

Settler Identity and Colonial Violence in French Algeria 1945-1962: An Exploration of the Relationship between Settler Identity Formation and the Justification of Violence in Settler Colonies

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The aim of this paper is to explore the role of settler identity formation in the legitimisation and unleashing of colonial violence in Algeria between 1945 and 1962. This will be examined through an analysis of British perspectives on French justifications for colonial violence in Algeria. Recent investigations into colonial violence in Algeria have moved away from the broader question of colonial violence, paying more attention to specific violent events such as the Sétif and Guelma massacres.

The present paper reconsiders the question of colonial violence by investigating the understudied relationship between settler identity formation and colonial violence. This will be conducted by combining a Fanonesque psychological approach to the broader question of colonial violence with a modern examination of colonial and metropolitan responses to specific violent events. It will propose that racist European epistemological assumptions not only legitimised colonial violence by dehumanising the indigenous 'other' but also by shaping settler identity.

The essay will diverge from the classic postcolonial literature by bringing into question the assumption that the settlers were aware of their illegitimacy and were therefore free to rationalise about their response to indigenous anti-colonialism. This argument oversimplifies the complex nature of the colonial situation by ignoring the reality that most settlers were entirely convinced of their right to exist within the colony and were therefore able to justify violence. This reality will be demonstrated by applying psychologist Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement as well as Amartya Sen's ideas on identity and violence to the colonial context.

This paper makes the case that the racist epistemological notions upon which the settler colony was founded served to reduce the plurality of European identities to a singular affiliation: settlers. It will argue this process restricted the colonisers' ability to engage their 'normal' morality when deciding upon a suitable response to indigenous challenges to colonial power.