

Note: Snapshot PDF is the proof copy of corrections marked in EditGenie, the layout would be different from typeset PDF and EditGenie editing view.

## Author Queries & Comments:

**null** : No Queries

---

BOOK REVIEW

**Recto running head** : THE JOURNAL OF NORTH AFRICAN STUDIES

**Verso running head** : BOOK REVIEW

Clement M. Henry

Emeritus, University of Texas at Austin

 chenry1509@gmail.com

**Les camps de regroupement en Algérie: Une histoire des déplacements forcés (1954–1962)**, by Fabien Sacriste, Paris, Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2022, 336 pp., €24 (softcover), ISBN 978-2-7246-3865-3

### History :

**Copyright Line:** © 2022 Clement M. Henry

This book is a meticulously researched history of what had been in France an almost taboo subject: the French military's forced relocation of at least one-third of Algeria's rural population between 1954 and 1962. Fabien Sacriste has mined many of the relevant state archives, with special attention to those of the Sections Administratives Spécialisées (SAS) of the Service des Affaires Algériennes, created in September 1955. He also had access to private archives of major actors, including the infamous Maurice Papon as well as Paul Delouvrier, Charles de Gaulle's top civil servant for Algeria. The author was thus able to trace the bureaucratic infighting and difficult relationships between French military and civil authorities that Delouvrier was tasked to manage.

The very term 'camp de regroupement', whether in French or English, poses a problem. In colonial times regroupment was better known as 'concentration', associated with concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. It is also associated with nineteenth century Spanish 'reconcentrations' of Cubans and the American experience of pacifying the Philippines in 1900–1902 (14).<sup>1</sup> *Regroupement* acquired such negative connotations in French Algeria, evoking 'un régime concentrationnaire', that the term 'camp de regroupement' was banished by administrative decree in early 1960, along with 'centres de regroupement' and 'camps provisoires' (13). A significant portion of the rural population, however, remained displaced in these centres, euphemistically renamed 'villages' in 1959, many of which were forgotten after independence in 1962.

The forced relocations began just weeks after the outbreak of the Algerian war of independence on 1 November 1954. In the Aurès mountains, Shawi Berbers sustained the insurrection with the widespread support of the population. On 19 November, two state officials, three local administrators, and the regional military commander readily agreed to order local populations to regroup but hesitated to enforce the order to bomb those who refused to move. The fateful decision was passed up the line to higher authorities, reaching Interior Minister François Mitterrand, who authorised the bombing. During the winter of 1954–55 some 20,000 Algerians in the Aurès, near Arris in the Batna sub-prefecture, were displaced, marking the beginning of a process that was soon to be generalised across Algeria. The author graphs the detailed evolution of displaced people across Algeria (120, 123) and plots their locations on regional maps (51, 85, 124) from 1955 to 1959, along with some additional plots in 1961 in Akbou (in the Soummam Valley of Kabylia) and eastern Algeria (269, 301). He offers a running commentary on the infighting over policies and budgets between a military bent on counter revolutionary warfare and a civilian administration responsible for the welfare of their subjects.

The government's original response to the bureaucratic infighting in the Aurès was to summon General Gaston Parlange, a 'charismatic hero ... and living incarnation of Lyautey's Morocco', (60) to take charge of the region, bypassing local officials and directly reporting to the prefect of Constantine. Sacriste perhaps assumes that his readers know that pacification in Morocco was a living memory, the final dissidents being subdued as recently as 1934. The tried-and-true methods of Marshal Lyautey were now to be applied in Algeria: '*réprimer, encader, réformer*', with battalions of Moroccan troops accompanying General Parlange (61) to remedy Algeria's administrative shortcomings. He viewed the troubles in Algeria as due to lack of contact between the people and their rulers.

Compared to France, there were indeed fewer administrative personnel per capita in the Aurès, where sparse populations were spread widely in areas difficult to access. But Parlange was obliged to revise Morocco's traditional model of pacification to fit the tactics of counterinsurgency imported by French generals from Vietnam. Moreover, his Moroccan battalions had to be sent home for fear of their siding with the Algerian revolution. Parlange fought losing administrative battles to assure proper care for displaced populations. They were supposed to have new homes, schools, clinics, wells and fountains, souks, local government offices, communal centres, post offices, and possibly electrification, in communities to be placed within less than a forty-five-minute walk to their fields as well as offering people further economic opportunities. Instead, the army announced interdicted zones, obliging people to flee into 'temporary' regrouping centres, hastily set up by an overworked, underfunded local civilian administration and SAS.

After General de Gaulle returned to power following the 13 May 1958 military-led uprising, military-civilian relations became ever more fraught with tensions and failed coups attempts. The French army's counterinsurgency campaign accelerated in 1958 and 1959, nearly doubling the numbers of displaced Algerians, to over 800,000 (120). De Gaulle then appointed Delouvrier, one of Jean Monnet's elite team of civil servants, to take charge of Algeria. Sacriste offers a fascinating account of how he in turn tried to manage the relations and support Parlange and his cohort of reformers.

The catalyst was Michel Rocard (1930–2016), a young graduate of the prestigious *École Nationale d'Administration* employed in the Inspection de Finances, Delouvrier's home administration. A childhood friend of Rocard's, who had performed his military service in Algeria, informed him of the camps. He in turn contacted another childhood friend, who was a journalist with access to Delouvrier. The latter then assigned Rocard to evaluate the regroupment centres. Rocard delivered his report on 17 February 1959, just two months after Delouvrier's arrival. With the help of an *énarque* classmate the report eventually leaked to *Le Monde* which gave it full coverage. Delouvrier used the resulting scandal to crack down on military excesses while officially burying the centres, transubstantiated into a programme of *mille villages*, in a blitz of propaganda. A small number of showcase villages cut short the protests in the metropole against the military's *régime concentrationnaire*.

Delouvrier issued a series of decrees designed to limit and eventually stop forced displacement, and to ensure that any new villages be properly located and adequately serviced, but it was too little too late. Eventually well over two million Algerians joined the colonial gulag of over two thousand camps (151, 295–297). Ironically the FLN sometimes benefited from the concentration of populations because they could gain control from within these open-air prisons surrounded by barbed wire.

Sacriste's detailed study sheds further light on the tortured relationship between massive bombardment and modernisation that Samuel Huntington once claimed for US forces in Vietnam, a sort of modernisation from above<sup>2</sup>. In Algeria there was some truth to Delouvrier's testimony in 1959 (before receiving Rocard's report) of the

birth of new villages...and I could observe...at what speed, in many sectors, the Army was making populations descend from the Middle Ages to the 20th century... I could have been in Anjou or Brittany... [seeing] a family mother installed in one of those houses constructed by the Army where the SAS no longer serviced her *kanoun* [traditional oven]. She was behind her *butagaz*. (215)

Sacriste shows just how exceptional these models of military propaganda really were.

Ten years after independence some three-quarters of the regroupment centres survived with poor uprooted peasant families having no place to go (298), but Sacriste does not discuss their sequel: '*Les 1000 villages socialistes en Algérie*'<sup>3</sup>. Algeria's agrarian reform launched in 1972 was in part an effort to clean up the residual centres but also with mixed results. Modernisation from above never worked well in the countryside, whether directed by a colonial power or nationalist revolutionaries.

## Notes

- 1 Citing Iain R. Smith and Andreas Stucki, "The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps (1868–1902)," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (2011), 417–437. This reviewer could not find Sacriste's reference to an American Reconcentration Act in the article, but its discussion of the Philippines is worth further quotations, especially for an American audience: 'Anti-guerrilla strategies included not only the confiscation of property, summary executions, massacres, deportations and crop destruction but also civilian concentration in designated areas', where they were called 'concentration zones', building on the 'experience of establishing "reservations" for native Indians'. The authors also noted that 'in the "pacified" towns and villages, American civil administrators tried to implement allegedly social 'uplifting' programmes and economic development: new roads, schools, medical infrastructure, sanitation, and 'protection' from the guerrilla forces' – just like the French SAS in Algeria. There was another disturbing parallel: 'In the "concentration zones" in the Philippines, tens of thousands of people died in the space of a few months from malnutrition and disease' (424). ✘
- 2 Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Bases of Accommodation', *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 4 (July 1968), 642–656. The bottom of page 653 deserves a full quotation: 'In an absent-minded way the United States in Viet Nam may well have stumbled upon the answer to 'wars of national liberation'. The effective response lies neither in the quest for conventional military victory nor in the esoteric doctrines and gimmicks of counter-insurgency warfare. It is instead forced-draft urbanisation and modernisation which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can hope to generate sufficient strength to come to power'. On a personal note, I should add that, despite our political disagreements, Samuel Huntington was a pleasure to work with, as we organised a conference in 1968, later published as *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*, eds. Samuel P. Huntington & Clement Henry Moore (New York: Basic Books, 1970). ✘
- 3 Djaffar Lesbet's *troisième cycle* doctoral thesis, published as *Les 1 000 villages socialistes en Algérie* (Paris: Syros, 1983). See also Alberto Arcchi and Cyrille Megdiche, "Les villages socialistes en Algérie," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 19 (1979), 3–14, and François Burgat and Michel Nancy, *Les Villages socialistes de la révolution agraire, 1972-1982* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1984). ✘