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## Going beyond the *guerre des mémoires* in theatrical representations of the Algerian War

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the 'guerre des mémoires' that has defined the memorial landscape surrounding the Algerian War and seen it mired in a competitive memory dynamic that Benjamin Stora terms 'une surenchère victimaire'. It argues that since the fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2012 there are signs of attempts to move beyond the impasse. Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe and Anna Cento Bull, the article examines two recent plays that adopt contrasting approaches to the aim of representing conflicting experiences of the war. *Et le cœur fume encore* features elements of Rancierian thought, emphasising the multiplicity of conflicting experiences, and interrupting viewer empathy through distancing techniques that disengage actor from character to defer empathetic engagement until the full complexity of post-war experience is made available. In contrast, *Les Pieds tanqués* works to create an entente between audience and characters that emphasises not only division but also the culture and humour that unites protagonists from different backgrounds.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la « guerre des mémoires » qui a marqué le paysage mémoriel qui entoure la guerre d'Algérie et l'a vu s'enliser dans ce que Benjamin Stora appelle « une surenchère victimaire ». Il soutient que depuis le cinquantième anniversaire de l'indépendance en 2012, il y a des signes de tentatives pour sortir de l'impasse. S'appuyant sur le travail de Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe et Anna Cento Bull, il examine deux pièces de théâtre récentes qui adoptent des approches contrastées dans le but de représenter des expériences conflictuelles de la guerre. Alors que *Et le cœur fume encore* tient à distance son public afin de différer l'engagement empathique jusqu'à ce que toute la complexité de l'expérience d'après-guerre soit rendue disponible, *Les Pieds tanqués* vise à créer une entente entre le public et les personnages qui met l'accent sur la division mais aussi sur la culture et l'humour qui unissent des protagonistes issus d'horizons différents.

Since the turn of the millennium, the memorial landscape in France has undergone a revolution in relation to Algeria, France's most important former colony. Between

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the formal acknowledgement of the war in 1999 and the sixtieth anniversary of independence in 2022, there has been a fundamental shift in how the colonial period in Algeria and its end have been remembered, impacting the spheres of politics, civil society and artistic representation. In the same period, there has been an explosion of research in Memory Studies, with significant advances in its theoretical underpinnings. This article aims to test some of the emerging theoretical perspectives by applying them to the evolving memory culture of the Algerian War in the new millennium, with a specific focus on how memory is mediated by artistic representation. It begins by tracing the changes that have taken place in France's memorial landscape,<sup>1</sup> in order to analyse the effects of social and political shifts on the discursive environment in the context of recent developments in memory studies. While the debates surrounding the war have transformed since McCormack (2007, 180) argued that 'it is largely through literature and cultural production that dominant narratives of the war are challenged and memories transmitted and contested', art continues to play a significant role in mediating and representing the contested versions of the past that are played out, as recent research demonstrates (Connolly 2020; Donadey 2020). Accordingly, the second part of this article examines how artists, particularly playwrights, have responded to this new memorial context in cultural representations of the Algerian War. Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe and Anna Cento Bull, it analyses the recent trend in media and art towards more inclusive and democratic representations of the war and assesses whether these recent memorial manifestations point towards a potentially more productive relationship with the past.

As Benjamin Stora (1991) and Anne Donadey (2020) and others have argued, France's failure to address its past has had persistent negative consequences for the nation's politics and inter-ethnic relations. Yet the emphasis on psychoanalytically inflected terms such as repression and amnesia (Bucaille 2010; Donadey 1996; Stora 1991) ignores the conscious and deliberate strategies by which families, groups and communities have retained, conserved and transmitted memories associated with the Algerian War (Eldridge 2016). Moreover, while memories originating in the private sphere—referred to by Rousso (1990, 235) as 'associational' vectors of memory—have shaped the mnemonic landscape, they have intersected with 'cultural' and 'scholarly' vectors that became active soon after independence in 1962, through the work of novelists, film-makers, journalists and historians.<sup>2</sup>

Mnemonic carriers, then, encompass public and private spheres. Within each vector, memorial discourses operate at different velocities and with different trajectories, with uneven, sometimes indirect, social impact. De Cesari and Rigney (2014) have used the concept of scalarity to highlight how memory exists and travels across different scales—local, national and global—and this, combined with close attention to mass and reach, or what Rigney (2016) calls 'differential memorability', allows us to think in terms of the differing impacts of memorial discourses. Kennedy and Nugent (2016, 64) use it to refer to 'overlapping and sometimes nested series of memory communities of different sizes and significance', a description that does not capture the determination with which certain actors in the Algerian War set about transferring memory from the familial to the community and thence, via the media and lobbying, to the national scale, with the express aim of achieving legal change. As Vince (2020, 190) notes, such strategies, which exist to

achieve political legitimacy, may operate independently of the drive for historical accuracy.

Although Rousso's 'official' vector of national and legislative commemoration of the Algerian War was for a long time absent, the other mnemonic carriers of the war intersected with politico-judicial trends at a national and global level. Historians (Eldridge 2016; Lotem 2021; Vince 2020) have identified the evolutionary stages in France's attitudes towards the war, from the post-war focus on practical recovery and financial indemnification, led most notably by the Association Nationale des Français d'Afrique du Nord, d'Outre-Mer et de leurs Amis (ANFANOMA) during the 1960s–70s, through the search for cultural identity and a place within the French nation that characterised the activities of groups representing the *pieds-noirs*, *harkis*, children of Algerian immigrants, and army veterans during the 1970s–90s. During the 1990s, what Vince (2020, 166) terms the 'transnational memory turn' brought a global focus on international law, crimes against humanity, and reparations, manifested in the 1990 Gaysot Law on the Holocaust, the 2001 Taubira Law on slavery, and Article 4 of the 23 February 2005 Law that, before being abrogated, proposed to formalise teaching about the 'positive presence' of France in North Africa. In the context of greater attention to infringements of human rights, the scandal around the use of torture in the Algerian War, which erupted in 2000, triggered a painful period of reassessment about France's conduct. This contributed to the emergence of the most recent stage, starting in the mid-2000s, which saw an increase in the instrumentalisation of history.

These stages have been shaped by an unstable triangular relationship between the various communities functioning as actors, the French state and its authorities, and the international legal context. Eldridge (2016), Vince (2020) and Lotem (2021) have mapped the resulting oscillations in political dynamics and action, and I do not propose to reiterate the details of how colonial injustices have become increasingly visible within society, to the point that successive French presidents have chosen to engage in a political dance that includes apologies and admissions of responsibility for past atrocities. Instead, I focus on how artists have responded to the most recent iteration of France's memorial landscape, signalled by the coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2012. Prior to this, the narrative of colonial Algeria had arguably been dominated by the *piéd-noir* community, which, via its extensive network of cultural associations, had achieved the most effective political representation of all the populations linked to colonial Algeria. Previous research (Barclay 2021; Eldridge 2013) has shown how the *piéd-noir* community instrumentalised multidirectional memory, drawing analogies with other groups and using publications, lobbying, and ultimately, websites and other media to advance their cause. Their success was such that by 2010 William Kidd (2011, 21) could argue that *piéd-noir* memory had assumed 'le statut d'une mémoire officielle'.

The fiftieth anniversary of independence signalled a change. Welch and McGonagle (2013, 45–47) note how the *pieds-noirs* were central to previous anniversary coverage in 1987, 1992 and 2002 but as I have noted (Barclay 2015), in 2012 the situation was different. *Piéd-noir* testimonies still featured in media coverage but as one perspective among many. The political expediencies of Franco-Algerian state relations (Bucaille 2010, 98) and the demands of the community of Algerian immigrant origin led to state recognition of colonial atrocities, such as François Hollande's 2012 acknowledgement of the Paris massacre of 17 October 1961. Thanks to Fatima Besnaci-Lancou and Dalila

Kerchouche amongst others, the experiences of the *harkis* were more widely known. The campaigns of the Fédération Nationale des Anciens Combattants en Algérie, Maroc et Tunisie (FNACA) and the explosion in memoirs written by conscripts and soldiers ensured that their experiences were also represented. Given the changes that had occurred in this now highly fractured memorial landscape, groups seized the opportunity to compete for the control, visibility and salience of the national narrative. In a sense the context had moved from Stora's memorial 'oubli'—as late as 2008 he pointed to a corpus of more than forty films featuring the war and asked why, given this context, each new release was greeted with the journalistic cliché of the absence of the Algerian War on film (Stora 2008, 264)—to a surfeit of memory, which Stora himself termed a 'guerre de mémoires' (Stora 2007; Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson 2010).<sup>3</sup>

Michael Rothberg (2009, 3) has referred to the conflicts surrounding memory as a 'zero sum game' of 'winners and losers' in which simplified narratives seek dominance by occupying the discursive public space to the exclusion of others. In the Franco-Algerian context this 'competitive' or 'antagonistic' memory draws on what Levy and Sznneider (2006) term 'cosmopolitan memory'. Deriving from the experiences of the Holocaust and the 'transnational memory turn', cosmopolitanism eschews nationalist paradigms in favour of an appeal to supra-national human rights regimes that emphasise our responsibilities to victims and the need for compassion. In practice this decouples events from their contexts, presenting them in moral terms of innocence and evil, and elides responsibility for perpetration so that in some instances perpetrators may be regarded as victims of their circumstances. Here, this produces what Stora (2007, 46) calls a 'surenchère victimaire', an arms race for validation that demands recognition and compassion for the alleged harms done and injuries suffered by the group in question. In this context, says Stora (2007, 66), identifying as a victim can bring its own risks, leading to fossilised debates that foreclose any possibility of healthy development: 'La posture victimaire devient un danger quand elle conduit à la passivité et à l'enfermement identitaire'. The consequence of competitive victimhood within the 'guerres de mémoires' is a discursive environment in which the only alternative to amnesia is a calcifying resentment. The dynamics of retrenchment evacuate empathy towards the experiences of others, rendering a project of national reconciliation increasingly inaccessible. With the failure of politics and in an international context where inclusive representation, particularly of overlooked and marginalised experiences, has become increasingly important, this polarised landscape has presented writers and artists with the challenge of how to represent ethically the divisions of colonial memory.

## Representing a fractured memorial landscape

The commemorative coverage of 2012 signalled the efforts of the media to go beyond the positive narrative of colonialism associated with the *pièdes-noirs* and reflect the perspectives and experiences of other, less mediated groups. The most explicit attempt was a slick online dossier produced jointly by *Le Monde* and *El Watan*.<sup>4</sup> Featuring parallel columns profiling eight different figures—*pièd-noir*, *OAS*, *appelé*, *combattante du FLN*, *Fédération de France du FLN*, *combattant du FLN*, *armée des frontières*, *habitant d'un camp de regroupement* (Barclay 2015, 208)—it accorded equal space to each individual. No attempt was made to reconcile the conflicting and sometimes contradictory narratives

placed alongside each other. The aim, clearly, was to replace the cacophony of competing narratives with the construction of ‘a more comprehensive and even-handed memory mosaic’ that would give voice to the diverse experiences and, ultimately, ‘contribute to a holistic view of the war’ (Barclay 2015, 208).

The online dossier was an overt attempt by the media to give equal visibility and weight to the conflicting experiences of the war. Similar efforts have been made in theatre and film, with a significant increase in the number of plays and films directly addressing the Algerian War in recent years.<sup>5</sup> Despite active government censorship, theatre produced some of the earliest representations of the Algerian War, from Kateb Yacine’s trilogy *Le Cercle des Représailles* (1959) and Jean Genet’s *Les Paravents* (1961), which dealt directly with the conflict in Algeria, to Michel Vinaver’s *Les Huissiers* (1958) and *Iphigénie Hôtel* (1960), which focused on its effects on the *métropole*. However, it was two decades before further plays appeared in the period 1988–91. Writing about four titles,<sup>6</sup> Bradby (1994, 379) noted the prevalence of the psychoanalytic approach to memory, with the widespread inclusion of characters who are dead emphasising the dimension of hauntology. Thereafter from 2005 onwards a larger number of films and plays about the Algerian War appeared, coinciding with the most recent evolution of attitudes. Notable among these plays are Mehdi Charef, *1962, le dernier voyage* (2005) and, more recently, Philippe Chuyen, *Les Pieds tanqués* (2012), Alexandra Badea, *Quais de Seine* (2019), Baptiste Amann’s *Des Territoires (... et tout sera pardonné?)* (2019), and Margaux Eskenazi and Alice Carré, *Et le cœur fume encore* (2019).<sup>7</sup>

Two approaches emerge from a glance at this corpus. The first, which includes Badea and Amann, foregrounds the experiences of one family, offering a relatively unified perspective on the war that, although it acknowledges division and engages in important memory work, does not correspond to the fragmentation of today’s memory politics. The others, including Charef, Chuyen, and Eskenazi and Carré, adopt an approach that responds to the conflicted memories of the war by consciously staging the multiple perspectives and experiences of different groups that avoid focus on a single protagonist. The conflict produced by multiple perspectives finds an ideal setting in the dramatic immediacy offered by theatre. Indeed, this is the reason given by Mehdi Charef, a writer better known for his films, for choosing the theatre as his vehicle for his play about the Algerian War, *1962, le dernier voyage* (2005, 66):

le théâtre évoque pour moi une immédiateté [...] Je voulais que le drame qui se joue ici se déroule vite, et, surtout, que tous les personnages soient présents en même temps. S’instaure alors un rapport permanent de confrontation: entre les personnages de la pièce, et entre les interprètes de la pièce.

By bringing together opposing viewpoints, these playwrights build on Michel Vinaver’s practice of juxtaposing discontinuous fragments, inviting the audience to engage in deriving its own interpretations. As Sparks, Stephenson and Bradby (1997) note, regarding Vinaver’s work, ‘This makes for plays in which the audience is never able to settle back into a comfortable emotional identification with any given character, since the perspective is constantly shifting. The viewpoint of one character is contradicted by that of a second, or a third, often overlapping in the same scene’. This multi-perspectival approach to performance is worthy of consideration as a twenty-first-century response to the memory wars, and the article will focus in particular on the distinct approaches taken by Philippe Chuyen

in *Les Pieds tanqués* (2012) and Margaux Eskenazi and Alice Carré in *Et le cœur fume encore* (2019). Based in Provence and Île-de-France respectively, both companies continue to perform the two plays across France to critical acclaim. The directors have said that they knew little about the war before beginning their projects, despite the fact that Eskenazi's maternal family were Algerian Jews who arrived in France in 1962 (Eskenazi 2023), and that their research led them to create the productions. While Eskenazi and Carré's Compagnie Nova consists of a young, multi-ethnic cast in comparison to Chuyen's Cie Artscénicum Théâtre, which features a predominantly white cast with a greater spread of ages, the plays have attracted a wide range of audiences, from school groups to those directly affected in different ways by the war, and their children. Although they demonstrate the same commitment to sharing a multiperspectival approach to representing the experiences of the Algerian War, their artistic choices produce different theatrical outcomes.

Within the context of theatre, questions of conflict and disruption have in recent times been closely linked with the writings of Jacques Rancière, whose work aims at making visible the cracks in the established order, which he refers to as the 'partage du sensible' (Rancière 2000). Theatre offers a privileged site for what he terms 'dissensus' because the division between actor and character highlights the instability of identity; it serves to throw the viewer off-balance, challenges assumptions and so disrupts, temporarily, the political order. According to Rancière (2008, 18, 19), the director has one overriding purpose: 'ils savent qu'il doit faire une chose, franchir le gouffre qui sépare l'activité de la passivité. [...] L'émancipation, elle, commence quand on remet en question l'opposition entre regarder et agir'. By disrupting the system of procedures that organise power and fix individuals and collectivities in stasis (which Rancière calls 'the police'), theatre dismantles the hierarchy that exists between the storyteller and the listener, the teacher and the pupil, and the actor and audience, allowing each to learn from the other. Rancière conceives this as

une nouvelle scène de l'égalité où des performances hétérogènes se traduisent les unes dans les autres. Car dans toutes ces performances il s'agit de lier ce que l'on sait avec ce que l'on ignore, d'être à la fois des performers déployant leurs compétences et des spectateurs observant ce que ces compétences peuvent produire dans un contexte nouveau, auprès d'autres spectateurs. [...] Il demande des spectateurs qui jouent le rôle d'interprètes actifs, qui élaborent leur propre traduction pour s'approprier l'"histoire" et en faire leur propre histoire. Une communauté émancipée est une communauté de conteurs et de traducteurs. (Rancière 2008, 28–29)

In this space individuals remain discrete—if Rancière is interested in dissolving existing structures it is to replace them with flux—but they are temporarily occupied in a shared process of engagement with the work of art.

Dans la logique de l'émancipation il y a toujours entre le maître ignorant et l'apprenti émancipé une troisième chose – un livre ou tout autre morceau d'écriture – étrangère à l'un comme à l'autre et à laquelle ils peuvent se référer pour vérifier en commun ce que l'élève a vu, ce qu'il en dit et ce qu'il en pense. Il en va de même pour la performance. Elle n'est pas la transmission du savoir ou du souffle de l'artiste au spectateur. Elle est cette troisième chose dont aucun n'est propriétaire, dont aucun ne possède le sens, qui se tient entre eux, écartant toute transmission à l'identique, toute identité de la cause et de l'effet. (Rancière 2008, 20–21)

Performance creates a space in which, with the rules and assumptions associated with the police disrupted, individual viewers are free to engage momentarily with art which ‘has the aesthetic power to open up a space for the individual’ (Fryer 2021, 112). It posits a space in which the dissensus created by theatrical performance disrupts established order, demassifying and multiplying the divisions between individuals, who are thence free to reassess and make new connections via their encounter with the performance. In the context of memories of the Algerian War, it allows the divisions and fragmentation of experience to be foregrounded without any attempt at consensus or resolution. This approach is explored in the first of the two recent productions that we will examine, Eskenazi and Carré’s *Et le cœur fume encore* (2019).

### Multiperspectivism on stage: *Et le cœur fume encore*

*Et le cœur fume encore* is the second part of a triptych entitled ‘Écrire en pays dominé’ (the first, *Nous sommes de ceux qui disent non à l’ombre*, focuses on cultures of *négritude*; the third, *1983*, examines anti-racism and workers’ struggles from the 1980s onwards). The title of the triptych indicates the centrality of literary expression to political resistance: *Et le cœur fume encore* takes its title from Kateb Yacine’s play *Le Cadavre encerclé* (1959), whose première features in the plot along with extracts from Assia Djebar, the filming of *La Bataille d’Alger*, and the trial of Jérôme Lindon, each moment a discrete insight into the tensions created by the war. Its central feature, though, is a polyphonic representation of characters which, we are told, embodies the stories of friends, family and acquaintances of the cast.

Through its structure, the play consciously foregrounds the division and fragmentation of the war. Rather than a single narrative, the histories constitute a series of fifteen tableaux of moments from the war to the present. The putative hierarchy between performers and audience is disrupted at the outset when the seven actors in turn step forward to introduce themselves and the character(s) that they will be playing. Briefly, each actor states their character’s name and the group to which they belong, necessary because the ethnicity, gender and age of the actors is unrelated to the characters whom they portray. Actors often play one character and also the character’s child of a different gender; one scene comprises a monologue in which the actor plays both a *pied-noir* grandmother and her grandson. This disjuncture between actor and character is a conscious decision to fundamentally disrupt assumptions about identities because, as Eskenazi (2023) states,

je ne crois pas à l’identification [...] Ce qui m’intéresse le plus au plateau est de voir l’acteur. trice devenir devant moi un rôle, y plonger, le construire à vue. Je trouve que l’adhésion fonctionne à ce moment-là d’autant plus forte.

On one level, then, the staging removes the traditional hierarchy between actors and audience, democratising the space, while simultaneously constructing a distance by refusing an empathetic identification with the actors. Because most characters appear only in one or two sequences, actors play multiple roles, placing further cognitive demands on the audience and minimising emotional investment. The distanciation produced is heightened by the self-consciously artificial staging: sets are minimal, framed by a transparent tulle curtain which allows visual penetration whilst holding the audience



at a distance.<sup>8</sup> Occasionally actors break the fourth wall. Sequences are brief and fragmented, and initially they appear unrelated. They begin in darkness and dissolve without ceremony, heightening the cognitive load and forcing the audience to work to make sense of them, with only brief super-titles announcing the location and date. By disrupting attitudes towards the war the play achieves Rancière's site of dissensus: regardless of the audience's pre-existing perspectives on the war, the play refuses easy identification with the staged subject positions.

But if the *Verfremdungseffekt* of the staging works against the empathetic involvement of the audience, the script's focus on moments of dramatic confrontation gradually produces the 'adhésion' referred to by Eskenazi and with it, emotional intensity. The sequences begin in 1955 with a group of conscripts celebrating Christmas. Gérard, the viewer's proxy, breaks the fourth wall to introduce us to his comrades: the naïve youth, the anti-colonial Communist, the suspected rapist, the Algerian Muslim, and the sergeant parroting patriotic dogma. The young Gérard speaks with the benefit of hindsight, highlighting the references to systematic rapes and torture that caused lasting controversy, and concluding with one of the play's central ideas: 'La violence ne les quittait jamais' (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 5). Violence features explicitly—the opening is followed by a dancehall sequence in the Casino de la Corniche near Algiers as it is bombed by the FLN in 1957—and in the intensity of emotions manifested by the young and energetic cast. Confrontation, in which anger, frustration and fear are loudly expressed, characterises interactions. The *guerre des mémoires* is under way.

Implicit in attempts to move beyond competitive memory is the drive towards a representative multiperspectivism. Across its fifteen sequences, the play includes characters from each of the diverse groups involved in the war. Crucially, the playwrights reject the reductive narratives propounded by activist groups and instead attend to the conflicting experiences contained within communities. Presenting individual stories allows them to expose and highlight the internal divisions that are moments of Rancierian dissensus. We witness the recruitment of Brahim, an FLN militant whose initiation test is the gunning down of a meeting of rival nationalists from the MNA in a fratricidal demonstration of loyalty, and his French counterpart Mado, a *porteuse de valise* assigned to work with Brahim. Together they are sent to surveil the premiere of *Le Cadavre encerclé*, Kateb's 'contribution à la révolution algérienne' (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 9), while later Mado appears in the making of Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 23). The play thus presents artistic creation as intimately bound up with specific strands of political activism. The response of Brahim's daughter to hearing his story—'Mon père m'a raconté son recrutement par deux types qui le testaient [...] Alors moi, je me suis inventé un film' (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 6), testifies not only to the multiple perspectives within the Algerian community but how the memories of that period are mediated through others and through art.

The play's constant shifting between short sequences is initially disorienting but gradually, characters reappear in different contexts. Slowly the audience pieces together two separate arcs of individual but entangled histories as the sequences advance through the decades. Three aspects are foregrounded in this process. Firstly, the play underscores Gérard's retrospective conclusion about the lasting effects of violence: each character bears the psychological scars of the war. Secondly, exposing the audience to the effects of violence on individuals over time overcomes the deliberate distancing created by the

staging and enables an empathetic response to the emotional suffering communicated by the actors. This is accentuated by the play's third aspect: rather than showing retrenchment into competitive memory, the playwrights demonstrate how experiences resulting from the war demolish the characters' certainties, leading the putatively clear distinctions between subject-positions to fracture into a complex mass of damaged, divided subjects. Philippe, the soldier suspected by Gérard of multiple rapes, is a broken man at the veterans' thirtieth anniversary celebrations. Paul, the Communist, is accused of having abandoned his friends by deserting, despite having served a prison sentence. Gérard himself, haunted by his memories, fumbles towards atonement by suggesting unsuccessfully that they give their war pensions to an Algerian education charity. Francis, the patriotic sergeant, who saved the life of Ahmed, the *harki*, in an apparently admirable act, says that the experience motivated him to join the OAS: 'Il fallait le faire pour tous les gens comme Ahmed—qui nous avaient choisis, que avaient choisi la France et à qui on avait dit qu'on ne les abandonnerait pas' (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 32). Meanwhile Brahim, the FLN activist who murdered the MNA members, has his dreams of an independent Algeria shattered when, as a Communist, he is disowned by his family and tortured by Boumédiène's regime. The emotional impact of the scenes as the audience surveys the remnants of the brash young men blurs the line between perpetrators and victims. The war has exposed and destroyed the pretence of moral absolutes.

The play exposes the atomisation caused by the war. Divisions are de-massified and multiplied: characters putatively on the same side find themselves separated by their experiences or making common cause with former enemies. In the sequence featuring Ahmed, the *harki* saved by Francis, we hear his long experience of discrimination, which also affects his son Daniel, born in the *harki camp de Bias*. Expectations are confounded, however, as it transpires that Ahmed's only confidant is his friend Amine, a former FLN fighter. Sharing stories of the hardships that they have experienced, from opposing sides in the war but 'tous les deux dans la même galère' (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 35), they are brought together by their shared memory of suffering, which unites them even as it cuts them off from their own sons, born in France.

Key to its interrogation of competitive memory is the play's use of time. By juxtaposing brief, dramatically intense incidents brought together across time and tracing the development of characters across the decades, it explodes the classical theatrical unities of time and space. Allowing the audience to see what the characters have become and reassess their initial judgements, it highlights the contingent nature of assumptions based on snapshots of memory. Confrontations are expressed as authentic and legitimate, presented with respect and without condemnation. In this sense, it presents a radically democratic approach to conflicting memories.

Yet we might ask what this approach ultimately achieves. Following Rancière, the play disrupts the established social structures, revealing them to contain a multitude of divisions and connections. In doing so it posits dissensus as the inescapable outworking of the Algerian War, suggesting that it has destroyed social cohesion not only at a national level but within communities. The lasting impression is of psychic pain and damage: a fitting memorial to the war, but offering little future direction. The only suggestion of a way out of the impasse of division comes in the play's closing scene, with the speech delivered by Assia Djebar on the occasion of her entry to the Académie française, where she voices the hope that language may heal the wounds

of memory: ‘Mon français, doublé par le velours, mais aussi les épines des langues autrefois occultées, cicatrisera peut-être mes blessures mémorielles’ (Carré and Eskenazi 2019, 40). The insertion of ‘peut-être’ underscores the frailty of the hope. In this sense, the play is open to some of the criticisms that have been levelled at Rancière’s project. Rancière regards the distance between individuals as fundamental. Language brings them into a community in which they remain separate, with communication possible only through constant acts of translation: ‘Les hommes sont unis parce qu’ils sont des hommes, c’est-à-dire des êtres distants. Le langage ne les réunit pas. C’est au contraire son arbitraire qui, les forçant à traduire, les met en communication d’efforts—mais aussi en communauté d’intelligence’ (Rancière 1987, 37). The resolution of difference is not Rancière’s aim, because difference and the separation it engenders is irreducible. This has consequences for political mobilisation since Rancière actively calls for those who would come together to ‘retain distinct elements and refuse to “aggregate”’ (Fryer 2021, 115). Hallward (2009, 155) sees this as a weakness: ‘In short, Rancière’s emphasis on division and interruption makes it difficult to account for qualities that are just as fundamental to any sustainable political sequence: organisation, simplification, mobilisation, decision, polarisation, taking sides, and so forth’. Rancière’s approach, like *Et le cœur fume encore*, would seem to condemn society to perpetual division; it forecloses the possibility of creating collectives that might work sustainably to effect meaningful change.

What alternative might be possible? Reinelt (2021, 177) argues that Rancière’s focus on ‘The stark binary of power and resistance that is the conceptual driver of both anarchy and dissensus does not recognise the complex and interrelational components of hegemony that an alternative radical theorist such as Chantal Mouffe embraces as the basis for creating lasting change’. In the post-1962 context, characterised by a situation of unstable official power and competition between groups seeking—but not attaining—control of the hegemonic narrative, a focus on the complex interrelational dynamics of power is required. Mouffe (2005) argues that human society is inherently antagonistic, tending to produce divisions between a social group constructed with imagined shared characteristics, and in opposition to alternative, ‘outsider’ groups. Consequently, the world is ‘ontologically antagonistic and conflictual’ with divisions frequently constructed on the basis of nationalism or class (Cento Bull, Hansen, and Colom-González 2021, 15). Mouffe calls for such antagonism to be contained within democratic processes reminiscent of the cosmopolitan appeal to supra-national legal frameworks, whilst not flattening or denying the force of specific conflicts. She terms this a move towards agonistic democracy. Her aim is that we recognise others not as enemies, but rather as adversaries with a right to their position and to the expression of that position. In this way antagonism can be transformed into an agonism compatible with pluralist democracy (Mouffe 2005, 20). As Petrović Lotina (2018, 143, 154) puts it,

Jacques Rancière envisaged the model of communal anarchism; a politics of disorder and dissensus, without any type of mastery. Chantal Mouffe envisaged the model of agonistic pluralism; a politics of order and conflictual consensus, regulated by hegemony and decisional acts [...] anarchism stands for the artistic strategies of disruption conveyed by *le partage du sensible*, agonism stands for the artistic strategies of engagement that articulate initial *mise-en-sense* into *mise-en-scène*.

Mouffe's emphasis on democracy reflects her belief in the possibility of the dialogic coexistence of conflicting narratives, a position that has led Cento Bull and Hansen (2016) to use her work as the basis of an emerging model of 'agonistic' memory. Mouffe's optimism contrasts with Rothberg's assessment of the 'zero sum game' mechanisms inherent in competitive memory. Influenced by Bakhtin's dialogism, Cento Bull, Hansen, and Colom-González (2021, 15) argue that the aim should not be to 'dissolve conflict' but to 'transform the extant relations of power and to establish a new hegemony' through what they term 'agonistic dialogue'. This would allow for the acknowledgement and expression of the range of different positions, experiences and perspectives that exist in all societies but that are exacerbated in instances of traumatic history. It would include not only the victims but the bystanders, beneficiaries and implicated subjects (Rothberg 2019) and also the perpetrators of crimes, torture and atrocity, allowing the vectors of history to be captured through social and political contextualisation. Eschewing resolution as an aim, agonistic democracy revolves 'around the permanent struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects, in which opposed views, political passions and social imaginaries compete, but can be democratically channelled through an adversarial dynamics of public contest and confrontation' (Cento Bull, Hansen, and Colom-González 2021, 16). In short, opposing groups are reclassified not as the enemy to be annihilated, but as adversaries to be encountered. Such a radical multi-perspectivist approach works towards creating a 'conflicting consensus' in which contrasting or opposing viewpoints confront and compete with each other in an open-ended manner. Because the groups are not constrained to fit into an authoritative narrative, we are able to hear the perpetrator's perspective, not in order to excuse or legitimise crimes but to understand and guard against the social and political processes whereby humans become able to commit them.

Central to agonistic memory is the imperative to bring opposing experiences into dialogue. Cento Bull et al. (2021, 32) emphasise the importance of narratives in the creation of radical multiperspectivism. This is part of the work of literature and theatre, offering audiences the opportunity to engage emotionally with narratives by creating empathy and, on occasion, identification with characters. Empathy, however, is not inherently progressive: as Suzanne Keen (2006, 208–209) points out, it can be translated as 'I feel what you feel' and sympathy as 'I feel a supportive emotion about your feeling'. It allows the reader insight into a subject perspective, without the obligation to approve. Since, as Bakhtin observed, the novel is fundamentally dialogic and intrinsically open to bringing conflicting perspectives into contact, it creates a space for the challenge and reassessment of assumptions. To the dialogism of literature, theatre adds dramatic immediacy, which combines with character to facilitate conflict. Because conflict, physical and psychological, is the primary driver of drama, the theatre has long been a space in which conflict has been used to provoke an emotional response from the audience. From Aristotle's advancement of the uses of theatrical catharsis to Bandura's (1983, 2001) research on vicarious learning, the social benefits of theatrical representations of conflict have intrigued scholars interested in emotional and cognitive responses. Such work approaches theatre as an artistic rather than aesthetic object where value derives from comprehension of the work (Stecker 2012, 357), but it also appeals to the emotional response of both audience and performers.<sup>9</sup> Berceanu, Matu, and Macavei (2020) observed emotional and cognitive responses to theatrical representations of instances

of violence and also acted recollections of instances of violence amongst audiences and performers, finding responses to both from audiences and performers. Similarly, research by Farrington et al. (2019) and Goldstein, Lerner, and Winner (2017) highlighted the positive social and emotional learning derived from engaging in theatre as both a performer and an audience member. Troxler et al.'s (2022) work on social perspective-taking suggests that exposure to theatre performance can affect the perception of the thoughts, feelings and motivations and that, beyond this, it can positively impact affective empathy, whereby the empathiser tends to vicariously experience the emotions of the target of their empathy (Jolliffe and Farrington 2006). Such findings support Bandura's (1983, 2001) theory of vicarious learning, which suggests that social learning is possible through observing the behaviour of others.

The emotional and cognitive responses to theatre suggest that performance might enable the dramatic presentation of radical multiperspectivism through a range of individual characters who also represent larger groups. The process of creating characters who 'stand in' for communities is not without risk, however: Jeffers (2012, 143) argues that it may reproduce stereotypes, particularly where suffering is involved, as 'practitioners tread a precarious line between producing validation, on the one hand, and victimhood, on the other'. This risks entrenching the binary divisions of competitive memory, leaving playwrights and directors with the challenge of balancing representativity with meaningful, non-reductive narratives. Nonetheless, unlike the static visual cultures of art or photography, where images of suffering are easily reduced to passive victimhood, theatre combines literary text with the agency of embodied performance, enabling the actor to take a role and develop it beyond stereotype into a fully rounded character. Moreover, the potential for light and shade offered by drama allows theatrical representations of conflict to escape the desensitisation and numbness that Çelik Rappas and Benegas Loyo (2020, 75–76) observe in relation to violence in state propaganda, where viewers actively resist identification with victims out of fear of sharing their fate. Theatre performance can invite the audience to identify and engage emotionally with interactions between radically different perspectives and subject positions that are not their own, allowing responses to be posited, rehearsed and modelled, and potentially leading to epistemic gains and emotional shifts. In the Franco-Algerian context in which competitive memory has led to a *dialogue de sourds*, the application of conflicting approaches offers a seductive route out of the impasse.

### **War in the *boulodrome*: *Les Pieds tanqués***

*Et le cœur fume encore* deliberately creates a critical distance for its audience and uses a timespan of decades to paint the portrait of lifetimes lived in the shadow of war. By deferring affective empathy, its approach to agonistic memory situates judgement in the widest possible context that works horizontally across society and vertically through generations. In contrast, *Les Pieds tanqués*, written by Philippe Chuyen, employs a radically different, character-driven approach that seeks to build audience engagement from the outset. A one-scene play set on a Provençal *boulodrome*, it features three male friends who are joined by a Parisian outsider for a game of *pétanque*. The characters represent different groups—the initial three players are a *ped-noir*, a *Beur* and a Provençal—with further perspectives added through the remembered experiences of their parents'

generation. The play's subtitle—'Quand les mémoires s'entre-choquent'—highlights the collision of perspectives that occurs in response to the contested history of Algeria and, to an extent, the characters conform to the types associated with their origins. Zé, the *pied-noir*, is prone to lapses of self-pity and nostalgia: 'Nous l'accent, c'est tout ce qu'il nous reste' (Chuyen 2012, 6). Yaya, the *Beur*, is constantly forced to negotiate the expectations of a society that regards him as a foreigner. The infuriated response of Loule, the Provençal—'Fatche de con, c'est le bal des victimes aujourd'hui !' (Chuyen 2012, 6)—speaks to the exhausting nature of the competitive model of memory. Indeed, the dangers of identitarian fixity resulting in a *dialogue de sourds* are realised, as Loule resolutely refuses to talk about the past.

Yet the play departs from convention in terms of its genre. The majority of texts about the Algerian War and its legacies share the characteristics of *Et le cœur fume encore*: they reproduce the intense emotions of anger, fear and frustration associated with war, to which are often allied scenes of violence, death and suffering. In contrast, *Les Pieds tanqués* is a comedy that uses humour to emotionally engage its audiences from the outset by creating an entente between characters and audience. The individual characters are affectionately and knowingly sketched, so that when in a dispute about the game's score Zé, the *pied-noir*, is accused of having 'la mémoire courte', the audience is aware that his response of 'La mémoire courte? Ah non, pas moi' (Chuyen 2012, 3) is, in a wider context, ironic. Similarly, when Zé tells Yaya, the *Beur* character, that he should be prepared 'que je vous désintègre' in the next game, Yaya's response, 'Pas moi Zé. Je suis parfaitement intégré!' (Chuyen 2012, 3), produces laughs from the audience.<sup>10</sup> The auditory experience of audience laughter creates an experience of shared responses to dramatic stimuli and, with it, a temporary sense of community. Chuyen uses these exchanges to establish how the divisions between communities can coexist with friendship based on *pétanque*, which has its roots in a masculine culture of sporting banter that pokes fun at cultural stereotypes.

The comedic entente between characters and audience makes the presence of conflict—past and present—the more striking. The opening sequence signals the irruption of the past as Loule's game preparations are repeatedly interrupted by radio newsflashes reporting the 25 July 1995 bombing of the Saint Michel metro. Loule's refusal to engage with the news, changing stations and finally switching off the radio, encapsulates the characters' initial focus on the present game at hand. Initially, conflict centres on the rural-urban divide between the three friends, Loule, Zé and Yaya, and the Parisian incomer, M. Blanc. With his aristocratic origins ('M. Blanc de la Martinière'), Parisian accent and ignorance of Provençal *moeurs*, M. Blanc is a comic outsider who inadvertently triggers memories of past conflict when, in response to Zé's *pied-noir* complaint of being misunderstood, he naively reassures Zé that 'Si, moi je crois que je vous ai compris' (Chuyen 2012, 6).

The reference to de Gaulle's infamous speech of June 1958 garners an instant reaction and opens the Pandora's box of memories of the Algerian War. From M. Blanc's assertions that 'Ce n'était pas une guerre' and 'On était tous des Français' (Chuyen 2012, 8) to Zé's pride in Camus and *pied-noir* culture, Yaya's recognition of the magnitude of the violence and Loule's steadfast Provençal determination to ignore talk of the war in favour of playing *pétanque*, the play foregrounds historical divisions. To achieve a greater degree of representativity and reflect the divisions within communities, Chuyen, like Eskenazi and

Carré, explores the intergenerational impacts on his small cast. His characters therefore 'alternent sur deux plans: celui de leur mémoire transmise par leur histoire familiale, et celui de leur vécu personnel d'homme de 1995 date à laquelle la pièce se passe' (Chuyen 2022). Loule's refusal of the past is shown to stem from his ambivalence about his father's conduct. A Communist railway-worker, his father had acted as a *porteur de valise*, funneling cash from Paris to Marseille and across to Algeria. Loule is conflicted by this memory: 'Il transférait du pognon pour acheter des bombes qui tuaient ses compatriotes. C'est pas beau ça?' (Chuyen 2012, 11). M. Blanc, for his part, shifts from being the uninvolved outsider to confessing that his father was an officer who oversaw a torture centre overlooking Algiers. A veteran of the Resistance, captured by the Nazis and by the Viet-Minh at Diên Biên Phu, his experience in Algeria drove him to take his own life three months after his return to France. Because of his father's suicide, M. Blanc has no memory of his father, a situation shared by Yaya, whose father was an FLN member detained and killed by the French army. Yaya's uncle had served as a *harki* who himself was murdered when the captain of his ship received orders to disembark all *harkis* seeking to leave for France. At the hands of the French army Yaya's family has therefore lost members fighting on both sides of the war. Generational history is shown to underpin contemporary positions in complex ways.

Including the wartime experiences of the older generation allows Chuyen efficiently to expand the representativity of his small cast. In comparison to *Et le cœur fume encore*, in which children were often alienated from their parents' experiences, here, with the exception of Loule's ambivalence, intergenerational memory transmission is presented as unproblematic, even respectful. The technique raises questions about the extent to which an agonistic approach to memory should be comprehensive in its multiperspectivism. Agonism does not seek resolution and its aim of facilitating dialogue and allowing the audience to produce informed responses implies a degree of what might be termed 'balance' or 'impartiality' that leaves open the possibility of differing interpretations. Mehdi Charef voiced his anxiety regarding this aspect of his play, *1962, le dernier voyage*, which brings together characters from Algeria's communities on the eve of independence:

J'ai seulement peur que certains y voient a priori une pièce partisane et revancharde, ce qu'elle n'est nullement. Je sais qu'elle va susciter des réactions très contrastées. Il y a des juifs, des pieds-noirs et des Arabes dans cette pièce. Et dans ces trois communautés il y aura des débats et des controverses. Mais on parlera enfin de l'Algérie. (Charef 2005, 67)

Set at the cusp of independence with emotions running high, Charef's play appeared at the height of the *guerre des mémoires*. By 2012 the fiftieth anniversary coverage had brought a more inclusive approach, allowing Chuyen (2022) to assert confidently, 'La pièce est impartiale je crois, les gens le ressentent ... chaque mémoire est évoquée sans mépris, ni volonté de nuire, ni recherche de culpabilité, enfin je crois ...'. In both plays, however, impartial representation appears to be an implicit aim.

Yet if agonistic memory does not assign blame, it nonetheless has to address forms of guilt and perpetration. The playwrights have chosen to address this in different ways. Three of Eskenazi and Carré's characters lay the blame at the door of politicians, including Francis, the conscript turned OAS member who asserts, 'Ce n'est pas à nous de rougir. C'est aux politiques. Ce sont les politiques qui nous ont demandé de ... pendant la

guerre . . . puis ils nous ont lâchés' (Eskenazi and Carré 2019, 32). Individual perpetrations of atrocity—Francis's confession of army torture and OAS membership, the allegations of rape against Philippe—are presented as the consequence of France's policies. That sequence ends with a recording of the political scientist Paul-Max Morin, which reminds the audience that one of the early acts of the Socialist President Mitterrand was to reinstate the ranks, decorations and pensions of the OAS putsch members, many of whom went on to re-energise the far-right National Front. However uncomfortable the shifting of blame away from individual perpetrators may be, the play repeatedly suggests that the responsibility sits with politicians on all sides.

Blaming politicians for the conditions that made perpetration possible has a certain simplistic attraction. Chuyen approaches the issue differently, instead attempting, as Cento Bull, Hansen, and Colom-González (2021) advocate, to offer insight into the factors that led to perpetration. M. Blanc describes his father as being trapped by the system—'C'est l'engrenage dans lequel il a été pris là-bas qui l'a broyé. Ça a été au-dessus de ses forces' (Chuyen 2012, 18)—with suicide the only way out. The play parallels his situation with that of Camus—'celui qui s'est tu' (Chuyen 2012, 8)—who in the impasse of war chose silence. M. Blanc seeks to humanise the torturer, arguing that he believed in France's ideals and sovereignty, sought to avoid systematic use of physical torture, and that had he deserted another would have taken his place. His father's own experience of torture at the hands of the Viet-Minh demonstrates the complexity surrounding the category of the perpetrator. In the end, however, M. Blanc's defence that, like Camus, 'Mon père aussi était juste un homme' (Chuyen 2012, 16), with its suggestion that the frailty of humanity excuses the perpetration of evil, falls short. It serves as a reminder of how affective bonds compound the difficulty of confronting those who commit the worst atrocities.

*Les Pieds tanqués* acknowledges the competitive nature of memories of the Algerian War but it uses the features of theatre to explore and push beyond them. Through the presentation of rounded characters it rehearses and models the responses to confrontation. At discrete moments M. Blanc, Zé and Loule each react to conflict by leaving the stage, and only reluctantly are coaxed back to finish the game. The script invites the audience to empathise with these moments of pain and suffering but it also models alternative responses. M. Blanc, having shared and defended the story of his father's life, on hearing Yaya's testimony of his father and uncle, is moved to action. 'Si ça peut avoir une valeur pour vous, Yaya, au nom de la mémoire de mon père, pour votre oncle, pour votre père (*il enlève son chapeau et lui tend la main*): je vous demande pardon' (Chuyen 2012, 20). The question of forgiveness—and more broadly, of expressions of apology and regret—is bound up with contested questions of responsibility, agency and meaningfulness: M. Blanc speaks as the son of the perpetrator asking forgiveness from the man whose father and uncle died at the hands of French forces. Moreover, he is asking forgiveness for the events that caused the deaths of three people whom he and Yaya never knew. Yaya's response, 'Merci M. Blanc, mais laissez-le tranquille, votre père, il a assez donné va' (Chuyen 2012, 20), accompanied by a handshake that recognises the value of the sentiment, signals the limits of responsibility that the ghosts of the past and their descendants in the present can be made to bear. Chuyen regards forgiveness as an important aspect of the play: 'C'est [...] une pièce sur le pardon, pour notre culture judéo-chrétienne je pense que c'est important, ça aussi ça rend les choses entendables'



(Chuyen 2022). Whether or not the 'Judeo-Christian' includes Muslim perspectives such as Yaya's, Chuyen's emphasis on the 'entendable'—on the need to be heard—bears consideration. The moment of forgiveness remains an important model of the healing that becomes possible when past harms are confronted, acknowledged and where responsibility is taken.

The exchange frees Yaya and M. Blanc to move beyond confrontation to imagine alternatives. At first this is in retrospect, as Yaya imagines what might have been, 'L'Algérie, un subtil mélange de Musulmans, de Chrétiens et de Juifs qui vivraient en paix, d'égal à égal: la plus belle et la plus grande des régions françaises, de l'Union européenne!' (Chuyen 2012, 23). Yaya's vision smacks of the tradition of 'missed opportunities' in relation to French Algeria, but Chuyen takes it further as M. Blanc imagines the future: 'Et si cette région elle existait déjà? Si l'expérience d'Algérie, commencée en 1830, avait toutes les chances de réussir ici en Provence, au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Comme une greffe qui aurait pris de ce côté-ci de la Méditerranée?' (Chuyen 2012, 23). The utopian quality of his speech is comically undercut by the reactions of his fellow players, described in the stage directions as 'tous le regardant pantois', but it remains nonetheless the emotional climax of the play, leaving an implied challenge to the audience hanging in the air. Moreover, despite their incredulous reaction the other players respond positively. The opening of the play had foregrounded the social divisions and conflict between the characters; now, the game resumes and the same lines are repeated but with a subtle yet constructive difference. Now it is Zé who teases Loule for having 'la mémoire courte', and Yaya who asks if they have a chance of 'disintegrating' Loule in the game (Chuyen 2012, 23). M. Blanc no longer protests at being labelled 'M. Brun' but joyfully assumes the moniker, along with the Provençal title of 'faiseur de *nari*', whose significance continues to escape him.

The sudden amity serves as a manifestation of the utopian vision proffered by M. Blanc; it also functions as a demonstration of how social harmony is made possible. The characters reprise in positive tones the lines spoken in irritation by other players at the play's opening, or respond to the same lines in different, more positive ways, to the delight of the audience, whose empathetic engagement with the characters is now rewarded by comic recognition. But this is not simply a spontaneous outbreak of harmony: to reprise another's lines requires that the characters have listened to and heard each other's earlier complaints, and that they are able to respond in an ethical manner that is also playful, even joyful. An entente requires the respect of listening to the other, of hearing and accepting their story while not negating one's own experiences. It functions to signal that the experiences and perspectives have been heard, respected and responded to. As Chuyen (2022) puts it, it demands that resentments be made 'entendable'. In this regard it approaches the agonistic democracy advocated by Cento Bull, Hansen, and Colom-González (2021) that is achieved through the process of agonistic dialogue.

In *Et le cœur fume encore*, perspectives are presented through fragmented sequences that foreground specific moments of confrontation. Without a structure that would bring sequences into dialogue the complex work of synthesis is left to the individual viewer. *Les Pieds tanqués*, on the other hand, allows the characters to hear and respond to the experiences and memories of opposing perspectives and to rehearse moments of confrontation, frustration and anger. In doing so, it challenges Rancière and Mouffe's models

and their narrow focus on disruption and conflict, arguing that to centre our understanding on division is to lose sight of the wider social context and allow the memory of conflict to become overdetermining. The expression of memory conflict is embedded within a wider social context of shared culture that precedes, frames, and extends beyond the divisions of war. Although Zé, Yaya and Loule come from different sides in the war, the opening sequences show their long-standing friendship rooted in a shared love of *pétanque*. M. Blanc is initially a stranger who becomes a friend because of the game. Their memories and origins are diverse but in the present they participate actively in the same sporting culture, one that is particularly French in nature. Indeed, the *pétanque* pitch, with its codes, its actors and its tragedies, functions as a symbolic backdrop, ‘une République en miniature’ (Chuyen 2022), for the national conversation. Although they have experienced uprooting, exile and migrations, *pétanque*, from the Provençal *pè tanca*, which refers to playing with feet rooted to the ground, becomes a site in which the wounds of the past and the divisions of the present are aired. The tone is not competitive or dismissive; rather, Chuyen (2022) argues, ‘chaque mémoire est évoquée sans mépris, ni volonté de nuire, ni recherche de culpabilité’. Memories can be raised precisely because the masculine sporting culture of *pétanque* and its banter, game talk and comic exchange have established a camaraderie that cushions the pain of the past.

Indeed, the comic genre of the play disarms not only the confrontations between characters, but also the audience. The tone is not satirical but gently comic, poking fun at each of the protagonists in turn. It works in a Bakhtinian sense to destabilise authoritative discourse, inviting the audience into knowing complicity with the characters. Chuyen (2022) argues that the disarming use of humour is responsible for the positive reception of the play: ‘le rire issu de la situation a permis de faire pénétrer les gens dans des choses qu’on a du mal à évoquer en France du fait que certaines mémoires sont toujours à vifs’. Embedding moments of traumatic remembering in an atmosphere of camaraderie works against the tendency of much cultural production to highlight and reproduce the intense, isolating emotions of individual pain, loss and suffering associated with the war. In contrast, in its use of the French culture of *pétanque* *Les Pieds tanqués* appeals to what its protagonists share, rather than what divides them.

Artistic reflections on memories of the Algerian War, like the dramatic representations analysed here, recognise the impossibility of producing a singular narrative of the war and the need to resist imposed resolution, whilst also striving to move beyond the sterile impasse of competitive memory. *Et le cœur fume encore* takes a Rancierian approach, destabilising the identification between actor and character to produce moments of dissensus that highlight the fractured nature of experience. It holds its audiences at a distance, deferring judgement on intra-group and inter-generational encounters that highlight the isolation and trauma of individuals and challenging them to synthesise a coherent narrative from the discordant scenes of (post-)war damage. The provisional ‘community’ that emerges through this Rancierian work of translation is founded on pain, a negatively charged force that holds its members in proximity and yet repels them. It is difficult to see a productive path towards reconciliation emerging on this basis. In contrast, because of its conventional, character-driven form, *Les Pieds tanqués* approaches the need for dialogue literally and so exhibits characteristics of the agonistic model of memory, working through multiperspective conflict to model the transformation of relations and establish a new balance of power based on forgiveness and respect for

difference. Its originality lies in its emphasis on what its characters have in common—a shared culture that unites them despite the divisions of war—which ultimately proves as meaningful as their memories. The drama’s disarming use of humour extends the experience of complicity, and even empathy, to the audience, involving them in the process of making ‘entendable’ the pain of the past. While the transformatory power of art may be momentary and the vision of unity offered by the play utopian, the agonistic model that it draws on offers a tentative vision of a more sustainable relationship with memory. Ultimately, it suggests that emphasising what we have in common may be the most productive context in which to listen to the conflicts of the past.

## Notes

1. Algeria’s memories of the ‘Révolution algérienne’ have followed a separate trajectory and are not discussed here.
2. To Rousso’s list of vectors of memory McCormack (2007, 5) adds the media, the education system, and the family.
3. Stora’s own response—the 2021 Stora report commissioned by Emmanuel Macron—focused on the aim of promoting reconciliation between France and Algeria, rather than easing the tensions between competing groups engaged in ‘memory wars’ within the national discursive space. Indeed, Macron’s recent conduct is suggestive of a desire to address colonial-era issues and ‘move on’, liberating all generations from the burden of the colonial past. As Hassett discusses in this issue, this disregards the fact that the younger generation have a different relation to colonisation and neglects the need—clearly visible since Chirac’s identification of ‘la fracture sociale’—for reconciliation amongst the estimated seven million French citizens directly affected by decolonisation. For a discussion of the Stora report, see Mortimer (2023) and Slyomovics (2023).
4. This dossier was accessible using Adobe Flash, now rarely used; as a consequence the dossier is now unobtainable and in 2019 *Le Monde* advised that there were no plans to update it.
5. To date, films featuring the Algerian War have attracted considerable scholarly attention (Austin 2009; Donadey 2020; Stora 2008; Stora and Anderson 2014); consequently this article focuses on recent plays.
6. The four plays analysed by Bradby are François Bourgeat, *Djurdjura* (Paris: Theatrales, 1991); Eugene Durif, *B. M. C.* (Paris: Comp’Act, 1991); Bernard-Marie Koltes, *Le Retour au desert* (Paris: Minuit, 1988); Daniel Lemahieu, *Djebels* (Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers, 1988).
7. Amann (2019) and Eskenazi and Carré’s (2019) titles each form part of a triptych focused on different aspects of France’s history, indicating a wider desire to engage with memories of the nation’s past. Only those relating to the Algerian War will be considered here.
8. I am grateful for Margaux Eskenazi for sharing a recording of a live performance of *Et le coeur fume encore* produced on 12 February 2021 at the Comédie de Béthune CDN Hauts-de-France.
9. Stecker distinguishes between artistic and aesthetic responses to a work as follows: ‘artistic value derives from what artists successfully intend to do in their works as mediated by functions of the art forms and genres to which the works belong. [So] does one need to understand the work to appreciate its being valuable in that way? If so, it is an artistic value. If not, it is not’ (Stecker 2012, 357).
10. I am grateful to Philippe Chuyen for sharing a recording of the live performance of *Les Pieds tanqués* produced in July 2018 at the Festival d’Avignon.

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