increasingly public discussions of partition were met with a mixture of outrage and fear by the FLN. On July 5, 1961, the FLN protested partition plans by organising mass demonstrations, which were bloodily put down by French authorities.[[26]](#footnote-26) The FLN, like many other anti-colonial movements, stressed a strict interpretation of full independence within the borders of French Algeria. Partition was widely seen among anti-colonial movements as an attempt by former colonial powers to hold onto power, and threats of partition proved especially effective at mobilising international support for the FLN in the Third World. In particular, the disastrous unfolding of the independence of the Belgian Congo in 1960 was seen as a cautionary tale. Shortly after de Gaulle and Ben Gurion’s meeting in the Élysée in June 1960, the independence of Congo under Patrice Lumumba was marred by the secession of the vast and mineral-rich province of Katanga, in which Belgium maintained troops allegedly to protect Belgian citizens there. The secession of Katanga drew international outrage both from the US and USSR and was widely seen as an attempt by a former colonial power to to cling onto power and destabilise the new Congolese state.[[27]](#footnote-27) In December 1960, the UN General Assembly’s declaration enjoined parties to guarantee the “unity and territorial integrity of Algeria”, clearly targeting French partition plans.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The FLN’s opposition, however, did not prevent French officials from continuing to consider partition in ever closer detail. To historians, Peyrefitte’s book *Faut-il partager l’Algérie?* looks “untimely”, as the final round of negotiations concluded a few weeks later in March 1962 at Evian. Once Algeria was on the path to independence, such ideas seemed ridiculous.[[29]](#footnote-29) Yet over the course of 1961-62 the prospect of partition actually increased as independence loomed closer. In January 1962, the highest-ranking French official in Algeria, Delegate-general Jean Morin, produced a detailed report, containing maps of strategically feasible partition plans as well as costing sheets of the military and economic viability of a rump state.[[30]](#footnote-30) The report was produced just two months before the French government officially recognised the FLN and promised Algerian independence in March 1962.

The possibility of partition was a sticking point between the French and Algerian sides during peace negotiations. When the French government and the provisional Algerian government signed the Evian Accords ending hostilities on 17 March 1962, Benyoucef Benkhedda, in the official declaration of the Algerian delegation, said the first principle that emerged from these agreements was “The territorial integrity of Algeria in its present shape, which excludes all open or hidden attempts of partition in the North of Algeria.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Clearly, until the very last minute, this had been a possibility.

Yet even to those most in favour of it, partition was an uncertain concept. Morin’s report, for instance, could not determine a single option and considered various hypotheses of partition, with many different colored lines running across maps (fig. 1). The most restricted version would see small, disconnected enclaves created around Algiers, Oran and Bône (fig. 2). More ambitious plans envisioned the creation of a “Western Algeria” covering half the country, encompassing the areas of densest European settlement and providing access to the oil deposits and nuclear testing grounds of the Sahara.

Drawing borders was impossible because there were no clear areas of European demographic majority, which did not allow for easy partition. Only in the city of Oran did Europeans form a demographic majority, and this disappeared as soon as the suburbs and wider region were included. Debré tried to identify border lines that would protect the European population using maps of population showing the proportion of Europeans and Muslims per commune taken from the 1948 census, to no avail.[[32]](#footnote-32) Even in the most restricted scenario of three small coastal enclaves around Oran, Algiers and Bône, Europeans would form at most 27% of the population, and this was an optimistic scenario.[[33]](#footnote-33) Jean Morin in his 1962 report recognised that a larger new state going beyond these enclaves, would be more economically viable and militarily defensible, but it would also be more politically unstable, as it would contain more “Muslims” of uncertain loyalty. Partition, whenever it was seriously considered, was frustrated by the impossibility of locating “the ectoplasm of the border”, as one official in the ministry of Algerian Affairsput it.[[34]](#footnote-34)

**Figure 1:** Map showing multiple potential partition plans, with different coloured lines as possible boundaries. ANOM 81F/149. ©Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence.

**Figure 2:** Map showing possible enclave around Algiers and the surrounding Mitija plain, based on communes with highest European populations. ANOM 81F/149. © Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence.

Partition remained a subject of discussion for mainly Parisian bureaucrats and journalists; significantly, European Algerians do not seem to have supported the projects as they fought for the entirety of Algeria to remain French. The Consul-General of the United States in Algiers, William J. Porter, had a cool assessment of such plans: “It is virtually impossible in Algeria today, in any camp, to find convinced supporters of any partition (…). The more the subject is discussed or studied, the more unrealistic any such project appears.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Even for the small group of supporters, partition remained in the conditional tense, a language of “if”s, of *hypothèses* and *faut-il* (should we?) rather than of assertions.Though the plans were far more than a clever ploy by de Gaulle, even for those who were more supportive, partition was held at arms’ length.Instead, a closer look at the content of these plans reveals that they were comparative exercises, attempts to understand possible futures for Algeria based on past precedents.

II. Comparisons and the quest for an expert decolonization

The most extensive discussions of partition are to be found in Peyrefitte’s writings as well as in the works of the Ministry of Algerian Affairs’ internal thinktank, the *mission d’études*. [[36]](#footnote-36) Both Peyrefitte and officials in the Ministry of Algerian Affairs looked sideways and drew on a variety of international models, in particular decolonizations in the British Empire: the partition of Ireland in 1921 and the India/Pakistan partition of 1947, but most frequently the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1947-8 that led to creation of the state of Israel. Less frequently, as we shall see, they drew on other cases of recent Cold War partitions like that between West and East Germany, North and South Vietnam or North and South Korea. Following longstanding practices of colonial administrators, they used these examples to give their proposals an air of neutrality and expertise, but also shied away from excessively “Anglo-Saxon” solutions to French problems.

Partition was but one of a whole range of alternative institutional solutions explored by the Ministry of Algerian Affairs. One report explored a federation between France and Algeria based on the historical Danish-Norse federation; another considered splitting Algeria into autonomous cantons on a Swiss model. Depending on who was doing the talking and what books they had read, the *mission d’études* of the ministry could consider Canadian- or Yugoslav-inspired arrangements.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In this quest for an “expert” decolonization, far removed from French political bickering, solutions drawn from the British Empire seem to have been particularly appealing. Was Britain not, as Peyrefitte wrote, the “unrivaled champion of decolonization”?[[38]](#footnote-38) In this, Peyrefitte was hardly being original. The idea that better models for managing the colonies could come out of judicious comparisons with foreign empires, and especially the British one, was as old as French rule in Algeria. During the conquest of Algeria in the 1830s, a proliferation of comparisons with British colonies guided explosive debates about the future of the new colony.[[39]](#footnote-39) As Tocqueville put it at the time, “Without being bad Frenchmen, we can admit that it is good to follow the English in matters of colonisation”.[[40]](#footnote-40) These practices were not characteristic of any particular regime: officials looked sideways to develop better, more “expert” solutions to Algeria’s woes, especially in times of crisis.[[41]](#footnote-41) Officials prized comparisons as a way to produce more rational methods of colonial government removed from the narrowness of French political bickering. As pointed out by Pierre Singaravélou, under the Third Republic this was even institutionalised into curricula in comparative colonialism, in order to develop a more scientific, improved colonialism through comparisons between empires.[[42]](#footnote-42) Colonial comparison was not just blind imitation, but a critical analysis of the difference between British and French models.

During the war of independence, the careful study of distant examples in which the French were ostensibly uninvolved gave the proceedings an aura of dispassionate scientific expertise. The core problem, as the officials saw it, was trying to find a constitutional solution that would satisfy both European and Muslim Algerians. They repeatedly asserted that this was an unprecedented problem, one that required searching beyond the French model of the unitary state to look at examples abroad. Specifically, bureaucrats and social scientists investigated a number of “complex” British colonies, such as India, Palestine, Ireland and Cyprus, where decolonisation had involved more than a simple transfer of power. Partition was the most radical of these potential arrangements, one of total institutional separation between European and Muslim-controlled areas. By contrast, other models like Cyprus seemed to offer the possibility of allowing different communities a degree of self-rule, or “personal federation” as it was sometimes referred to, without splitting up Algerian territory.

Comparisons were a convenient way of looking sideways and not backwards, and in particular of avoiding looking at the colonial processes that had brought the European and Muslim communities into being and taking responsibility for them. Comparisons deflected any French responsibility in events in Algeria. For instance, comparing Algeria to Cyprus dissimulated settler colonialism by equating it with religious coexistence.[[43]](#footnote-43) As Debré wrote to de Gaulle, Cyprus was, like Algeria, a “Mediterranean” society, thus one full of “quarrels between races and religions”.[[44]](#footnote-44) As Todd Shepard has pointed out, these reports fantasised community relations in Algeria as a breakdown from a previous “Mediterranean coexistence” that, under colonial rule, had never existed.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Political scientists were involved in the meetings of the *mission d’études* to determine alternative solutions. The constitutionalist Jean-Louis Quermonne, for instance, understood Algeria to be one of several “multi-communitarian” societies, like Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Canada or South Africa. While acknowledging that some of these communities came out of “processes of colonisation, which makes the coexistence of communities all the more delicate”, Quermonne took the existence of these communities as a given, never interrogating the historical processes that had brought them into being.[[46]](#footnote-46) Officials in the *mission d’études* rarely discussed those cases in which the French themselves had engineered complex arrangements, like in Lebanon.[[47]](#footnote-47) In doing so, the French government could claim a neutral stance in arbitrating between the two different parties. By adopting this reading in Algeria, the French were shamelessly learning from the British, who also had a penchant for using partition to absolve themselves from any responsibility of colonial rule in leading to the current situation.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Referring to these foreign models was also a way of making French policy look more neutral on the international stage, especially when discussing the sensitive issue of partition. As the journalist Alfred Fabre-Luce wrote: “What are we afraid of? (…) Of being criticised by M. Nehru who maintains the partition of Kashmir, by the representative of Pakistan, a country that is issued from the partition of India, by that of Great Britain that maintains Northern Ireland independent (…) by the UN that decided the partition of Palestine?”[[49]](#footnote-49) On June 29, 1961, in a speech to the National Assembly, Debré stressed that partition “would not be a new phenomenon in this world (…) It has even occurred that geographical divisions were enacted and have succeeded to the benefit of populations of Muslim religion in order to prevent them from being given off to others in which they could not trust.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Implicitly, he was referring to the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

The ways in which various officials manipulated these models had little to do with the historical reality of those events. For instance, the French consensus around the 1947 partition of British India was that it had been a positive undertaking, in part because they knew little about it. Viceroy Mountbatten’s role in the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 was singled out as a case of successful management of decolonisation, because it had successfully disentangled Britain from a messy situation.[[51]](#footnote-51)

In fact, many of the comparisons explicitly came from places which French officials had never visited, for instance, Cyprus. The island’s independence in 1960, which included a complex power-sharing agreement between the Greek majority and the Turkish minority, proved a convenient example for the French government.[[52]](#footnote-52) One report noted that out of all the precedents, “it is probably Cyprus that is the least distant from Algeria if we consider the proportion of the two communities (17.5% of Turks and 78.8% of Orthodox people [*sic*]), as well as religious differences between these”, given its demographic proportions [[53]](#footnote-53)

The French ambassador in Cyprus, upon hearing that his colleagues were using the Cypriot model to frame an Algerian solution, complained that they knew little of the situation on the ground. Seen from Cyprus, it was clear that the power-sharing agreement between a Greek president and a Turkish vice-president was proving highly unstable and would indeed lead to a full-blown crisis and partition some years later.[[54]](#footnote-54) But it is precisely because officials in the Ministry of Algerian Affairs knew little about Cyprus that it was so helpful, as its model could be all the more easily flattened to suit their purposes. Thus, they ignored the on-the-ground knowledge of their colleague in Nicosia.

Similarly, Peyrefitte used foreign models to keep French responsibility for partition at a distance. The problem he was dealing with, he argued, was a global one rather than a specifically French one. He compared the fate of European Algerians to that of other settler popultations, “the Boers, New Zealanders and French Canadians.”[[55]](#footnote-55) By referring to these international examples and positing the existence of European Algerians as a natural fact, Peyrefitte avoided discussing how it was a succession of French regimes, including most durably the Third Republic (1871-1940), which had created the racial inequality in Algeria that was proving so problematic by encouraging mass settlement through *colonisation officielle* and institutionalising the differences between “settlers” (*colons*) and “natives” (*indigènes*).[[56]](#footnote-56) Comparisons allowed Peyrefitte both to claim that Algeria was exceptional and different from other colonies, and to deflect the responsibility of the French government by pointing to other cases when it was convenient.

Yet there were limits to the value of foreign models, as they might be seen as opposed to French values. While Peyrefitte’s book included maps of the partitions of India and Palestine, Peyrefitte approached these British models gingerly. As he noted, partition appeared “contrary to the French spirit [*contraire au génie français*], (…) in the French collective unconscious, an antiracist impulse fights, against the idea of partitioning Algeria”. Partition was a dangerously “Anglo-Saxon” solution, and he even defended himself against the idea that “partition” was a British loan-word.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Partition seemed to fly in the face of the very reasons why France was committed to staying in Algeria, namely that Algeria had been part of the French Republic since 1848. The strongest supporters of French Algeria claimed that they stood for a united Republic from “Dunkerque to Tamanrasset” in which all would be equal Frenchmen, and that the Republic stood for the revolutionary ideals of territorial unity and equality among all its citizens. Abandoning Algeria, they argued, was racist against Muslims which deserved to be full French citizens, an argument which distracted from the fact that many of them had been among the staunchest opponents of granting civil rights to Muslims before the FLN had begun its insurrection. For many Frenchmen, it was the Anglo-Saxons who practised partition, segregation and apartheid which were anathema to Republican equality.

Using “Anglo-Saxons” as scarecrows also reflected well-established patterns of thinking. As David Todd has pointed out, despite a rhetoric of rivalry, the French and British colonial empires were far more entangled than is usually acknowledged.[[58]](#footnote-58) Véronique Dimier suggests that comparisons between French and British colonial models formed a discourse within colonial rule itself. Officials would point to allegedly “French” or “British” styles of rule in their own debates, while their actual policies on the ground are difficult to disentangle as being wholly one or the other.[[59]](#footnote-59) Peyrefitte, here, was clearly doing the same as his predecessors – using a simplified understanding of decolonisation in the British empire as a kind of straw man against which to argue for a specifically French solution to Algeria’s woes.

Peyrefitte attempted to reinvent partition as a French decolonization technique by performing an awkward little dance around the concept of race. He argued against seeing partition as a technique of racial separation, under which there would lay “a whiff of apartheid”. Such a “Southern” state of Algeria, argued Peyrefitte, would be isolated, its only allies Franco’s Spain, Salazar’s Portugal, Katanga, Rhodesia and South Africa. Instead, a good, French partition would mean that Algerians would be free to choose their side: “it is not about separating two races, but two varieties of Algerians: those who wish to live with France, and those wish to live without and against her”. [[60]](#footnote-60) It was crucial to the success of arguments of partition that many Algerian Muslims would choose to remain loyal to France. This would make partition into a political choice and would maintain the fiction that the French state was not racist.

In some passages of the book, Peyrefitte attempted to rephrase Algeria’s hypothetical partition in Cold War terms, like Korea, Vietnam or Germany: there could be a free West Algeria and an oppressive communist East Algeria ruled by the FLN, with a split Algiers in the middle, “like Berlin”. [[61]](#footnote-61) Yet it is striking how little Cold War partitions featured in official discussions of partition. This was most likely because of two reasons. First, framing a partition of Algeria as a Cold War problem, though likely to garner greater international sympathy, was likely to be too reminiscent of the partition of Vietnam, primarily associated with the cataclysmic French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Such an argument would rankle the French military who were desperate to win the war in Algeria to atone for their defeat in Indochina.

More broadly, the comparison with Korea, Germany or Vietnam was difficult to sustain because of the importance of racial divisions in Algeria. Unlike these countries understood to be ethnically homogeneous but split apart by political differences, the problem in Algeria was inescapably colonial, as the FLN itself repeatedly asserted. Even Peyrefitte could not avoid the racial undertones of partition. To defend partition, he placed European Algerians on the same side of a global colour line of settler colonialism, as “European Algerians form a people that has their uniqueness, like the Boers, the New Zealanders, the French Canadians”.[[62]](#footnote-62) Despite his best attempts, Peyrefitte could not hide that his fundamental problem was what to do with the European minority in Algeria.

No comparison seemed to be able to predict the future of the European minority because Peyrefitte and others insisted that Algeria was like no other colony. Algeria was so difficult to compare because it had long been deemed exceptional, both part of France and a colony, both settler colony and not. For this reason, the Israeli analogy proved very fertile in these discussions, as the Israeli case, like the Algerian one, seemed ambiguously colonial.

III. The Israeli comparison and Algerian exceptionalism

The French had long held that Algeria was like no other colony. As Algeria had been a special colony within the French Empire, French officials believed that its decolonization would also be special. “The Algerian affair is far more than a simple decolonisation problem”, wrote Peyrefitte in the opening of his book.[[63]](#footnote-63) “Simple decolonisation” presumably referred to a direct transfer of power to a new independent state, and it along this model that the French had conducted most of their decolonisations so far, including the most recent round in sub-Saharan Africa in 1960. In particular, the French were keen to avoid comparisons between Algeria and Indochina, Morocco or Tunisia. The chief negotiator on the French side at Evian, Louis Joxe, rejected such a “tyranny of analogies”.[[64]](#footnote-64) For this reason, comparisons proliferated with a number of other colonies, but they always ended with the assertion that Algeria was unique. Faced with this longstanding difficulty, officials turned to comparisons with Israel, because the Israeli case seemed “good to think” with when trying to assess the viability of partition.

Algeria had long seemed especially confusing because of its demographic proportions, in which settlers were significant but never dominant. Even in its heyday at the turn of the twentieth century, French colonial theory was unable to make sense of France’s most important overseas possession: it was unclear what kind of colony it was, or even if it was a colony at all. In 1874, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, the Third Republic’s most prominent colonial theorist, penned a highly influential categorisation of colonies in his *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*. According to him, colonies according to their economic and demographic profile, between settler colonies (*colonies de peuplement*) with a high proportion of white settlers which exported agricultural goods, and dependent colonies or *colonies d’exploitation*, with a large native population whose labour could be exploited for to produce tropical goods. Yet the very author of this classification recognised that Algeria did not fit into either of these categories. Looking back towards the conquest of Algeria, he described it as:

“a fact without precedent, without analogy in all of modern history. Founding agricultural colonization in a country where the soil was possessed and cultivated; introducing a numerous European population next to this numerous Muslim population that we had neither the right nor the strength to extract or to push back; make of these two juxtaposed and heterogeneous elements a whole (…) this was the most difficult problem that had yet to occur to the colonial policy of modern peoples.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

Algeria, where Europeans never reached more than 10-15% of the total population and yet where they enjoined nearly total political domination did not fit into any established models of how a colony should work. To use the words of another prominent colonial theorist, Arthur Girault, Algeria “resisted all attempts at classification”, which rapidly become a trope in French colonial writing.[[66]](#footnote-66) In times of quiet, Algeria’s demographic and institutional peculiarities could be dismissed as quirks, but in times of crisis French authors often worried that their most important colony just made no sense. Most of the time, they just repeatedly asserted that Algeria was like no other colony, an exceptional place. Yet this denial only led to even more comparisons to prove how different Algeria was.

During the War of Algerian Independence the French government vehemently held onto this Algerian exceptionalism and argued that Algeria was not a simple decolonization case. Algerian nationalist movements, on the other hand, and most notably the FLN, inverted French Algeria’s exceptionalism, stating that not only was Algeria a typical colony that should achieve full independence, but Algeria was *the* supreme colony, its large settler population and institutional attachment to France the ultimate denial of the humanity of the Algerian people. In the writings of Frantz Fanon, for instance, Algeria becomes the basis from which to write a more general theory of worldwide colonialism.[[67]](#footnote-67) Occasionally, the existence of a European minority in Algeria was seen to be a unique problem, but more often it did not change the fundamentals: “the independence of Algeria, like that of Tunisia and Morocco, like that of all colonised countries, is inevitable.”[[68]](#footnote-68)

Yet even for the FLN, the presence of settlers was a problem. Keen to portray Algeria as a typical colony, the FLN nevertheless acknowledged that Algeria was different. Its newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, highlighted the uniqueness of the Algerian revolution in the following words: “For the first time in history, a colonised people raised up *en masse* in a European settler colony (in Rhodesia, in Kenya, in the South African Union this was not yet the case).” The same article stated that the FLN was uniquely moderate on these issues, as “for the first time in a colonial liberation war, we can see the former colonised offer their former colonisers to share their nationality.” [[69]](#footnote-69) Even Fanon acknowledged that Algeria was a “settler colony”, like “South Africa”. [[70]](#footnote-70)

The FLN was uncertain whether the European minority could be rescued from its involvement with the structural forces of colonialism. While the FLN saw Algeria’s future in independence, it still had no idea what to do with the European minority. Public remarks on the future of the European minority depended on whether the audience was international or Algerian.[[71]](#footnote-71) Much like many in the French government stressed the importance of Muslims who had chosen to fight on the French side, the FLN exalted the few individual Europeans who had joined the Algerian revolution and insisted that Europeans had the choice to renounce their settler privileges and obtain Algerian citizenship. However, it was unclear what would happen to the vast majority of European Algerians who vehemently opposed independence.

Applying models of “decolonization” to settler colonialism posed an intellectual problem to both sides. As the sympathetic British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan summarised to de Gaulle in 1959, both in Southern Africa and in Algeria “the real problem is the problem of Europeans who have taken root in Africa.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Macmillan, dealing with a crisis with the South African Nationalist government, was only too aware of this. In effect, both the French government and the FLN were struggling to come to terms with the nature of colonialism in Algeria. Would colonialism simply mean the departure of the French government, or the departure of the settlers, or both? Behind their opposing positions, both sides were in fact uncertain what the presence of settlers meant for decolonization. Thus the intellectual “invention of decolonization” did not solve all problems, as it was clear at the time that several different types of decolonization were possible, which involved substantive political choices.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The peculiarities of the Algerian case called for an alternative genealogy, an equally complex case in the recent past to illuminate other potentialities. The Israeli analogy was thus particularly fertile because it presented an ambiguous case: depending on one’s understanding of events in 1948, Israel was or was not a colonial state. It thus offered a mirror back to understanding Algeria, which had always been somewhat puzzling. Both the French government and the FLN made analogies between Israel and Algeria, but they did so with completely different aims. Many in the French government did not see Israel as a colonial situation and thus saw it as a positive model for Algeria’s future. By contrast, the FLN identified both Algeria and Israel as climactic cases of colonial rule to be resisted.

Until the Six-Day War in 1967, there was a broad pro-Israel consensus in French public opinion which meant that creating a “new Israel” might not have sounded so controversial.[[74]](#footnote-74) In France, in an era of increasing discussion of the Holocaust, Israel was primarily seen as a modern, utopian country, made up of former victims of anti-Semitism, not an outpost of European imperialism.[[75]](#footnote-75) France and Israel were strong allies at the time, and most recently in 1956, they had joined up with the United Kingdom to invade Egypt during the Suez Crisis. Until the Six-Day War in 1967, there was a broad pro-Israel consensus in French public opinion which meant that creating a “new Israel” might not have sounded so controversial. In this context, it is understandable that Ben-Gurion’s advice was taken seriously in 1960, and that detailed plans were elaborated for partition along an Israeli model.[[76]](#footnote-76) “A new Israel”, from the French perspective, was not a colonial enterprise.

From the perspective of metropolitan onlookers, the Israeli analogy was reinforced by a gradual shift in the war. By 1960-61, the situation in Algeria had shifted from being a war between the French army and the FLN to a murkier three-way conflict between the army, the settler terrorist *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) and the FLN, which had been militarily impotent within Algeria’s borders but had successfully radicalised the urban Algerian population. The French media switched from covering the conflict as an insurrection against France and more like a “race war” of acts of violence between Europeans and Muslims in Algerian cities.[[77]](#footnote-77) On the ground level, local officials spoke of a “clash between communities”.[[78]](#footnote-78)

As Debré wrote, the scenario in Palestina and Algeria seemed similar: in a “Mediterranean” country, a small European minority struggled against Arab majorities, as terrorism exploded on both sides and metropolitan forces watched hapless.[[79]](#footnote-79) In the Ministry of Algerian Affairs, officials collected press cuttings suggesting that Algeria was the new Palestine. One journalist whose article ended up in the ministry’s archives noted that in Palestine in 1947 “police forces exhausted themselves fighting bombings, intervening in between communities; feeling, I imagine, the same feelings in front of this thankless task that the riot police [CRS] felt in recent events in Algiers.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

By contrast, the FLN also compared Algeria to Palestine, but for exactly the opposite reasons. Algerian nationalists had identified developments in Palestine since the 1930s as the outcome of European imperialism – Israel, to them, was a colonial state.[[81]](#footnote-81) Algeria was a colony, and so was Palestine, and both should undergo decolonization. For the FLN, a repetition of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1947-8 spelled disaster for Algeria. In July 1958, Ferhat Abbas had noted that if the FLN stopped its military struggle, “Algeria would become a new Palestine.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Following a speech by de Gaulle on partition in 1960, *El Moudjahid,* the FLN’s official newspaper, denounced partition as the “israelisation of the country”.[[83]](#footnote-83) Using the allegory of the national territory as a physical body, *El Moudjahid* accused the French of dismembering Algeria. As in the Biblical story of king Solomon, an article argued that the Algerians’ fear of dividing their territory showed their true love for their nation. For the FLN, the French, by threatening to split Algeria, were proving that their love was merely pretence.[[84]](#footnote-84)

For some in the French government, Israel was not a colony and was a model to be emulated, while for the FLN, it was the exact opposite – a culmination of colonial power and an absolute disaster scenario. De Gaulle’s position was somewhat intermediate in between these poles. As laid out in the introduction, de Gaulle was sensitive to how the Israeli solution might look to the Third World: a “new Israel” would be incredibly unpopular. Moreover, he privately thought that there were important differences between the two situations. He was convinced that unlike Israelis, the European population of Algeria would be unwilling to take arms to ensure their own defence, leaving the French army to do the dirty business as they had always done. Certainly, Europeans did not want to build their own state. In private discussions with Peyrefitte, he seemed to have bought into the idea that Jews had an inherent right to a national home in Palestine, borrowing language from the 1917 Balfour Declaration to contrast Israelis with French Algerians: “Jews have a good reason: it is on this land that they have their roots, well before the Arabs; and they have no other national home. In Algeria, the Arabs have precedent [*l’antériorité*] (…) the national home of French Algerians, is France.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Despite his later critiques of Zionism, it seems like in 1961-2 de Gaulle took up Zionist notions of a unique Jewish relationship to the promised land, and denied that Israel could be a guide to events in Algeria. In essence, it seems like de Gaulle argued that while Israel was not a colony, Algeria was, and therefore it should become independent and not be partitioned.

Depending on whether one identified Algeria and Israel as colonies, the comparison could be used for completely opposite purposes. For this reason, partition seemed so uncertain, as it was unclear whether Algeria was really like Israel or not. The comparison tied the two places together but did not elucidate the relationship between the two. What the general movement of decolonization would mean for specific places remained up for grabs.

Conclusion

The problem of what decolonisation would mean in a settler colony found an unexpected resolution. In 1962, a total meltdown occurred that was unplanned by both sides. Despite the Evian Peace Accords in March, violence escalated as both the French government and the FLN lost the monopoly of violence in their respective spheres. The majority of European Algerians did not support the French government’s peace negotiations and, following the failed Putsch of the Generals in April 1961, supported the violent *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) in increasing numbers. After the Evian Accords, the OAS waged an increasingly erratic terrorist bombing campaign in France and Algeria to derail the peace process, attracting retaliation from numerous Muslims and leading to regular massacres on both sides. The FLN, militarily evicted from much of Algeria for most of the duration of the war, had trouble controlling its sympathisers within Algeria and would itself implode in a leadership struggle over the summer of 1962. Out of this escalating political violence and panic came the sudden mass departure of the European population in the summer of 1962, a development that had no one had foreseen. Decolonisation, in Algeria, ended up meaning both the departure of the French state and that of the European settlers.

Perhaps the most important thing about the maps of potential partitions of Algeria is that they were full of dotted lines. Officials were unsure how to draw boundaries between different populations, or how Algeria fitted into other past precedents of decolonization. They considered partitioning Algeria until the very last minute, but remained uncertain about its viability. Desperate to find a solution, they drew on a wide range of models, but no comparison could seem to entangle the problem they faced. They comparison they settled on the most, Israel, they chose because it was itself hopelessly confused.

As James McDougall has pointed out, in recent years scholars of French colonialism have taken the administration’s discourse very seriously, paying great attention to the “official mind” as it wrestled with the relationship between the Republic and colonialism, conflating in the process the history of colonial discourse with the history of colonialism. [[86]](#footnote-86) Yet officials were often overwhelmed by events they understood poorly. The partition plans are one such case: they were attempts to come to grips with a situation that was spiralling out of hand.

Comparisons mobilised by officials, materialised into maps with haphazard lines running across them, are symptoms of deep confusion. They were intellectual tools of people trying to rationalise a situation which they refused to fully face. This study thus builds upon the idea that confused with events in Algeria, French officials looked sideways, not backwards. The reasons for European Algerians’ presence in the first place, encouraged by generations of incentives to colonisation fostered by the Republic, was never brought up. It was easier to discuss Algeria as a potential new Israel than to attempt to understand why past French governments had created the present situation.

Despite their amnesia towards the colonial period, the tools used by officials in the 1960s to reflect upon the Algerian problem were very much the same as those used by their predecessors. While officials never mentioned their predecessors, they repeated their techniques, revealing a deeper continuity in administrative thinking beyond the fast-paced shifts of the War of Algerian Independence. Though those who went through decolonisation convinced themselves that the debates they were having were new, but we should be cautious in believing them. Only one anonymous bureaucrat of the ministry of Algerian Affairs, deep in a confidential meeting debating the possibility of partition in 1961, noted that the French had considered splitting Algeria up well before, in the 1830s, and that this had not worked out so well.[[87]](#footnote-87) During the military maelstrom of the conquest, generals had considered withdrawing to a limited coastal occupation around a few enclaves, Algiers, Oran and Bône, exactly the same ones that their successors would consider preserving a hundred and thirty years later. This too was never implemented.

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1. Centre Historique de Sciences Po (hereafter SP), private papers of Michel Debré, 2DE60, “Entretien du Général de Gaulle avec M. Ben-Gourion le 17 juin 1960 à l’Elysée”, June 17, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On conspiracy theories in Algerian political culture see Silverstein, “An Excess of Truth”, 643-674. There have been persistent allegations of the extremist Zionist Irgun assisting the OAS in the final months of the war in the 1962. Laskier, “Israel and Algeria”. On specific allegations of the Irgun assisting the OAS see Malek, *L’Algérie à Evian,* 248-249 and Lacheraf, *Algérie et Tiers-Monde*, 157-178. Such reports may have derived from the presence of Israeli agents to secure Jewish emigration from Algeria, see Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France,* 35-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties”. Seigel, “Beyond Compare”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fassin, ““Good to Think”. Dimier, *Discours idéologique de la méthode coloniale*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This article follows recent practice by referring to the 1954-1962 conflict as the “war of Algerian independence” and not the “Algerian War” of which there were several. See Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 254. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 628. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is rarely discussed despite the growing scholarship on the international aspects of the War of Algerian Independence, see Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution* and Johnson, *Battle for Algeria*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Most prominently in Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization.* For some other examples see Stephen Tyre, “From *Algerie française* to *France musulmane*: Jacques Soustelle and the Myths and Reality of ‘Integration’, 1955-1962”, *French History*, 2006, 276-296 and on West Africa, Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, “Algeria, Mexico, Unesco” and “Algerian nationalism, Zionism, and French laïcité”. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For instance, an early American assessment of partition in 1957 characterised it in purely military terms. National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 22-57, August 13, 1957 in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XXVII, 138-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On these earlier and more diffuse discussions of federalism and partition, see the well-documented article by Benhamouda, “La question du partage de l’Algérie pendant la guerre d’indépendance”. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On this speech as turning point see Stora, *Le mystère de Gaulle*. “Allocution du général de Gaulle du 16 Septembre 1959 en faveur de l’autodétermination”, Sep. 16, 1959. The video recording is especially worth watching as de Gaulle’s tone of voice was clearly derisive in some passages, available here: <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu00088/allocution-du-general-de-gaulle-du-16-septembre-1959-en-faveur-de-l-autodetermination.html>, viewed July 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Winock, *1958: La naissance de la Ve République*. Thomas, Le Béguec and Lachaise (eds.) *Mai 1958*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Allocution du général de Gaulle du 16 Septembre 1959 en faveur de l’autodétermination”, Sep. 16, 1959, <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu00088/allocution-du-general-de-gaulle-du-16-septembre-1959-en-faveur-de-l-autodetermination.html>. On this speech as turning point see Stora, *Le mystère de Gaulle*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Speech by Michel Debré in Algiers, Apr. 13, 1960. A video recording can be watched here on the Institut National Audiovisuel (INA) website, <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAF89022942> (accessed July 26, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Sèbe, “In the Shadow of the Algerian War”. Davis, “‘The Transformation of Man’ in French Algeria”. On the history of French rule in the Sahara see Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In the September 16, 1959 speech, de Gaulle explicitly linked the preservation of those who would wish to remain French with the continued French exploitation of Saharan oil. On possible intersections of partition with military bases in Mers el Kébir, ANOM 81F/149, “Hypothèse de partage de l’Algérie et de regroupement de la population, examen”, Jan. 24, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “*Regroupement”* had strong military connotations as one of the many military euphemisms deployed by the French army during the war. Since 1957, millions of Algerians were displaced from their villages into *camps de regroupement* so as to be better controlled and cut off from FLN fighters. Cornaton, *Les camps de regroupement de la guerre d’Algérie.* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. SP/2DE30, Debré to de Gaulle, Sep. 15, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Letters from Alain Peyrefitte to Debré alleged widespread support in various ministries for partition, SP/2DE11, Aug. 4, 1961, and again in another letter on Aug. 24, 1961. The director of *Le Monde,* Hubert Beuve-Méry, seems to have been another supporter, see William J. Porter to Secretary of State, in National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter, NARA), Jan. 23, 1962, RG59, Central Decimal Files 1960-63, box 1799. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, 76-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie?*. The TV interview by Pierre Dumayet on *Lectures pour tous* on Jan. 10, 1962 can be seen at <http://www.ina.fr/video/I07123416> (accessed July 26, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See for instance *Le Monde Diplomatique* Jan. 1961, *L’Aurore* June 30, 1961. Peyrefitte also reported receiving numerous letters supporting the plan by interested citizens, Peyrefitte to Debré, October 5, 1961, SP/2DE24. A trade union in Oran for instance sent a relatively detailed proposal of which there is an archival record in La Courneuve, Archives diplomatiques (hereafter MAE), Secrétariat d’Etat aux Affaires Algériennes (hereafter SEAA) SEAA/98. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, 76-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Aix-en-Provence, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, (hereafter, ANOM), 15CAB/100, Information Services of the Delegate-General in Algiers, July 5, 1961. *La Depêche d’Algérie* tallied 80 dead, 300 wounded in its July 6, 1961 issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Algerians would remain highly sensitive to the partition of other Third World countries beyond independence. The President of the secessionist Katanga, Moïse Tshombe, was arrested in Algeria in 1967 and it is there that he died under house arrest in 1969, possibly assassinated under the orders of Algerian President Houari Boumédiene. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. UN resolution 1573, Dec. 19, 1960, the resolution may be seen here <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/153/47/IMG/NR015347.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed July 26, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 628. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ANOM 81F/149, “Hypothèse de partage de l’Algérie et de regroupement de la population, examen”, Jan. 24, 1962. This report appear to have been misdated to January 1961 by error. The letter from the Delegate-General to the Minister of Algerian Affairs refers to the publication of Peyrefitte’s articles in October 1961, which makes a January 1961 report impossible. Furthermore, many of the individual sheets inside are stamped January 24, *1962*. Given it was only a few weeks into January, it is possible that for those pages stamped 1961 the year on the stamp had not been changed from 1961 to 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. ANOM/15CAB/146, “Allocution de M. Ben Khedda”, Mar. 17, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The map is in Debré’s private papers in the files to do with discussions of partition in SP/2DE. The National Statistical Institute (INSEE) had produced a survey of the proportion of population by commune based on the data from the 1948 census in Algeria, see *Bulletin de statistique générale,* ‘Proportion municipale non musulmane et musulmane des communes de l’Algérie’, 1950. On the racial categories of the Algerian census see Kateb, *Européens, “indigènes” et juifs*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The figures assumed for instance that most Europeans living in isolated locations of the interior would move to the large coastal cities. ANOM 81F/149, “Hypothèse de partage de l’Algérie et de regroupement de la population, examen”, Jan. 24, 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ANOM 81F/173, “Débat sur la partition à partir des articles de Peyrefitte”, Manuscript meeting report, Nov. 15, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. NARA RG59, Central Decimal Files 1960-63, box 1799, William J. Porter to Secretary of State Jan. 23, 1962. Porter, having been on the U.S. Palestine desk in 1946-7 and then in Cyprus 1947-50 was in an interesting position to evaluate this. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The *mission d’études* was created in July 1958 under the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Algerian Affairs, see documents outlining its organisation in ANOM 81F/173. Originally, it was tasked with finding ways to further assimilate Algeria into France but after 1959, it came to examining all possibilities outlined in de Gaulle’s self-determination speech of September 1959. After 1960, the shifting membership of the *mission d’études*, who rarely signed their anonymous reports, were tasked with studying four options: partition, secession, assimilation and association.After October 1961, it was headed by François Gazier, who had led his own research on future Algerian institutions whose archives are in the Secretary of State to Algerian Affairs, MAE/SEAA/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. ANOM/81F/192. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie?*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Blais, “‘Qu’est-ce qu’Alger’”. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tocqueville, “Notes prises avant le voyage d’Algérie et durant le courant de 1840” in *Œuvres Complètes*, 197. The literature on Tocqueville and Algeria is extensive, yet what is significant here is that he had, as Jennifer Sessions has pointed out, very typical views for his time, Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For instance, archival examples of officials doing in-depth research on British colonies can be found equally during the July Monarchy, Second Empire and the Third Republic. For a Second Empire example: “Colonies anglaises, classification des colonies”, “La politique anglaise dans le Canada”, “Java (Hollande)”, “Achille Murat – *Le régime des Etats-Unis*” in ANOM, F80/1859. For a Third Republic example, Félix Dessoliers, *De la fusion des races européennes en Algérie par les mariages croisés et de ses conséquences politiques*, 1899, ANOM, F80/1691. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Singaravélou, *Professer l’Empire.* [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. On the tendency for settler colonialism to “dissimulate the conditions of its own production” see Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. SP/2DE30, Debré to De Gaulle, Jan. 15, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Shepard, *Invention,* pp.162-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Quermonne, “Le problème de la cohabitation dans les sociétés multi-communautaires”. Despite the title, the article was entirely about institutional solutions for Algeria. On this “multi-communitarian” solution see also Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution,* 215-248. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The “communitarian” power-sharing in Lebanon, which had been a French Mandate, was influential in discussions but was rarely mentioned publicly, ANOM/81F/192. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Chester, “Boundary commissions”. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *La vie française*, June 30, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Journal Officiel, Assemblée Nationale*, *Débats*, June 28, 1961, 1327. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. SP/2DE24, Peyrefitte to Debré, “L’échec de Lugrin: une issue à l’impasse algérienne?”, report Aug. 18, 1961. French understandings of the decolonisation of India focused on a simplistic narrative around Gandhi, see Marsh, *Fictions of 1947*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. ANOM/81F/192, Jérôme Salusse “Programme d’études sur le problème de la protection des minorités”, Oct. 20, 1960. The French ambassador to Great Britain had sent details of the new Cypriot constitution on July 11, 1960, ANOM/81F/192. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ANOM/81F/192, “Le préalable de la nationalité”, anonymous, undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. MAE, Mission de liaison Algérienne, 244, Robert Baudouy to Maurice Couve de Murville, telegram, May 4, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*, 20. Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. On the history of colonial Algeria and its settlement policies see Peyroulou et al., *Histoire de l’Algérie à la période coloniale* and the still classic Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine.* [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*, 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Todd, “A French Imperial Meridian”. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Dimier, *Le discours idéologique de la méthode coloniale*. This approach contrasts with an earlier historiography that took these distinctions at face value, see Betts, *Assimilation and Association.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*? 70, 75 and 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*?34 and 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*?20. On the notion of a “global colour line” for (Anglophone) settlers see Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Peyrefitte, *Faut-il partager l’Algérie*?i. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. SP/2DE86 Louis Joxe to Michel Debré, Telegram, May 23, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Leroy-Beaulieu, *L’Algérie et la Tunisie*. Girault, *Principes de colonisation*. Leroy-Beaulieu and Girault’s works were particularly significant because they made their way into the curricula of various colonial institutions and thus became common sense to many officers, which explains the persistence of their theories, see Singaravélou, *Professer l’empire*, and El Mechat, “Sur les *Principes de colonisation* d’Arthur Girault”. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Fanon, *An V de la révolution algérienne* and *Les damnés de la terre*. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Speech by GPRA President Ferhat Abbas in Tunis, *El Moudjahid*, Feb. 17, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *El Moudjahid*, Sep.14, 1959. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Fanon, *An V de la révolution algérienne,* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN*, 252-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. SP/2DE64, “Compte-rendu conference tripartite à Rambouillet” Dec. 20, 1959. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Shepard, *Invention of decolonization*. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. 1967 is generally considered to be an important turning-point in French-Israeli relations, with de Gaulle’s press conference on Nov. 27, 1967 in which he famously described Israel as a “peuple d’élite, sûr de lui et dominateur”. Intellectually, the publication of Maxime Rodinson, 1967, “Israël, fait colonial?” *Les Temps Modernes* 22, no.253 led to a re-evaluation by some of Israel as a colonial state. Sieffert, *Israël-Palestine: une passion française*. Dalloz, *La création de l’Etat d’Israël vue par la presse française*. Coulon, *L’opinion française, Israël et le conflit israélo-arabe*. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. On 1961 and the Eichmann trial as a turning-point in Holocaust memory see Wieviorka, *Ère du témoin*. On the intersection between Holocaust and decolonization see Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*. Bouchard, “Les intellectuels et la question palestinienne”. Terrenoire ‘Le mouvement gaulliste et la question palestinienne’. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. ANOM/81F/192, “Mission d’études: statut politique, solutions envisagées”. MAE/SEAA/5 “Rapport du groupe d’études des structures futures de l’Algérie (Mission Gazier)” July 1960 and Jan. 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Eugène Mannoni, *Le Monde*, Sep. 5, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. ANOM/15CAB/144, Information Services of the Delegate-General in Algiers, May 27, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. SP/2DE30, Michel Debré to Charles de Gaulle, Jan. 15, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Edouard Sablier, “Le précédent palestinien – Quand la haine conduit au partage”, *Le Monde*, Sep. 22, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Katz, “Tracing the Shadow of Palestine”. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France.* Jauffret, “Algérie 1945-1954”. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ferhat Abbas, “Éléments constitutifs d”une politique FLN”, Address to the Comité Central Exécutif, July 29, 1958 in Harbi, *Les Archives de la révolution algérienne*, 194. Hamana al-Boukhari, “Al-thawra al jaza’iriyya wa al-thawra al-falastiniyya” (The Algerian Revolution and the Palestinian Revolution). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. “Le chantage sur la partition”, *El Moudjahid*, Feb. 20, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. “Le jugement de Salomon”, *El Moudjahid*, Feb. 20, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. As most European Algerians were born in Algeria and were of Spanish/Italian descent, many had never set foot in France, the situation was not as clear as de Gaulle made it. These words are taken from the notes of Alain Peyrefitte who published them much later so they are not to be read as a verbatim quote. Nonetheless, the opinions described by Peyrefitte’s notes are consistent with contemporary transcripts of de Gaulle’s opinions. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle* 89 and 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. McDougall, “The Secular State’s Islamic Empire”. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. ANOM 81F/173, “Débat sur la partition à partir des articles de Peyrefitte”, Manuscript meeting report, Nov. 15, 1961. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)