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Did the Algerian War of Independence Gave Birth to French Graphic Novel? Coral's *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962

I. Introduction

The year 1962 was a major turning point in the decolonization of the French Empire. In March 1962, the Evian agreements were signed between the French government and the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, putting an end to a 7-year-war that had made 250 to 350,000 dead on the Algerian side and 25 to 30,000 on the French side.

For France, the Empire came to an end, at the same time as the war disappeared from the horizons of the French society. Then began the work of remembrance, slow and tumultuous. Indeed, it was only in 1999 that the term Algerian War was recognized by the French government, which had shielded behind the fiction of "pacification operations" (Shepard) during the entire period of the war. Even today, the reconciliation of memory remains complex.

As Jennifer Howell pointed out, comics play a role in this reconciliation process: "French comics on the Algerian War create historical memory and influence how contemporary France engages with its colonial past and manages its postcolonial present" (Howell xxxii). Many scholars have highlighted the importance of the theme of memory in contemporary graphic novels (Ahmed and Crucifix 2018). Mark McKinney, for example, has explored the importance of "imagined, invisible lines" that simultaneously unite and separate France and Algeria (McKinney, *Redrawing* 3). Isabelle Delorme has shown the importance of the figure of the witness and of generational transmission (Delorme): children of soldiers, *pieds-noirs*, *harkis*, activists, and immigrants explore the gaps between family narratives and national history, in a post-memorial approach: "They are family memories studied through the prism of history, collective memory, and personal experience" (Howell xxiv).

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The memory of the Algerian War plays a singular role in French graphic narratives. From Farid Boudjellal to Lax and Giroud, from Morvandiau to Giroud, there have been many accounts of the memory of the Algerian War, particularly since the turn of the century. Jennifer Howell argues that *Une éducation algérienne*, published in 1982, can be considered "the first noteworthy comic book on the [Algerian] war" (Howell 19).

Both Mark McKinney and Jennifer Howell point out, however, the existence of two stories published at the end of the war, in 1962 and then two years later, in 1964, which offer a drawn account of the Algerian War: *Journal d'un embastillé* (1962) and *Journal d'un suspect*, by Coral, a former army officer involved in the fight for French Algeria with the OAS (*Organisation de l'armée secrète*). However, these two stories appear marginal: as Mark McKinney notes, these works "appeared so far outside of mainstream comics that they have gone largely unnoticed" (McKinney, *Redrawing* 155).

Yet, as this chapter will argue, this oversight of Coral in comics histories is questionable. Coral would indeed be a serious contender for the title of pioneer of the French graphic novel, and for the writing of a comic autobiography. The publication comes well before Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* (1972), but also well before the first French formalizations of graphic novels in the 1970s, studied notably by Jean-Matthieu Méon (Méon). Until then, the mid-1970s offered an effective benchmark for dating the emergence of graphic novels – in all its problematic aspects, notably around the publication of *La Ballade de la mer salée* by Casterman, inaugurating a collection of *Romans (A Suivre)* destined to transform the contours of cultural hierarchies in France (Lesage, *Ninth Art. Bande dessinée, books and the Gentriification of Mass Culture*). Considering the case of Coral leads to question these periodizations and the historical trajectory of French comics. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, *Le Journal d'un embastillé* sheds a light on the tensions that run through French society in the context of decolonization. It also highlights the creative effervescence of the 1960s and the vitality of graphic experimentation far beyond the children's illustrated magazines that dominate comics historiography. Therefore, it shows the extent to which the writing of the history of comics is a prisoner of the *Bildungsroman* which, in France too, permeates the narrative.

II. Coral and the Algerian War

Understanding Coral's book now is not easy, as the narrative is deeply rooted in the context of the end of the Algerian War. Coral's book can only be read in the light of the French defeat. Coral is a pseudonym for Jacques de Laroque-Latour, and his *Journal d'un embastillé* was published by a far-right publishing house, Éditions Saint-Just. Laroque-Latour was a former parachute non-commissioned officer, born in 1935; he joined the parachutists at the age of 20, served in Algeria in the early days of the war of independence, was decorated, and returned to metropolitan France in 1957 while remaining close to military and pro-French Algeria circles. In April 1961, during the putsch of the generals that tried to overthrow the Gaullist government, he was one of the Frenchmen imprisoned in mainland France. Sentenced to one year in prison, he appears – in the current state of my knowledge – to be only as a fairly minor player in the movement.[2] In 1963, after *Journal d'un embastillé*, he became editor-in-chief of *Europe-Action* (1963-1967), a journal that served as an incubator for the entire extreme right which was trying to modernize its doctrine and recompose itself after the failure of the colonial project: he was thus an important player in the *Nouvelle Droite*, which brought together key players of the reconfiguration of the extreme right like Alain de Benoist, François Duprat, François d'Orcival, etc., published by the same Saint-Just publishing house.

The *Journal d'un embastillé* is part of this dynamic: it is a charged account of the Algerian war, seen from the perspective of the OAS, *Organisation de l'armée secrète* (Secret Army Organisation), the clandestine paramilitary organization that fought (and, in 1962, still fights) against the decolonization of Algeria by seeking to sabotage – both figuratively and literaly – the negotiations and the accession of Algeria to independence. The OAS emerged in early 1961 as a clandestine organization created at a time when the French authorities were clearly moving more and more towards the policy of Algerian self-determination (Dard). While de Gaulle was brought to power in 1958 by his very ambiguous position likely to win him the votes of supporters of French Algeria ("je vous ai compris," 4 June 1958), once in power he indeed began a shift towards

2 I have not yet, however, managed to access the judiciary sources concerning Coral. These might shed a new light on the character and his involvement in the war. This an ongoing research project.

self-determination, envisaged from September 1959. The question of de Gaulle's personal positions is the subject of a lively dispute of interpretation, especially since de Gaulle is a master of ambiguity (Jackson). This question goes far beyond the limits of this chapter, and I therefore leave the question of de Gaulle's personal attitude on the side. However, the denunciation of de Gaulle's duplicity is a recurrent motif in the OAS's rhetoric, and one of the foundations of an extremely diverse movement.

Self-determination was the subject of a referendum in January 1961, widely approved by the French population. The growing rift between French public opinion and the Parisian authorities, on the one hand, and the European populations in Algeria and the military present there, on the other hand, provoked the formation of militant direct-action groups, aiming to prevent the march towards independence by means of assassinations and attacks. The signing of the Evian agreements in March 1962 led to an intensification of the attack campaign, with the OAS embarking on a veritable scorched earth tactic from May 1962 (Thénault).

It is therefore a story set in the midst of a burning topicality, something that French-language comics at the time very rarely faced. At the beginning of the 1960s, one of the keys to Asterix's success, as many commentators immediately pointed out, was certainly its ability to echo contemporary society (Stoll; Rouvière, *Astérix ou Les lumières de la civilisation*). This ability to satirize current events is part of a "*Pilote* spirit" (Groensteen), itself largely inherited from *Mad*, which can be found in other series of the newspaper, such as Gotlib's *Rubrique à brac*. But satire as found in *Pilote* remained, in the early 1960s, mainly confined to good-natured and relatively consensual social satire: In 1962, Cabu came to *Pilote* from *Hara-Kiri*; but in *Pilote* he offered a very depoliticized version of his "Grand Duduche" stories, where his character reflected the growing misunderstanding between the generations but without openly encouraging rebellion.

The more political publications, for their part, made very little use of comics. Thus, while the communist newspaper *L'Humanité* published *Pif* in daily strips, the series was almost entirely depoliticized, even though it could have been an unprecedented vehicle for political mobilization. However, political forms of comics did exist: Robert Fuzier, for example, animated the series "Dédé et Doudou" in the pages of *Le Populaire*, the newspaper of the Socialist Party, featuring pacifist and internationalist ideals that echoed very directly the rising tensions in Europe. Finally, testimonies of directly political uses of comics remain extremely rare, and the

most spectacular cases are undoubtedly the parodies of *Tintin* published by *Le Canard enchaîné* in the context of de Gaulle's installation in power (Screech) – but Matthew Screech has clearly shown how they constitute quite exceptional examples.

Thus, in the early 1960s, comics were marked by a clear depoliticization. Of course, comics still carried political values: 'Buck Danny,' in the pages of *Spirou*, conveyed a very NATO-oriented vision of the Cold War – which was precisely why he was reprimanded by the supervisory commission responsible for the application of the 1949 law on publications intended for young people (Joubert). However, the political sphere remains, for the most part, a very distant background in children and teenagers' illustrated magazines.

Coral's account of the pro-OAS view of the Algerian War is therefore singular in that it directly engages the most heated debate of the time. It should be noted, however, that the OAS is far from having an ideological unity, apart from the desperate struggle to keep Algeria French, the hatred of the Head of State and the will to stop the process of Algeria's independence. As Olivier Dard observed, three main currents can be distinguished: a fascist current for the survival of the white race, a traditionalist and counter-revolutionary current (nostalgic for Petainism and Catholic fundamentalists), and finally, nationalists (Dard).

The narrative offered by Coral, however, tries to erase these strong divergences and to offer the united face of an OAS gathering true patriots by depicting its members as united behind a common goal. This is largely the result of the structured strategy put in place by the OAS to develop an active propaganda: leaflets, posters, radio, television... The OAS, in this respect, prolongs the effort of in-depth modernization of war propaganda, under the effect of the recommendations of colonel Charles Lacheroy, who returned from Indochina with the firm conviction that it was necessary to turn the methods of the "revolutionary war" against the insurgents. The main theorist of psychological action and subversive warfare, he belonged to the first circle of the Madrid branch of the OAS.

At this stage of my research, I cannot see any tangible proximity between Lacheroy and Coral; so I will simply state out that the effort to mediatize the OAS vision of the war through comics, that Coral undertook in his *Journal d'un embastillé* (Diary of a prisoner) and then in *Journal d'un suspect* (Diary of a suspect) are in line with Lacheroy's recommendations, which he raised in his conference Revolutionary War and Psychological Action: "in a war like this one, it is necessary to inform in such a way as to

have general opinion on one's side" (Schmidt-Trimborn). This new doctrine, which advocated the use of psychological weapons, resulted in the creation in the summer of 1957 of Fifth Bureaus specializing in psychological warfare and action. "These bureaus, which complement the four traditional bureaus at all levels of the military hierarchy, undoubtedly represent a real materialisation of the insertion of the psychological weapon within the organic structures of the army" (Villatoux 42). As Charles Villatoux points out, psychological action briefly occupied a central place in military activity in Algeria, even if it is difficult to establish an assessment due to the brevity of the experience (the 5th Bureaus were abolished in February 1960). However, the time is certainly ripe for a rethinking of propaganda methods and a new awareness of the importance of the battle of ideas.

It should come as no surprise that, in the context of the defeat of the supporters of French Algeria, Coral's work did not meet with a considerable response. The referendum ratifying the Evian agreements was approved by more than 90% of the French population. The publication of *Journal d'un embastillé* at the end of 1962 was therefore part of a complicated ideological context, and in a society seeking to turn the page on the conflict. It nevertheless offers a first-hand account of new forms of graphic narration, in a perspective of both biting satire and colonial nostalgia. This will be further addressed in the next part of this chapter.

III. 2° Coral and Graphic Experiments

Coral's album manifests a political commitment that was unprecedented in French comics at the time. Graphic satire is certainly an old tradition in French politics (Erre; Vaillant; Duprat). However, under Coral's pen, it takes a new form: that of a long-term graphic narrative, mobilizing the language of comics in a militant rereading of a crucial episode of the Algerian War: the OAS and its role in the decolonization of Algeria.

At a first glance, the story mobilizes the classic forms of caricature. Thus, we find recurrent representations of de Gaulle as the *Roi Soleil* (Fig. 1): the President of the Republic is thus presented by the text as "his most gracious majesty," "the king," "the monarch, in his golden carriage." Above all, Coral almost systematically depicts him in an outfit reminiscent of Louis XIV: powdered wig, silk stockings, scepter, etc. This representation is interesting on two levels. On the one hand, it echoes the title of

the work, denouncing royal arbitrariness through the founding figure of the imprisoned as a political opponent, allowing Coral to follow in the footsteps of Sade or Voltaire. The representation he chooses for the cover, in which he shows himself with a large quill pen, fits in well with this imaginary of the political opponent as a victim of personal arbitrariness. On the other hand, this representation of the president as a monarch echoes the very lively debates in French society about the presidential regime of the Fifth Republic, and the excessive weight given to presidential power, particularly since the referendum allowing the election of the president by direct universal suffrage, adopted in 1962 in spite of strong reservations expressed by major political figures such as Senate President Gaston Monnerville.

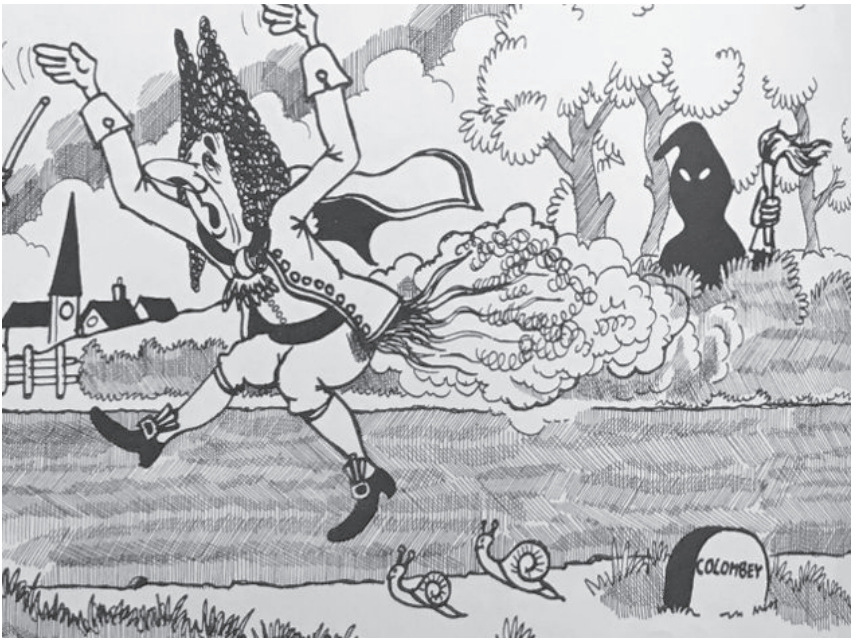

Fig. 1: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

The figure of de Gaulle is certainly the most present in the narrative. Less frequently, other well-known French and Algerian political figures are caricatured. This is the case, for example, of Pierre Mendès-France, depicted and described as an "old crab emerging from the mud" (see Fig. 1, above), or Georges Pompidou, Krim Belkacem, Messali Hadj, or other

leaders such as Nasser, Krushchev, Kennedy or Bourguiba. These caricatures are very virulent: Habib Bourguiba, for instance is depicted under the features of a jackal taking himself for a lion, which "a good blow of para boots [...] made him go back into his cage" (see Fig. 1). Pompidou is the subject of anti-Semitic caricatures, the Prime Minister being presented as "the deceitful Rothschildian banker" who, from his busted nose to his cigar and bag of dollars, ticked all the boxes of the codes of graphic anti-Semitism. There is no shortage of racist representations either, such as the sequence where de Gaulle "organised sumptuous and expensive parties where he received the little kings of Africa," where Coral uses the worst racist clichés to depict the African leaders, rooted in a long tradition of colonial comics (McKinney, *The Colonial*), where Coral uses the worst racist clichés to depict the African leaders, rooted in a long tradition of colonial comics (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

However, apart from de Gaulle, who is the central figure in the detestation of the OAS, caricatures representations remain marginal. What characterizes Coral's work is its mixed form, halfway between a picture story and comics. The narrative plays with the boundaries between types of narratives: illustrated vignettes, pictorial narratives, comics sequences, even some pastiches of cinematographic novelizations (Fig. 2). The narrative constantly alternates between different ways of articulating text and image, sometimes even going so far as to rediscover old forms from the illustrated press of the 19th century. For example the page relating radio propaganda efforts undertaken by the OAS (FIG. 3), (sabotage of transmitters, pirate broadcasts) takes the form of *miscellanées* reminiscent of the juxtapositions one could find in *The Graphic* and the *London Illustrated News*, for example (Smolderen).

Fig. 3: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

The main complication that Coral encounters in his portrayal of the OAS action is the question of embodying the narration. The narrative is conducted in the first person, and Coral represents himself on several occasions, for example on the occasion of his arrest, which opens the story. But with a broader ambition to provide a general account of the Algerian War, de Gaulle's 'betrayals' and the action of the OAS, the narrative also adopts a general perspective that often condemns it to the status of illustrated text, following a chronological tale of the events, illustrated by the artist. The story is told by a very present narrator, who provides dates, names and precise circumstances in a meticulous narrative that unfolds, week by week, the tragi-comic story that Coral envisions. The images provide a humorous counterpoint, and the narrative often relies on the discrepancy between the grandiloquence of the text and the ridiculousness of the images. The narration is thus emphatic, while the drawing emphasizes the good-natured tone.

Indeed, Coral's story is based on a double shift. On a first, purely textual level, the story uses hyperbole and displaces the settlement of the Algerian question under the guise of a Louis-Quatorzian court story, in the manner of Moisan who, in the pages of the *Canard enchaîné*, transposed de Gaulle's term of office under the features of the reign of an absolute monarch (Martin). This is how De Gaulle's trip to Corsica is presented: "in the early hours of the morning, the King, in the procession of his glory, set off for his possessions in Corsica. To force the peasants of this wild island to bow to their Lord and Master, he was accompanied by a few squadrons of mercenaries" (Coral). At the same time, Coral proposes a second shift, this time graphic, using a graphic style that is round, clearly evocative of humorous strips, a style that suggests a confrontation made of mischief. This is probably one of the keys to the use of comics: their ability to depict bloody confrontations (assassination campaigns, bombings, plastic attacks) as childish pranks. For example, the attacks on the headquarters of the general government are depicted as the work of "invisible and mischievous leprechauns who came at night to blow up what had been built during the day" (Coral).

Yet the violence of the conflict is not absent, paradoxically. If the representation of law enforcement and loyalist soldiers remains almost systematically in the register of the ridiculous, repeating all the clichés about cowardly and stupid policemen, the representation of OAS forces is more ambivalent. On the one hand, they are portrayed as good boys with a bit of a joke, on the other as fierce fighters with exacerbated virility. Thus, they take on the features of mischievous *Chouans* who kidnap Edgard Pisani to make him listen to "some very blasphemous remarks." The riot at the Santé prison concerning the internment of Jean Dides, an epiphenomenon in the history of the OAS, becomes an epic confrontation spread over 10 pages, where once again violence is euphemized in the guise of a joyous brawl, which takes place with pots of extra-strong mustard or ground pepper. Therefore, if the violence is not absent, it remains largely euphemistic due to the graphic style derived from the "big nose" tradition. Thus, the clashes in the streets of Oran between the riot police and the supporters of the OAS during the Evian peace conference was transformed into a pleasant mischief, in which "the King's henchmen were disarmed and undressed at every street corner" – thus concealing the violence of the attacks on the French forces.

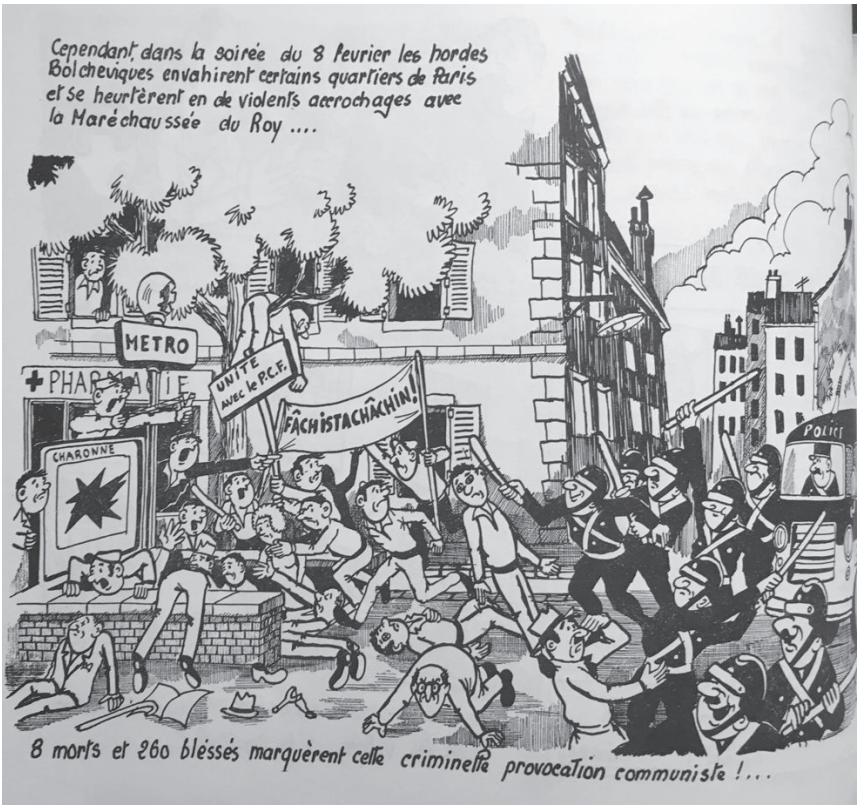

Fig. 4: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

The most symptomatic episode of this euphemization of violence is the representation of Charonne (Fig. 4). A drama structuring the left during and after the Algerian war, Charonne bears witness to the extent of police violence extended to the very heart of Paris. The demonstration organized by the unions and the main left-wing forces (PCF, PSU) turned into a tragedy when the police charged the demonstrators in the Charonne metro station; the jostling and the projectiles (cast-iron grills, in particular) thrown by the police resulted in the death of eight people (a ninth victim died shortly afterwards in hospital). The situation is problematic for Coral: Representing police violence makes it possible to castigate Gaullist hypocrisy; but the demonstration was protesting against the violence of the OAS. Coral therefore chooses a humorous representation, while clearly indicating the toll of 8 dead and 260 wounded – a toll immediately

reduced by the observation that the demonstration was a "criminal communist provocation" – in fact taking up the state lie complacently peddled by the media of violent demonstrators who would have compelled the police to fight back.

Alongside these representations of good-natured violence, Coral also juxtaposes representations offering an apology for the virile strength of the OAS. In a very different style, anchored in a dark realism and a taste for crosshatching and chiaroscuro, Coral also includes representations that stem more from the codes of film noir or the spy novel, with its characters of virile and determined *baroudeurs*. The story thus oscillates between two figures embodying the OAS, casual *bonhommie* on the one hand, and manly assurance on the other.

This ambiguity on the front of violence – between laughing occultation and fascinated exaltation – is also found in the registers adopted by Coral. The author spends his time juggling between different levels of representation: metaphor, allegory, or realism. Many scenes borrow striking visual shortcuts from the visual cultures of childhood. These representations, most often, proceed by visual declensions of written figures. Thus, the administrative city of Rocher Noir, some twenty kilometers from Algiers, becomes "the fortress of Rocher-noir,' where the worst intrigues and the most diabolical projects were hatched. This process is repeated several times in the book, even in its title, *Journal d'un embastillé*, which proceeds by metaphorization of arbitrary confinement – an arbitrariness permitted precisely by the dynamics of war. Bluebeard, the witches' sabbath or the trope of the evil forest are thus taken up as elements feeding the dreamlike discourse.

In addition to the comical and whimsical style that dominates, and the dreamlike atmosphere that permeates certain pages, the dominant tone is one of realism that emerges in certain pages. It is precisely the interest of Coral's story to juxtapose fantasy and serious documentary. It is thus with great documentary precision that Coral depicts his cell at the Santé prison, in a drawing full of hatching that has all the features of authentic observational drawing (Fig. 5). This realism takes the form of pathetic representations in particular. Coral has to deal with a contradiction: his story is a story of defeat, and the apology of the OAS in images clashes with his position as a victim. He must therefore simultaneously project a positive, joyful image of the OAS, while portraying them as victims. From then on, between two sequences in the purest tradition of slapstick, Coral can depict the fate of the repatriated populations in pathetic terms.

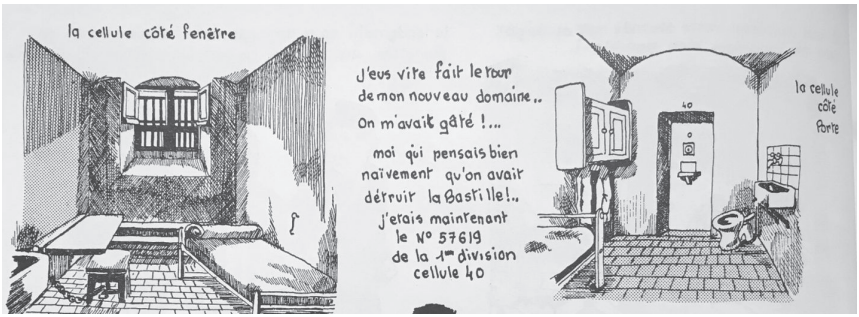

Fig. 5: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

As the next part of my chapter illustrates, Coral's entire narrative is impregnated by the memory of past conflicts that were then affecting French society. Through the memory of these conflicts, Coral summons a visual culture structuring the OAS. The visual heritage of the Second World War is particularly present, and what is striking about it is the way in which the narrative tries to turn the figure of de Gaulle upside down.

IV. 3° War of Images and Cultural Memory of Conflicts

Coral draws a sinister image of a camp, with the caption "While in a wild desert region the infamous Frey, minister of the King and executioner of the patriots, was opening a new concentration camp and throwing in bundles of citizens torn from their families, their children and their homes." Above this legend, he depicts the camp of Saint-Maurice l'Ardoise, with the sinister word "Stalag." The reference, in 1962, is clear: while the memory of the concentration camps is still largely obscured, and replaced by that of the camps where captured soldiers were detained, Coral brings together the imprisonment of the OAS militants and the German concentration camps – the expression "concentration camps" appears elsewhere in the book. In that perspective, Coral's book is clearly set in the context of the repressed memory of the Holocaust (Rousso; Azouvi).

What he neglects to mention in passing is the multiple roles of these camps. In fact, Saint-Maurice l'Ardoise was first of all an internment camp (or house arrest center, to use its official name) for Algerians. It was only later that this camp – and the others – welcomed OAS militants, before being reused from the summer of 1962 as a reception camp for repatriated

harkis. The story is thus marked by a very clear schematism, which makes de Gaulle-Louis XIV an infamous despot at odds with noble patriots.

This episode of the camp also illustrates a procedure that Coral uses extensively: the reversal of the heroic imagery of Gaullism. The embodiment of the spirit of resistance during the war, de Gaulle here becomes the oppressor par excellence. Indeed, de Gaulle's political legitimacy is largely derived from his aura as a Resistance leader, and Coral sets out to demolish this figure by attempting to turn the iconographic codes on their head. The ball and chain with which he represents himself on the cover is thus affixed to the cross of Lorraine, which goes from being a symbol of Free France to a symbol of oppression. OAS militants were renamed "patriots of the Resistance"; the camp for Muslim "suspects" at Djorf, reallocated to the internment of Europeans arrested after the putsch of 22 April 1961, was thus renamed a "concentration camp." The arrests following the shooting of the Rue d'Isly and the dismantling of the Bab-el-Oued bastion were also described as "deportation," while dark and dejected figures paraded behind barbed wire.

Other, rarer references punctuate the narrative with allusions to earlier conflicts. With his "*On ne passe pas*," Coral mobilizes memories of the propaganda of the First World War, with a particularly famous poster by Maurice Neumont (Neumont 1918), using a formula from a popular song during the war, which crystallizes the resistance of Verdun (Verdun ! On ne passe pas 1916).

Above all, Coral multiplies the references to the Vendée War which, from 1793 to 1796, bloodied the French Revolution (Fig. 6). An episode that is still sensitive in French memories, the infernal columns remain a structuring factor in the imagination of the royalist far right. The Vendée War was a very violent war in the countryside and is represented here through the classic figures of the Chouans armed with rustic rifles and scythes, facing the modern weaponry and numbers of the CRS "infernal columns." Against the Cross of Lorraine erected as a symbol of oppression, Coral makes the sacred heart of the Chouans an alternative mobilizing symbol.[3] Other historical references pepper the story: while de Gaulle is sent back to Waterloo, Coral depicts the French soldiers leaving Algeria in the summer of 1962 as making "Franks, knights, musketeers,

3 One can observe here a contradiction between an artist retorting to the trope of French kings as political oppressors and his very clear appeal to monarchists. But precisely, the OAS itself was very heterogenous politically (Dard).

sans culottes, grognards and poilus [...] blush with anger and shame at this unprecedented defeat." Here Coral returns to the historical imagination of the Third Republic, and the mobilization of history in favor of a project of national recovery after the 1870 defeat against Prussia.

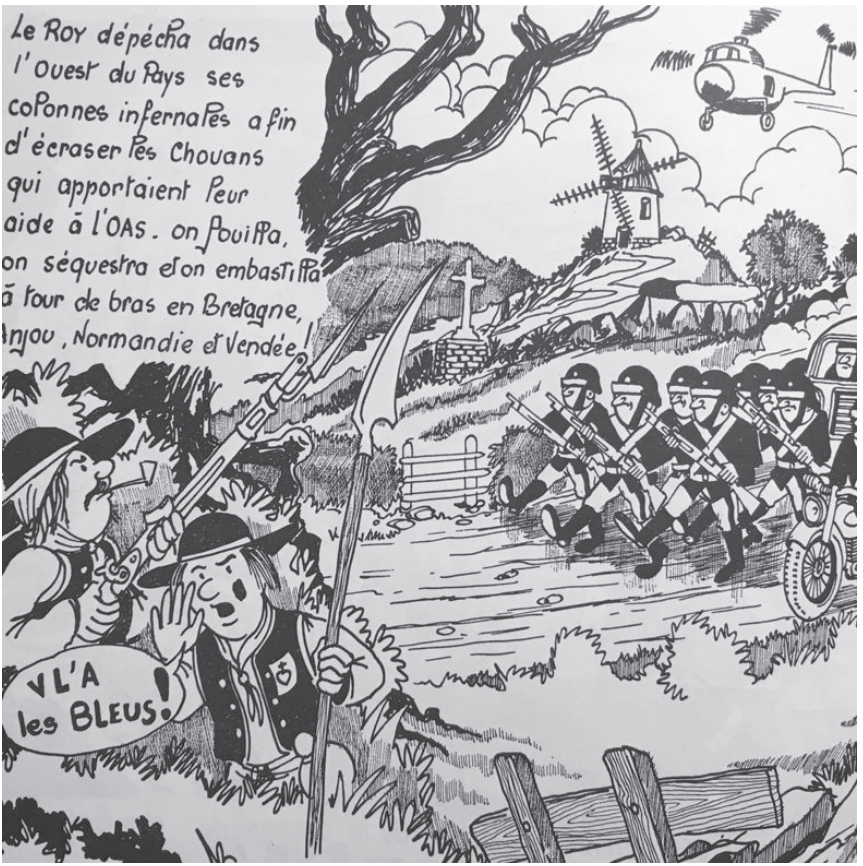

Fig. 6: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

These references to past conflicts can also be linked to the colonialist imaginary that feeds the narrative. Unsurprisingly, Coral's story is steeped in Orientalism, but it offers a limited version of it. While French Orientalism has its roots in the conquest of Algeria, it is based on a fascination with and eroticization of female bodies. However, this eroticization is absent here: all that remains of this orientalism is an obsessive hatred of "barbarians," depicted in the grimacing guise of savages armed with

scimitars, "sowing desolation and misfortune through the arteries of the capital," or vociferating "anarchic *youyoutries* and hysterical contortions of a few decadent elements."[4] Also described several times as "sarrazins," the FLN is represented through racist clichés, which are first and foremost conveyed through images and grimacing features. However, the denunciation of the FLN remains secondary in the narrative: what Coral is aiming at is first and foremost the duplicity of de Gaulle and the renunciations of the French government.

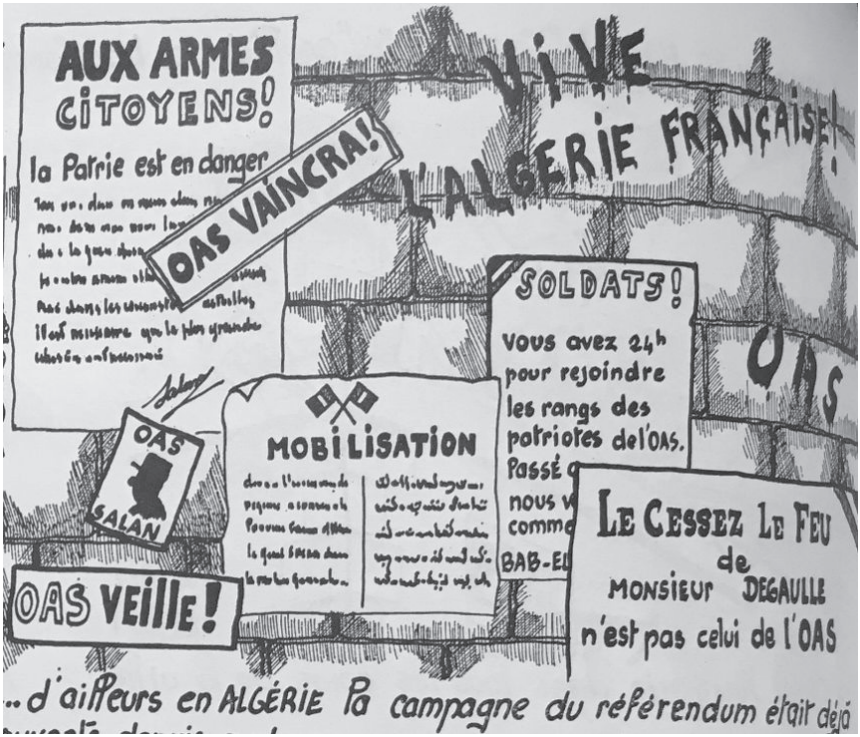

Fig. 7: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé*, 1962.

This focus on de Gaulle can also be explained by the type of satire he uses in his story, which is quite similar to what can be found in the pages of

4 The term *youyoutries* is a portmanteau word used by Coral, aggregating women's ululations, *youyous*, and a very offensive word used by Anti-Semites, *youtrerie*, designating a gathering of Jews.

the *Canard enchaîné* at the same time ("La Cour" section illustrated by Moisan), transposing de Gaulle's term of office under the features of the reign of an absolute monarch reigning in Versailles) or that of Jean Effel, notably in *L'Express* (for example the famous representation of a press conference on 30 January 1964, in which de Gaulle provides questions and answers). From then on, although xenophobic clichés (Italians described as "macaroni"), racist clichés (African kings as cannibals) and anti-Semitic clichés (Pompidou and Rothschild) are not lacking, they remain in the background and serve the purpose of denouncing de Gaulle's policies.

In addition to the references to past conflicts, Coral's narrative offers an interesting testimony on the weight of propaganda and counter-propaganda. His narrative is indeed woven with quotations, borrowings or allusions to propaganda efforts on both sides. The mobilization efforts of the OAS are, not surprisingly, very present. Posters and slogans punctuate the narrative, as do painted slogans, and concerts of pans. This aspect is probably all the less surprising as one can imagine Coral being involved in the OAS's psychological action activities. In this respect, his account is an extension of the war propaganda, but also offers a testimony on its implementation. The Algerian war led to a return of censorship, and Coral multiplies the scenes representing this war of information which redoubled the civil war in Algeria (see Fig. 7 above). Hacking into the radio waves, distributing leaflets, tagging slogans on walls, flying OAS colors, posters. This media battle is a response to the effectiveness of government propaganda. The independent press is also represented as being under orders and peddling governmental intoxications, such as *France-Soir*, the largest circulation of the French press at the time, renamed *France-Bobard* (*France-Fib*).

Although the orientalist imagination does not take up many sexualizing clichés about Arab women, Coral's work does present a highly sexualized vision of the European population in Algeria. On the one hand, it contrasts the virile strength of the OAS militants with the weakness of the loyalist forces, described for example as "the most beautiful collection of gaudy, good-for-nothing people we have seen." But it also offers, in parallel, a very sexualized vision of European women in Algeria, depicting them, for example, in Oran in a "seduction operation" supposed to demobilize the loyalist troops.

Fig. 8: Coral, *Journal d'un embastillé,* 1962.

Similarly, when Brigitte Bardot took a stand against the OAS, she was reduced to her looks. In November 1961, the actress received a threatening letter from the OAS demanding that she support French Algeria activists financially. The actress leaked the letter to *L'Express* magazine, which was at the forefront of the fight against the Algerian war; she declared, among other things, "I don't march because I don't want to live in a Nazi country." A sexual icon of the early 1960s, "B.B." saw this status turned against her: Coral described her as "the most beautiful buttocks in the kingdom," and depicted her on a film poster, naked, from behind, in a fictitious film entitled "*Je serai un vain cul*" (see Fig. 8).

The play on words is fraught with meaning: at first, it means "I will be a defeated man," but it also means "I will be an aimless ass." The Brigitte Bardot fantasy thus stops at the threshold of politics: Bardot's body not only disqualifies her politically, but it is also of no use once she joins the enemy's camp. Although the eroticization of the gaze also remains in the background, it plays an important role in sexualizing imaginaries, testifying to the way in which the Algerian War sexualizes colonial roles (see Brun and Shepard).

V. 4° Coral and the History of Comics: French Comics and the Bildungsroman

From then on, it's not that difficult to see in Coral a pioneer of the French graphic novel. With a story anchored in current events, in the most burning conflicts of the time, a narrative that carries the traumas still alive, *Journal d'un embastillé* could be considered as a turning point in the history of French comics, It is a story that is eminently partial and biased, but that offers a unique insight into what comics can provide as social testimony. However, the *Journal* is absent from the history of comics, and only a handful of specialists of the Algerian War mention its existence in passing. This discrepancy speaks volumes on how much comics historiography is canon-oriented.

In the French-speaking world, traditional historiography insists on the decisive changes that affected comics in the early 1960s. The period was indeed marked by several important transformations in the readership and the comics scene, starting with the launch of the newspaper *Pilote* (1959), which progressively targeted a teenage audience (and no longer only children) (Michallat). From its very first issue, the newspaper welcomed the Astérix series, through which Goscinny and Uderzo set out to mock

school knowledge of history, and to make the Gaulish background the setting for a satire of identity (Rouvière, *Astérix ou Les lumières*; Rouvière, *Astérix ou La parodie*). Published in album form by Dargaud, the series established itself as a major publishing phenomenon; in 1966, it exceeded one million copies sold – a threshold below which the series has never since fallen – contributing decisively to the shift in the comic book market from newspapers to books (see Lesage, "Astérix, phénomène éditorial").

At the same time as these mutations affected the youth comic sector, the first visible signs of the birth of adult comics appeared. The publication of Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella* in 1964 by the Surrealists' publisher Éric Losfeld is often taken as a symbolic marker of this change: drawn eroticism left the space of the soldier's pocket, and ventured into the sector of respectable publishing (see Lesage, *Ninth Art*).

At the same time, the first comic book circles took shape between 1962 and 1964: the publication in the pages of the magazine *Fiction* in 1961 of a note by Pierre Strinati devoted to the "golden age" of science fiction comics in France (Strinati) gave rise to an abundance of letters from readers – several hundred, according to Francis Lacassin (Lacassin). This outpouring of letters from *Fiction* readers led to the creation of a 'Club des bandes dessinées' in March 1962, bringing together adults to reminisce about their youthful reading. This Club was renamed *Centre d'étude des littératures d'expression graphiques* (Centre for the Study of Graphic Narratives) at the time when a conflict broke out with a dissident faction of the club, which left to found the *Société civile d'études et de recherches sur les littératures dessinées* (Socerlid), directed by Claude Moliterni, who, around his magazine *Phénix*, quickly established himself as the nucleus of comics activism (Demange; see also Gabilliet and Labarre).

All these signals testify to the profound mutation that affected the comics landscape in the first half of the 1960s: comics were becoming more provocative, more mature. Handling self-mockery and absurd humor, venturing into the field of eroticism and radical graphic experimentation, it emancipated itself – not without conflict – from the gangue represented by the July 1949 law on publications intended for young people. Stimulating new reading practices, it structured new communities of learned and cultured readers.

At first glance, Coral's album *Journal d'un embastillé* fits well into this scheme. Published in 1962, it depicts the Algerian war from the French side. It is clearly intended for an adult audience, in touch with the most burning news, part of the debate of ideas, a hybrid object halfway between

non-fiction and political satire such as can be found, for example, in the pages of *Le Canard enchaîné* (Screech). Coral's bbok might seem to be part of this wider movement of thematic expansion of comics to current issues, which can also be found, in the same period, in the pages of *Hara-Kiri* (Kohn). As such, adding it to the chronology could be no more than an additional nuance, a footnote that enriches our knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms that lead the Francophone comics to what they have become today.

But this model on which the Franco-Belgian history of comics is built is based on a clearly teleological writing: like American comics, the traditional history of comics is impregnated with the *Bildungsroman* (Pizzino) which would lead comics towards adulthood, in the double sense of a maturity of the readership and the medium. This tension between young and adult readership on the one hand, and between entertainment and art on the other, has been constructed since the early 1960s by journalists and comic book enthusiasts. Working to legitimize the "ninth art," these actors aimed to claim a new status for comics, at the cost of a selective writing of its history (Lesage, *Ninth Art*).

This linear schema, which would go from childish entertainment to a complex work intended for adults, constructed by the first comics enthusiasts, was taken up and amplified in particular by Luc Boltanski, one of the sociologists closest to Pierre Bourdieu, who, in the first issue of the journal that Bourdieu launched, the *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, described this schema in an article that has remained famous (Boltanski). In it, Boltanski analyses in a pioneering way the transformation of the landscape of comics. He links this transformation to the mutation of the way comics are viewed and, more broadly, to the mutation of the readership. In France, where schooling has been extended and secondary and, soon, higher education has been massively expanded, the relationship to culture is changing. While French cultural life is in the process of being overturned by the expansion of the middle classes, the comic book readership is extending its consumption of comics beyond adolescence. For Boltanski, this is not a coincidence, but rather one of the testimonies of what Pierre Bourdieu has called the "average arts" (*les arts moyens*) (Bourdieu). What is at stake in the comics scene is therefore the re-composition of cultural values, against the background of the emergence of middle classes that impose their new cultural norms while, simultaneously, the transformation in the socio-cultural composition of the authors brings out new voices, new creative adventures.

VI. Conclusion

This understanding of the mechanisms by which the French comics changed status during the 1960s-1970s and gradually came to be treated as an art form has been, and continues to be, bitterly discussed (Maigret, "La reconnaissance"; Maigret, "Bande dessinée et postlégitimité"; see also Seveau). What interests me here is not so much the sociological interpretive key – the process of legitimation and its epistemological soundness – as the discussion of that moment in the 1960s when comics were supposed to move linearly from being entertainment for children, to being reading for adults. For, as the reader might have (hopefully) understood from the previous developments on the visual contents of the *Journal*, Coral's book does not fit this narrative. Not only because it was published directly in book form, whereas the 'adult' comics of the 1960s were first and foremost published in the press – such as *Barbarella*, which was published in album form by Losfeld (Forest), but first published in the pages of a second-rate erotica magazine, *V Magazine*. Although the albums received more critical interest, the creation of these works was primarily carried out by the comics magazines until the mid-1970s. The works that appeared directly in bookshops were more like editorial UFOs: for example, Alain Tercinet's astonishing adaptation of *Et on tuera tous les affreux*, a sulphurous cult novel by Boris Vian, which Losfeld (again) published in 1967 (Vian et Tercinet). Tercinet's version, which is the only known foray into comics, offers a parallel rereading of Vian's story, proposing a hybrid form between adaptation and illustrated novel. But such examples of comic stories appearing directly in book form are still totally exceptional (Preteseille).

Coral's story certainly shifts our chronology of what we call (with all the problems that poses) a graphic novel, because in many respects, if we were to accept the term (Baetens et Frey), this book would be a very good candidate, shaking up our conception of adult comics emancipated from children's illustrated press. We would therefore have another cultural series emerging here (Gaudreault), which remains to be questioned. Moreover, Coral's work is in line with the mobilization of drawing in the service of racist and anti-Semitic satire, which had a golden age at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, notably under the pen of Caran d'Ache (Tillier).

Coral's work raises many additional questions, starting with its reception: in which circles was it distributed, and how was it perceived? Moreover: How does the satire that Coral proposes (at least in part) fit in with the nostalgia that permeates the OAS? The investigation remains to

be carried out, and promises to be complicated in terms of sources and accessibility. Despite the questions that remain open, Coral's album offers a fascinating glimpse into a little-known part of the history of comics: their militant uses, especially those leaning towards the extreme right. The way in which the extreme right-wing movements seized on comics to renew their communication is still little known, and would undoubtedly shed light on the complex re-compositions that this fringe experienced in the 1960s and 1970s, in the phase preceding the irruption of the National Front on the political scene.

It is of course uncomfortable to set up a reactionary, supporter of French Algeria, who multiplies misogynistic, anti-Semitic and racist representations as a key figure in the history of comics – but these are traits that could qualify many canonical authors, beginning with French "founding fathers" such as Alain Saint-Ogan or Hergé. In the end, Coral's concealment should probably be seen as a trace of this decolonial past that does not pass away, of the difficulty of French society in settling the accounts of the Algerian War (Stora; Branche; Jauffret; House et MacMaster). Inscribed on the wrong side of history, Coral is an eminently problematic figure. But it is undoubtedly in this way that he is a fascinating object of study.

If we want to understand the way in which comics allow the expression of competing and sometimes conflicting memories of the Algerian War, it seems to me that we should start by considering the treatment of the conflict in the heat of the moment, which already bears witness to the battles of memory surrounding the Algerian War. Coral's book should thus encourage comics scholars to broaden the corpus of the history of French-language comics. Beyond the magazines well known to several generations of researchers, a great number of stories nestle in the recesses of the cultural memory. Questioning the canon of comics historiography opens many perspectives to enrich our understanding of graphic narratives, their past and the issues they address.

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