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M. Kathryn Edwards, *Contesting Indochina: French Remembrance between Decolonization and Cold War*. Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 2016. xvii + 305 pp. Illustrations, map, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-5202-8860-7; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-5202-8861-4; \$34.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-0-5209-6346-7.

Review by Claire Edington, University of California San Diego.

The Indochina War, culminating with the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, signaled the end of France's empire in Southeast Asia and foreshadowed the bloody conflicts of decolonization yet to come. Unfolding far from home and fought by a professional army and troops drawn from France's colonial possessions, the Indochina War failed to grab hold of the French public's attention and continues to occupy an ambiguous status in popular memory today. While the conflict may be overshadowed by the memory of Second World War, which came directly before, and the Algerian War of Independence, which later followed, it is not insignificant. As M. Kathryn Edwards convincingly demonstrates in this erudite, nuanced, and crisply argued study, the unique ways in which the Indochina War has been memorialized, decades after the conclusion of the conflict and in the face of public indifference, make it a useful "case study for historical remembrance" (p. 2). Framed alternately as a legitimate war of independence or as a struggle against communism, memories of the Indochina War reflect the fractured and controversial nature of the war itself. These competing ideological interpretations have resulted in what Edwards terms a "divided memory" that can be seen reflected in the various acts and sites of commemoration established since the early 1980s. *Contesting Indochina* recounts these conflicted politics around the memory of the Indochina War in France and its place within ongoing debates over the country's colonial past.

The stark ideological divisions governing the war's interpretation are outlined in the book's first section. Chapter two elaborates the anti-communist position promoted by the National Association of Veterans and Friends of Indochina (ANAI), which views the war as an effort to protect the colonized peoples of Indochina from a dangerous communist threat. Veterans are presented as neglected heroes, victims even, who survived only to return home to an indifferent metropolitan public. This narrative seeks to rehabilitate the status of veterans and their sacrifice in French society but also, in emphasizing the Franco-Indochinese partnership, rehabilitate the colonial project as a whole. Whereas the anti-communist position focuses on the Cold War context of the conflict, the anti-colonial position describes a "dirty" war of recolonization that sought to crush legitimate national independence movements. Chapter three details the contributions to this narrative by a coalition of interest groups and intellectuals with ties to the political left including the Republican Veteran's Association (ARAC) and their affiliated group, Association of Veterans and Victims of the IC War (ACVGI). The influence of the French Communist Party (PCF) is especially pronounced in the commemorative efforts of the city of Montreuil, part of the historical Parisian red belt, which developed a museum exhibit in 2007 dedicated to promoting the legacy of Ho Chi Minh. While fascinating, this episode might have also been an interesting opportunity to examine exchanges between memory projects in France and Vietnam, a dimension to this story which is touched on only briefly in the book's conclusion.

It is the ANAI, however, which has exerted the most influence on official narratives of the war. In the book's next section, Edwards elaborates in rich detail the political controversies that swirled around the creation of both official and unofficial "sites of memory": the burial of an unknown soldier in 1980, the 1996 completion of the Memorial to the Indochina Wars in the town of Fréjus, and the creation of national day of remembrance in 2005 to those who died for France in Indochina. Throughout each episode runs the tension of how to represent an inglorious war whose memory "induces controversy instead of consensus" (p. 89). These issues are perhaps the most difficult to confront when it comes to the legacy of the repatriate camps, those repurposed World War I barracks where soldiers, settlers, and French citizens of indigenous background were resettled after the war. For Edwards, these camps serve as a kind of foil to the memorial complex at Fréjus in that they symbolize the failure of the state to assume responsibility for what the war carried home. The book's final chapter on the war's representation in film shows a very different kind of engagement with the war's impact, which largely embraces colonial nostalgia and leaves little space for critical re-examination.

One of *Contesting Indochina's* most valuable contributions is how it considers the ways in which memories of other wars interact and re-shape ongoing commemorative practices of the Indochina War. This comes out most sharply in the discussion of the 1991 controversy in which Georges Boudarel, a professor of Vietnamese history in Paris, was publicly accused of treason by a former prisoner of a Viet Minh Prisoner of War camp. The media frenzy that ensued witnessed frequent parallels drawn between Viet Minh and Nazi camps and saw Boudarel's detractors frame the fight against the Nazis and Viet Minh as part of a continuous, noble struggle against totalitarianism. This narrative of resistance spanning both wars, as Edwards notes, also conveniently helps to erase memories of the French collaboration with the Vichy regime in Indochina.

The shadow of the Algerian War also looms large throughout the entire book, at once forcing greater attention to the Indochina War while also overshadowing it. The period between 1984 and 1994, culminating with the fortieth anniversary of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, marked the high-water point for commemoration of the Indochina War yet it has never achieved the same level of cultural salience as the Algerian War. The reader does not get a strong sense of the memorialization efforts associated with the Algerian War in France and how they engage with broader histories of immigration and decolonization in ways that might put the specific Cold War context of the Indochina War in greater relief. Unlike the Algerian War, we are told the memory of the Indochina War is marked less by turning points than what Edwards terms "flash points" of collective remembrance which bring the war to sudden attention but do not meaningfully shift interpretations of the war itself. Indeed, what is so striking in this story is precisely how little the positions have changed since the postwar period. This is all the more remarkable given the shifting politics around the memory of the Algerian War in France in recent years, as detailed by Todd Shepard in his *The Invention of Decolonization* (2006), which receives short shrift here. These connections could have been probed further. Both conflicts also raise important questions about the assimilation of immigrant communities and the continual re-definition of French national identity. How did Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao communities in France themselves perceive popular representations of the Indochina War, and to what extent did they see their experiences mirrored in these commemorative activities?

In the end, there seems little hope of an eventual reconciliation between the anti-communist and anti-colonial perspectives. Edwards suggests that as compared to the American public, which has been much quicker to confront the "national trauma" of the Vietnam War, the French have had to contend with "several dark periods" including the aftershocks of World War II and the loss of its empire (p. 103). What is crucial to understand, and here is a major lesson from *Contesting Indochina*, is that these dark periods are never really in the past and that what bubbles to the surface and what remains underneath is the product of deliberate and contested, yet intertwined, efforts at historical recuperation. In this way,

with great sensitivity, Edwards does an important service in recovering not only the history of the Indochina War but also the history of its memory in France.

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