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Mouloud Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. Trans. Lucy R. McNair. Intro. James D. LeSueur. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005. xxxiv + 153 pp. Introduction and glossary. $49.50 (cl). ISBN 0-8139-2325-5. $16.95 (pb). ISBN 0-8139-2326-3.

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Historian James Le Sueur's edited English volume of Mouloud Ferouan's *Journal 1955~1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* made more available the thought of this literary humanist and intellectual, and dedicated schoolteacher, from the Kabylia region of Algeria. A rarity of its genre for the Kabyle Berbers, his journal affords a living chronicle of the daily and cumulative ravages of that war on this population and on Algeria itself.[1] Now Le Sueur brings us the English edition of Ferouan's coming-of-age novel, *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. This first literary effort provides an intimate ethnographic study of a group of the first known North Africans--the Kabyle Berbers--and how an inconspicuous colonialism and war molded the twentieth century son of Chabane into that remarkable man.[2]

A modest Ferouan purports simply to tell his own story. Yet well beyond the personal, his novel preserves, in the Braudelian sense, *la longue durée* of North Africa's Kabyle Berbers. The linguistic distinction of their Tamazight vernacular and their locale in the Kabylia distinguish them from other Berber groups of Algeria--Mzabs, Chaouia, and Touaregs.[3] Writing his novel between 1939 and 1949 against a portent of fateful events, the educated Ferouan was sensitive to the dangers that threatened the Kabyle ethnic specificity and cultural legacy. This awareness is demonstrated in the novel when, in 1940, the protagonist, Fouroulou Menrad, notes, as "disaster struck France with the swiftness of a fatal accident," his own people switched colonial loyalties. "[N]ow we're Hitlerians," he observes and asks, "what's in it for us?"(p. 136). In the late 1940s, when Ferouan's novel nears completion, the nationalist Algerian movement is solidifying, and those Kabyle leaders who raise the ethnic question are derisively excluded.[4] At risk is the Kabyle Berber heritage whose "language and traditions were deeply rooted in the North African mosaic," a political reality that Algeria's state makers wipe out in eradicating ethnic pluralism. The publication in 1951 of *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* preserves a cornerstone of Algeria, mediating it for posterity through culture.

Mouloud Feraoun has given us a story of the Kabylia that is part memoir, part ethnography, part fiction, part history, and part microstudy of globalism, all entirely engaging. His careful, sparse prose insures clarity in the voice of Menrad Fouroulou, firstborn viable son to Ramdane and Fatama. Fouroulou's narration of how he becomes a man unfolds in the spectrum of Kabyle place, time, and culture, all subtly refracted through the prism of French colonial policy, war, and global change. If the explicit story is the coming-of-age of a sensitive boy in the Kabyle of colonial Algeria, a second deeper level concerns the question of how the identity of the Kabyle Berbers will fare in the crucible of events in which they are subsumed.

Fouroulou's narrative unfolds at the *djemaâ* in his boyhood village of Tizi. The Kabylian equivalent of the village square, the *djemaâ* seems to be the generator of Kabyle culture. It is the seminal site of socialization, mediator of news and newsworthy, inculcator of Berber myths and rituals, the pecking order, and even the rites of violence. Ferouan's wry sense of humor and irony gives his story an endearing twist, as all moments comedic and grim swarm in this privileged spot which "our ancestors anointed for the men and the boys (p. 6)… and where every village brat learns early he has his place" (p.

23). Encircling the *djemaâ*, Tizi's dwellings "cling to each other along the summit of its ridge like the gigantic vertebrae of some prehistoric monster" (p. 5), a poetic referent to the ways in which Berber ancestors clung together by necessity (p. 7).

The Kabyle male toddler Fouroulou Menrad already knew he was hot stuff when "my sisters put up with my teasing and punches" and my princely portion of the couscous; and I could be "rude to the grown-ups with impunity"(p.18). Such solicitude the price of their anatomy, his sisters sanctify their good fortune to have a brother. For "as the first viable son of the Menrads, on me hung the fate of the entire *karouba*,[6] a heavy fate for the tiny runt of a man I was!" (p. 18).

It is out of the *djemaâ* that flows Ferouan's splendid parable in which the childish Fouroulou's gall short-circuits to riotous and taming effect. It happens that his impertinence ignites a blood feud when an action-starved crowd twists an accident, a nick to his precious Menrad's forehead, into an attempted murder by a rival clansman. With father away, it falls to the manly Uncle Lounis to avenge the family honor. His recourse to armed conflict swiftly erupts into a ludic orgy of village proportions between the rival clans that only the pacifying *amin*[7] is able to halt (p. 23). Implicit in the cadence of this seemingly disorderly scramble is an oddly familiar order. Is this the wisdom of these ancestral hills to accept the ritual relief of monotony, itch for a fight, and meltdown of frustration or anger? Finally, the way in which the villagers settle their dispute is striking in its invisibility of colonial officials to the process. After a fun time had by all, the rivals return to their respective hearths and the women prepare banquets to mollify the *amin*'s judgment of events. He then orchestrates peace between the rival clans, and each group pays off the *amin* and the *qaid* to hush up the whole affair. They alone are the eyes and ears of the colonial regime in the remote Kabylia, and the payoff facilitates relative independence at the village level and continuity of Berber specificity. In the end, Fouroulou has gleaned his civilizing lesson from the outrageously embellished incident: in lieu of Uncle Lounis's approach to crisis management, it is in his best interest to adopt a gentle demeanor. His rendition of this carnival affords Ferouan the chance to elucidate both the specificity and universality of Kabyle Berber ethnicity--the centrality of the *djemaâ* as a generator of culture, the place of women and of men as mediators of that culture, the authority of the Berber elders, the symbolic and literal value of food, the intolerance of vanity, the esteem for the ruse, the supreme important humor and fun, the role of popular religion, i.e. the exorcising of *jinns*[8] and sacrificial goats, and, finally, to what extent a young boy's identity is inseparable from his *karouba* and his village. Fouroulou's fate is entwined with even "those who are blind"(p. 3), and it is for this reason that he will return home after his *école* education, marry his first cousin, and become the humble schoolteacher of his Kabyle Berber people. Fourloulou has no longing for the French wife, the university professorship, and the cosmopolitan life of Algiers or even Paris.

Indeed in Ferouan's memoir, disguised as a *Bildungsroman*, colonialism is inconspicuous, "everywhere, invisible but omnipresent, and distributing good and evil with an open hand."[9] The invisible hand that has eliminated malaria and typhoid in Algeria launches a sudden population explosion whose flocks and farms surpass their natural resources.[10] The good intentions of the colonizer are inflicted on Fouroulou's childhood as hunger hangs over his multiplying family. His peasant father cannot sustain them with the dwindling resources from his near worthless land. So the illiterate Ramdane, like millions of other Algerians, emigrates to France where he works and lives in isolation, to send a paycheck to his family. It is not at all clear that Ferouan puts the sole blame for this situation on colonialism. He is too shrewd not to realize that contact with superior foreign techniques is assaulting archaic agricultural civilizations worldwide.[11] More explicit is the ambiguity of Ferouan's feelings toward France. For the experience of the Kabylians in French colonial Algeria was not, from 1857 on, the same as that of the Arab majority. France aimed through its ethnic policy to segregate the Kabyle Berbers from the Arabs, and to forge a French-like Berber intellectual elite, impregnated with French culture and language. Spectacular results were achieved in the literary genius of Mouloud Ferouan, Jean Amrouche,

Mouloud Mammeri, and Kateb Yacine, who wrote in French and have cultivated admirers worldwide.[12]

Like Ferouan and his fictional counterpart, nearly all of the state-recruited teachers for Algeria were of Berber origin.[13] Fouroulu is hardly blind to the novelty of his spectacular privilege to be cultivated at the École Normale Superieur d'Alger Bouzaréa. Nor does he take for granted the rarity of financial security he can count on as the paterfamilias for his *karouba*. In the course of years spent to prepare for his career as a teacher, the eager student "regains his dignity" (pp. 118-119). Ferouan does not ignore the condescension of certain of the European students, but he is meticulous in distinguishing the climate of *normalien* classroom from the world outside. Of particular note is the anecdote of a French mathematics professor whose concern results in a personal loan for the family of the overwrought Fouroulou. The inclusion of such a scene reveals a measure of Ferouan the humanist, in his choice to show that "humanity is frail, diverse, and hopeful" (p. ix).

"The War" and "Epilogue" chapters have finally reemerged in this English edition, omitted from the original, Le Sueur suspects, for their depiction of imperial France as weak and defenseless. The pages here are bereft of humor as Ferouan unfurls World War II in the spring of Fouroulou's teaching career. The initial naiveté of his fellow Kabylians evident in 1940 is reminiscent of Europeans on the eve of 1914. Fed up with their monotonous existence, they too seem to be "dancing on a volcano" to avert the melancholy of their heavy fate.[14] Ferouan makes clear that poverty and misery were no stranger to Kabylia. In the past the ancestral wealth of Kabyles had more or less compensated for their swings from abject poverty to modest comfort. It resided in the advantages of kindred living together, "the joy to have neighbors who do favors, help, lend, assist, sympathize, and share your fate" (7). Their homogeneous culture had united the Berbers and their identity withstood the Roman, Byzantine, Greek, Arab, and French invasions.

From 1940 to 1943 Kabylians yet again faced wartime destruction. Their villages were left unscathed by bombardment, but in Ferouan's narrative the plunder of their humanity was insidious and unyielding. In the wake of Republican defeat, Kabyle villages suddenly overflowed as Vichy returned their workers and soldiers. Shops emptied, prices rose, and the native resources from deteriorated soils and dried up springs held the populations for barely a month. Then came the nightmares. Out of Ferouan's final chapters emerges an intimate anthropological appraisal of what twentieth century war inflicted on a "world made flat by globalism."[15] Take the tragedy of cruel starvation Fouroulou's villager experience. It happens that the families of Aït-Tabous can no longer find barley at their markets. Their empty bellies are at the mercy of Vichy whose special services have blocked their supplies. Grotesque agents of horror now dole out couscous at some distant warehouse, and Feraoun depicts the queue on one such occasion: it is a "deplorable parade of misery personified."(p. 140) The scene is one of the brutal depravity of men and women reduced to ragged, filthy "Sad beasts … mute, gentle, humble. All old, even the young … eyes widen open ... yet sunken in deep sockets." (p. 139). Denuded of all modesty and self-respect, the Berbers grovel before the insolence, cruelty, and extortion of the ravenous Vichy agent who grows fat on their misery. Another more incomprehensible evil infects the Kabyles. As never before, "one is ready to cheat a friend, swindle a brother, or break a promise" if the loss of such scruples replenishes the couscous pot (142). Ferouan's final pages mourn the collective effect of this climate, which has dehumanized too many Kabyles and invariably splintered a collective solidarity and identity enriched over millennia.

The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher is a rich, sensitive and informative ethnographic study of the Kabylia over the first half of the twentieth century. Those in search of an anti-colonial diatribe won't find it here in *The Poor Man's Son*. Instead Ferouan's autobiographical novel brings to mind the similar works of Albert Memmi (*The Pillar of Salt*) and Emilie Carles (*A Life of Her Own: The Transformation of a Countrywoman in Twentieth-Century France*), important differences notwithstanding.

All three works are marked by the theme of betrayal, and war darkens each of the coming-of-age accounts. Place is central to the formation of Carles and Ferouan, each of them peasants from homogeneous, poor, isolated mountain villages. And for each of these humble schoolteachers, who are beneficiaries of the Republic's scholarships, there is no question of their return to family and village. Quite distinct from them, Memmi's ethnography is that of a child of the diaspora. He has no home and no certainty of belonging anywhere. And, finally, a reading of Ferouan stands apart. Memmi and Carles's works can be understood within a lifetime of achievement. Ferouan never got that chance. Dedicated educators for the French educational services, Feraoun and five colleagues perished under the bullets of the Secret Army Organization (OAS) just days before the signing of the Evian Peace Accords which ended the French-Algerian war.

NOTES

[1] Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, trans. Mary Ellen Wolf and Claude Fouillade, ed. and intro. James Le Sueur (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Originally published as *Journal, 1955-1962* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964).

[2] *Ibid.*, xvi. Le Sueur elucidates Ferouan's choice of "the sons of Chabane" for the Menrads. The Berber surname Aït Chabaâne underwent French-enforced Arabization to Ferouan in 1871 after the revolt in Kabylia. A French officer forcibly altered to Ferouan (Arabic for Pharaoh) in 1871 following the revolt in Kabylia. Mouloud Feraoun reclaimed his surname of Aït Chabaâne in fact, in Kabylia, and in fiction for the Menrad "sons of Chabane" in *The Poor Man's Son*. See Mouloud Feraoun, *Lettres à ses amis* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), p. 89.

[3] Taoufik Djebali, "Ethnicity and Power in North Africa," in Paul R. Spickard, ed., *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 147.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[6] See Glossary, p. 152. The *karouba* refers to the extended family, including in-laws.

[7] See Glossary, p. 151. The *amin* is the village leader and representative of the law appointed on the advice of the *qaid* (Muslim administrator).

[8] The *jinns* were/are among a host of popular beliefs that added a comfortable supernatural chill to the formal pillars of Islam. Between the angels and humans, the evil *jinns* were created out of fire and made mischief, from playful hiding of objects, to illness, or demoniac possession. See Raphaela Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey* (New York: Dorset Press, 1971), pp. 46-47.

[9] Germaine Tillion, *Algeria: The Realities*, trans. Ronald Mathews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), pp. 18-21. Originally published as *L'Algérie en 1957* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957).

[10] *Ibid.* [11] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63. [12] Djebali, p. 147. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 148. [14] Cited in Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment & Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 199.

[15] Thomas L. Friedman pursues the development that he describes as "the flattening" of the planet in *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

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