



Combats étudiants pour l'indépendance de l'Algérie: UNEF-UGEMA (1955–1962)/Moments d'histoire des étudiants algériens de Montpellier (1948–2014): Contre l'oubli

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gives a glimpse into the drinking cultures, slang, songs, and sexual practices of soldiers, shaped as much by a pervasive sense of disconnection from the outside world as by a shared age or sense of solidarity. This theme of isolation extends into Chapter 9, which focuses on the experience of homecoming and the war's lingering effects on soldiers' health and psychology, as well as the enduring feelings of guilt, shame, or resentment. Jauffret underscores the heterogeneity of memory as well as experience: the generation of the war, he argues, is 'one of a multitude of solitudes' (221).

Jauffret's book offers a welcome counterweight to a literature often focused on the actions and perspectives of military elites, and it will certainly interest historians of decolonisation or postcolonial memory. It also grants historians of postwar France a unique window into the social and cultural turmoil surrounding compulsory military service in the 1950s. The book might have benefitted from a more extended discussion on why experiences of the conflict varied so greatly across region and unit, or whether patterns of shared experience could be detected. Likewise, historians of Algeria may find the discussions of French troops' interactions with Algerian Muslims a bit brief. That said, several important themes do emerge from the narrative – the pervasive sense of isolation and incomprehension, the traumatic and dehumanising experience of combat, and the deeply-rooted and multiple divides within the *contingent* – and Jauffret takes care to repeatedly draw readers' attention to them. Jauffret's volume makes an important intervention by complicating simple narratives about the motivations and experiences of French soldiers who served in Algeria, and his sensitive and dispassionate treatment of their memories adds to the growing literature on the memory of the war.

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Combats étudiants pour l'indépendance de l'Algérie: UNEF-UGEMA (1955–1962), by Dominique Wallon, Algiers, Casbah Éditions, 2014, 240 pp., DA 850 (paperback), ISBN 978-9947-62-066-3

Moments d'histoire des étudiants algériens de Montpellier (1948–2014): Contre l'oubli, by Messaoud Djennas, Algiers, Casbah Éditions, 2015, 184 pp., DA 750 (paperback), ISBN 978-9947-62-092-2

These books both recall the role of the Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans Algériens (UGEMA) in Algeria's struggle for independence (1954–62). Algerian students in Algiers and in the French metropole founded the Algerian Revolution's first and only truly autonomous civil society association in July 1955, less than nine months after the Front de Libération National (FLN) launched the revolution.

As documented by this reviewer in *UGEMA: Témoignages* (Casbah Éditions, 2010/2012; reviewed in the June 2015 issue of this journal), it was the students themselves, not the FLN leadership, who created their association and would fully align it in support of the FLN at UGEMA's second congress, held in March 1956. The authors of the books under review both consulted my series of interviews with UGEMA's leaders, and with Messaoud Djennas (72–74) correcting his earlier statement on page 226 of *Vivre, c'est croire: Mémoires 1925–1991* (Casbah Éditions, 2006), that 'it is the genius of Abane that was at the origin of this policy of national union'. Ramdane Abane took charge of organising the FLN after his release from prison in early 1955, but students were already working in the context of student syndicalism to form their own national association.

Dominique Wallon, in his excellent autobiography of these years, offers a working definition of student syndicalism. He is well placed, having served as international affairs vice president of the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF) in 1960–61, then as president in 1961–62. Incidentally, he is also the great-great-grandson of the Wallon named in the amendment that created the French Third Republic in 1875. UNEF, as its former president points out, was founded in 1907 and was the oldest of Europe's national unions of students. It was a federation of *associations générales d'étudiants* (AGE) that managed each French university's social, cultural, and information services. To better represent the corporate interests of students, UNEF's Grenoble Charter of 1946 elaborated a doctrine of student syndicalism in which students were defined as 'young intellectual workers'. UGEMA, like UNEF, would operate in this context under a French law of associations adopted in 1901.

Pursuing the interests of 'young intellectual workers' like those of their regular unionised workers, still raised the issue, however, of how politically engaged they might be. By 1950 French students were divided between a conservative majority (*majo*) faction that insisted on staying out of politics and limiting action to material and cultural concerns of students, and a progressive minority (*mino*) faction affirming the right of the student trade union to engage in political issues 'having consequences on the life of the university and its students or threatening fundamental values of democracy' (37). Like the Vietnam War for American students later on, the war in Algeria raised major political issues for French students. A few months after the July 1955 formation of UGEMA, France started sending conscript soldiers to fight in Algeria. Carefully balanced between its *majo* president and *mino* international affairs vice president, UNEF did not oppose sending draftees to Algeria but did express the desire to work together with UGEMA for peace. At its April 1956 congress the *minos* took full charge of UNEF by electing a homogenous executive bureau. UNEF then attempted dialogue with UGEMA, but by this time, UGEMA was insisting that UNEF take UGEMA's political stand of insisting on negotiations with the FLN to end the war. Only in 1960, when Wallon became international vice president of UNEF, did dialogue resume, taking the form of joint declarations with UGEMA's executive committee. France had meanwhile banned UGEMA in January 1958, causing it to transfer its offices to Lausanne, Switzerland.

Wallon carefully chronicles the evolution of student politics in UNEF during this period. While regretting the cautious stances of its *mino* leadership, he appreciated the need to curb its progressive tendencies in order to retain a broad corporate student base. As it was, in 1957 some 10 universities seceded from UNEF under the influence of the AGE of the European students of the University of Algiers. They had already left UNEF and would promote the overthrow of the Fourth Republic and return to power of Charles de Gaulle on 13 May 1958. As a student at Sciences Po in Paris, Wallon still had opportunities to represent UNEF abroad, becoming president of the Sciences Po AGE in the fall of 1959, just after finishing his undergraduate work and beginning a preparatory year of study to enter the *École Nationale d'Administration*. He then, in March 1960, played a leading role in organising a two-day student strike against the rescinding of student deferments from the draft, 'a golden opportunity to mobilize against the war on the basis of a syndicalist demand supported by a large majority of students' (65). In April he joined a united and relatively homogenous leadership of UNEF as its international affairs vice president and resumed UNEF's efforts to engage in a dialogue with UGEMA.

Just how far again, however, could UNEF go as a student union engaging in politics in pursuit of student interests? In September 1959 President De Gaulle had made his famous speech in favour of self-determination for the Algerian people, but independence for Algeria was not yet an official option. In June 1960 Wallon and Messaoud Aït Chaalal, the president of UGEMA, reached agreement on a joint declaration calling on the French government to engage in negotiations with the FLN (217–218), shortly before these actually began at Melun, but nonetheless provoking sharp retorts not only from the French government but also from the French Communist Party (PCF), which accused UNEF of 'petit bourgeois adventurism', as UNEF's action revealed the paralysis of the PCF's own leadership in the face of the Algeria question. To put the UNEF gesture in perspective for American readers, imagine the United States National Student Association joining the Vietminh National Student Association in urging Lyndon Johnson in 1967 to negotiate with the Vietcong.

Wallon went a step further in July 1960 when he represented UNEF at the Fourth National Congress of UGEMA held in Tunisia. While he persuaded Aït Chaalal to tone down a resolution urging French draft resistance, he uttered the word 'independence' once in his official speech to the congress. Barely 22 years old, Wallon now faced the wrath of French Prime Minister Michel Debré on his return to Paris. Even the centre-left Pierre Mendès-France, who was head of government when the Algerian war broke out in 1954, said that he would have banned UNEF for consorting with the enemy had he still been prime minister. UNEF nevertheless mustered the support of a broad front of trade unions to oppose the war – including the Communist-led *Confédération Générale du Travail* – at a well-attended meeting in October 1960, and with the unions issuing joint declarations with UNEF the following February. Wallon went on to become president of UNEF in April 1961, facing major pressure from the French Education Minister Lucien Paye to stop taking political stands or to lose various subsidies. Paye

even promoted a rival student union but UNEF retained 100,000 student members, roughly half of France's university population.

Further efforts to promote UNEF-UGEMA dialogue involved taking a position not only in favour of Algerian independence but also of maintaining its territorial integrity, including the strategic and oil-rich Sahara. UNEF anticipated by three months De Gaulle's capitulation on this point, leading to the final peace accords of March 1962. What Wallon and all other foreign student leaders did not realise at the time, however, was that his Algerian partner would undergo a major purge shortly after their joint declaration of June 1961 and become a zombie NGO under the theoretical control of the Algerian Provisional Government's Education Minister Belkacem Krim. Once victory was in sight, various factions of the FLN fought to gain control of UGEMA, resulting in political deadlock. UGEMA's fifth congress ended in utter confusion in September 1962, just as Boumediene's forces were taking control of the country. UGEMA retained its international image, however, as the official representative of Algerian students, and it continued to enjoy enormous prestige, being at the forefront of Third World national liberation struggles.

UNEF played a constructive role under Wallon's leadership in the final year of Algeria's struggle for independence, but its president regretted, in retrospect, that neither he nor other union leaders took a stand against the unimaginable horrors of police brutality in Paris on 17 October 1961. The FLN's *Fédération de France* had taken the step, perhaps 'criminal' according to one of Wallon's FLN informants (163), of calling for a peaceful mass demonstration against an 8 pm curfew that had been imposed on Algerian Muslims in Paris and its *banlieues*. The Paris police, headed by wartime Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon, engaged in a ruthless repression not seen in Paris since the occupation. Over 200 Algerians were murdered, scores of them drowned in the Seine. In the interests of maintaining UNEF's unity, Wallon did not speak of, much less condemn, the violence, the full dimensions of which became public knowledge only much later.

While Wallon's autobiography paints a rich landscape of French political life from the perspective of a progressive student leader, Dr Messaoud Djennas offers a view of Algerian student politics from a provincial periphery. Fourteen years older than Wallon, Djennas had virtually completed his medical studies before the founding of UGEMA in 1955. The University of Montpellier, which he attended, housed the oldest medical school in the world, dating from 1220, that was still operational. Djennas presents an interesting portrait of his alma mater, though his book adds little to his excellent autobiography, *Vivre, c'est croire*, some of the relevant pages of which (165–256) are summarised or directly transcribed. The newer book is repetitive but consolidates excellent source material on Algeria's medical elite in the form of biographical sketches of the author's friends and acquaintances. A large majority of the Algerian students who gravitated to Montpellier did so to study medicine. While the first four presidents of UGEMA – Belaïd Abdesselam, Ahmed Taleb-Ibrahimi, the late Mouloud Belahaoune, and Messaoud Ait Chaalal – had studied medicine, many more – like Djennas, an ophthalmologist – pursued professional specialisations and academic careers.

Djennas offers a brief snapshot of the founding of UGEMA viewed from the provinces. Unlike Paris and various other French industrial centres, Montpellier had few Algerian immigrants, but it had the third largest concentration of Algerian students after Algiers and Paris, and it provided the largest contingent of medical students to the ranks of the Algerian guerrillas fighting for independence. In his earlier days as a student, from 1948 to 1956, most of the students were, however, relatively apolitical. Djennas himself, as a member of the PPA-MTLD, was one of the few nationalists, and had been arrested at the age of 19 in the wake of the Setif riots and massacres of May 1945. Of the 30 or so students he knew well at Montpellier, roughly one-third came from wealthy families, the rest being children of clerks or petty merchants for the most part. Few were nationalists in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Mohammed Khemisti, who would become Algeria's first foreign minister under Ben Bella, came to Montpellier in 1953 and was a first-year medical student in 1955.

Djennas claims that Khemisti established direct contact with the FLN in early 1955, shortly after the outbreak of the war of independence, whereas Djennas would have preferred first to organise the students, who were already members of an Association of Muslim Students. Young Khemisti subsequently co-opted Djennas, who supported the campaign for an Algerian *Muslim* student organisation (UGEMA) *versus* the Communist-led campaign for a Union Générale des Étudiants Algériens (UGEA) that could have submerged the Muslims in a progressive student front dominated by students from Jewish and Pied-Noir families. Well-known student leaders from Paris, Redha Malek and Mohammed Harbi, came to Montpellier to present their respective arguments for UGEMA and UGEA. The large majority distrusted the Communists and therefore favoured UGEMA. Djennas still recalls heated but civil arguments with a younger medical student sympathetic to the Communists.

In May 1956 UGEMA called an unlimited general strike, and of the 106 medical students who joined the *maquis*, 33 came from Montpellier. Djennas would have preferred calling for a strike with a more limited time period, but Khemisti and other UGEMA leaders got their way. In 1956 Djennas returned to Algiers to replace another doctor in a hospital, but he later managed to return to Montpellier to complete his specialisation, graduating in 1959.

In this book, he also recalls various encounters with other Arab students, who would taunt him and his other compatriots for their poor Arabic; one Syrian, queried by an Algerian about his religion, told him that such questions were not asked in his country, advice that subsequent generations unfortunately did not heed. Repeating his earlier book, Djennas also recounts a visit to Montpellier of Habib Bourguiba in 1951. The Tunisian leader already impressed the student as a megalomaniac and shocked Djennas by suggesting that Algerians living in the Constantine region might have to assist the Tunisians in a new form of struggle for independence.

In this latest edition, however, he says Bourguiba 'may not have been wrong' in calling for tougher forms of action. Djennas' focus on UGEMA led him to recall the wonder of a largely apolitical student body in the provinces engaging fully in Algeria's struggle for independence just four years after Bourguiba's visit.

Focusing on UGEMA, the two memoirs under review effectively join a generation of French and Algerian students in a shared enterprise of liberation.

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The battle for Algeria: sovereignty, health care, and humanitarianism,
by Jennifer Johnson, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016,
xiv + 274 pp., \$75 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0-8122-4771-8

Algerian history has long been a go-to for politicians, academics, and military strategists looking for models of colonial conquest and exploitation, anticolonial struggle, insurgency, and – more recently – counterinsurgency (COIN). The writings of French army Colonel David Galula, based on his experiences pacifying Kabylia during the Algerian struggle for independence and fighting in other colonial theatres, became required reading for aspiring US military strategists as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq intensified. COIN doctrine centres on the idea that the COIN force cannot simply bomb its way to domination. Rather, it must generate improvements to the standard of living of local populations that might otherwise support the insurgents, so that they see the benefit of rejecting insurgents' overtures and might share information about insurgent activities with the COIN forces. Winning hearts and minds is more important than controlling territory.

Saving bodies is a key component of winning hearts and minds, and in *The Battle for Algeria*, Jennifer Johnson expertly traces how French authorities, the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), and international organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) each strategically used, and were in turn altered by, the provision of health care, allegations and evidence of torture, and the emerging discourse of universal human rights and humanitarianism during the decolonisation war of 1954–1962. The book weaves together consideration of how France and the FLN vied to win the hearts and minds of Algerians with how each side sought to use its own treatment of Algerians, juxtaposed with that of its enemy, to establish the moral high ground in international public opinion.

The book's major strengths and contributions are threefold. First, its narrative emphasises in a fresh way the connections between the colonial, metropolitan, and international arenas. Second, it adds to our knowledge of the role that medical care, doctor recruitment and training, torture investigations, and appeals to human rights and new norms of sovereignty played in shifting the global context that contributed to the FLN's ultimate victory. In particular, Johnson argues that 'Algerian decolonization should be considered part of human rights