

is also minimal discussion of the geological and market characteristics of natural resources, even though these partially account for the interest of armed groups and criminal networks in some resources (e.g., diamonds) and not others (e.g., coal).

Alao could have better distinguished and substantiated those factors that according to his argument are distinctly African, such as “traditional beliefs” that water should be free (which, he argues, motivate opposition to privatization of water utilities) or that land has spiritual value (an important factor in the reluctance of indigenes to give up land). I wager that most people in the world think they have a right to free water. Similarly, spiritual ties to land are significant elsewhere—aboriginal Australians, for example, have successfully halted proposed mines on the basis that mining would upset spiritual ancestors.

The book is an excellent survey bursting with facts, figures, and interesting case studies. Its structure is wonderful: short chunks organized under useful headings that facilitate reading and digestion of information. It would be a valuable addition to any undergraduate syllabus.

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J. N. C. Hill. *Identity in Algerian Politics: The Legacy of Colonial Rule*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009. vii + 223 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00. Cloth.

Identity is a complex matter in most postcolonial societies. Certainly this is true in Algeria, a nation that has experienced millennia of migrations and invasions bearing diverse cultural outlooks—from the Carthaginians and Romans to the French. Notable among such arrivals were those Arabs and Ottomans who brought Islam to North Africa. Jonathan Hill’s focus is on Algeria’s fractured postcolonial identity, and therefore he privileges the legacy of French colonial rule. While no one contests the profound impact of the French colonial period on Algerians, the issues of Algerian identity are even more nuanced than that. Moreover, Hill rehearses the clash between colonial rule and Algerian nationalism in a rather conventional manner that adds little to existing accounts, such as John Ruedy’s well-known *Modern Algeria* (Indiana University Press, 1992; 2nd edition, 2005).

Rather than delving into the sociological, psychological, and cultural sources of identity, Hill provides an essentially historical account. There are chapters on the French colonial period, the rise of Algerian nationalism and the Algerian war, and the postindependence presidencies of Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediene, and Chadli Benjedid. Chapter 5 deals with the economic downturn of the 1980s and the rise of the Islamist movement that bloodied the country in the 1990s. The final chapter, entitled

“National Identity and the Ongoing Struggle,” addresses mainly the Bouteflika presidency (as an ongoing struggle) without substantially engaging the complexities of national identity. What this amounts to is a competent narration of an interesting story rather than a sustained analysis of identity politics.

Aside from its references to works of colonial history and documents published by the Algerian government, Hill’s bibliography is heavily weighted by literature in English. This is especially striking insofar as Algerian authors are concerned: all but one of the entries citing Algerians (mainly journal articles) are in English, and there is no reference to the works in French of, for example, Mohammed Harbi, Lahouari Addi, Rachid Tlemçani, Ali El-Kenz, Rédha Malek, or Abed Charef. Likewise, the major French political scientists who have written on postindependence Algerian politics (Jean Leca, Jean-Claude Vatin, Bruno Etienne, François Burgat, Rémy Leveau) are ignored. One could argue that an important dimension of the colonial legacy is the extensive scholarly literature in French about Algeria.

Hill states in his introduction that he seeks to understand the “centrality of violence to Algeria’s ongoing development” (2) and how “disagreements over national identity” (3) contributed to the atrocity-ridden civil war of the 1990s. The violent Islamist insurrection does reflect a clash of two visions within Algerian society—secular and sacred. There is no question that the preservation of a Muslim identity has been a fundamental component of the resistance to French conquest, assimilation, and the ideology of the *mission civilisatrice*. Many other factors, however—disillusionment with the FLN single-party regime, the Iranian revolution, the war in Afghanistan, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—contributed to the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) as an expression of identity politics in Algeria. Any explanation of the Islamist–secular cleavage in Algerian politics has to take these variables into account alongside the colonial legacy. While Hill focuses on Islamist identity politics, he gives some attention to Berber identity movements. In this regard, the postindependence regime’s Arabization policies and neglect of economic development in Kabylie seem to outweigh the legacy of colonial rule (and even the memory of the Tizi Ouzou–Tlemcen clash of 1962, which Hill overemphasizes) as explanations of Arab–Berber tensions.

Hill’s book is workmanlike, but it does not deliver fully on the promise of its title. My own suspicion is that the best way to get at identity issues in Algeria may be through creative literature. Such novelists as Boualem Sansal, Assia Djebar, Yasmina Khadra, Maïssa Bey, and Leïla Sebbar are all concerned with matters of identity. They all probe Algerian history in search of contemporary identity, achieving insights that somehow are more penetrating than what Hill’s methodology produces.

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