

# **Algerian colonial history in French textbooks**

## **At the crossroad of nationalism and memory clashes**

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### **Keywords**

history textbooks, history education, colonial history, Algeria, immigrants, multiperspectivity

### **ABSTRACT**

The representation of controversial or painful events is always difficult. One cannot consider the feelings and perspectives of all people that were involved in a given occurrence. This difficulty is felt in any sort of media. Hence, journalists or politicians when speaking publicly or writing an article or speech have the obligation to choose the right words and to state the right facts in order to not only be taken seriously but also to be respected as authorities. When such past events have to be represented in media such as history textbooks the matter becomes even more complex.

History textbooks are seen as crucial tools in the creation of the future model citizens. Although some might argue that this medium is slowly losing ground to tools such as the internet, the textbook still plays a fundamental role in the daily routine of a classroom. The role of explaining and justifying the occurrence of controversial or horrific past events to the students is not solely held by the teacher but also by the authors of history textbooks. Hence, these authors have the responsibility to represent a fair and impartial version of what truly did happen in the past. However, this task becomes difficult when the historical occurrence happens to severely put in jeopardy the image of the country in which the textbook is published. The authors are then faced with the difficult choice to either be loyal to their belief in impartiality, which is part of their history profession or to their obligation of to form faithful future citizens. In a country such as France the choice seems often easily made and the representation of controversial historical topics is often known to be either avoided or distorted.

With respect to my Master Thesis research I have formulated the following main question: *How is colonial Algerian history represented in French history textbooks between 1970 and 2012? To what extent can we link possible changes in these representations to public debates on this history in France?*

I have investigated how one of the most controversial French historical events was and is still represented. The goal of this Master thesis is not only to describe the possible changes, but to link these to one of the most heated French public debate of the new millennium: the connection between the colonial past and the present situation of immigrants. Hence, the occurring of highly covered public events such as the riots of 2005 by the youth of the French banlieux, which were mostly organized by second generation North African immigrants, stirred not only academic debates but also public frenzy. This study does not only touch upon area such as education and history didactics, it also highlights contemporary public issues that are now being addressed all over the world.

August 21, 2013