

H-France Review Vol. 16 (September 2016), No. 189

Djemaa Maazouzi, *Le Partage des mémoires: La guerre d'Algérie en littérature, au cinéma et sur le web*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015. 487 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. 87.00€. (cl). ISBN 978-2-8124-3836-3; 49.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-8124-3835-6.

Review by Lia Nicole Brozgal, University of California, Los Angeles.

The war for independence that opposed the settler colony of Algeria and the imperial power of France (1954–1962) was nasty, brutish, and long. More than fifty years later, its memory remains a subject of significant and even quotidian controversy in France. Following on from Henry Rousso's *Vichy Syndrome*, which periodized French collective responses to Vichy and World War II, memory of the Algerian War in France can be articulated into analogous phases.[1] An initial period of amnesty (1962–1968), during which both France and Algeria agreed to abandon criminal pursuit of key actors, was followed by a decade of amnesia (1969–1980). Although the amnesia phase coincided with the emergence of a powerful *pied-noir* lobby, discourse about the war was largely absent from the public sphere. The 1980s, which correspond to what Rousso calls a period of anamnesis or recollection, also witnessed the arrival on the scene of the *beur* movement, or the social and political *prise de conscience* of second-generation Algerians born in France.[2]

Finally, the current hypermnestic or obsessional phase, which began in 1991, has seen the Algerian conflict recognized, politically and officially, as a war. (The October 18, 1999 law passed during Chirac's first term as president formally changed the wording from “military operation” to “war.”) This period of memory “fever”—with its dual connotations of malady and desire—is characterized as much by the proliferation of memorial discourse and commemorative activities as by the interrogation of these very discourses and activities. Numerous articles, books, films, and talk shows dedicated to questions related to the Algerian War exist in tandem with a chorus of political and social actors, all of whom lament what they define as a particularly French tendency to engage in discourses of *repentance* and auto-flagellation.[3]

The new book by Djemma Maazouzi, *Le Partage des mémoires: La guerre d'Algérie en littérature, au cinéma et sur le web*, is well aware of this political backdrop and of the various ways the memory of the Algerian War becomes instrumentalized in public and academic discourse. Yet Maazouzi avails herself of a premise that allows her inquiry to remain above the fray: rather than debate the periodization of memory or quibble over what it would mean for there to be a “surfeit” of memory about the war, she opts for a tripartite solution that involves 1) understanding the memory of the Algerian war as intrinsically plural; 2) recognizing that these memories belong to, and are represented by, a variety of actors whose collective experiences of the war, exile in France, and the postcolonial aftermath are idiosyncratic, highly differentiated, and on occasion contradictory; and 3) demonstrating the ways in which these memories are represented and negotiated in a variety of genres of cultural texts.

If the goal of the book—to show how the representation of memories of the Algerian War functions in literature, film, and web productions—is fairly straightforward, the structure and organization of *Le*

Partage des mémoires is relatively complex, and even the five-page table of contents does not do justice to the number of subparts, sections, and subsections contained in each of the four main parts of the book. The first 100 pages review the scholarship on history and memory (Halbwachs, Ricoeur, Nora, Pomian) and establish the necessary colonial and postcolonial context. The first part of the book also articulates its method, identifies its corpus, and provides a rationale for these choices.

In keeping with one of the possible interpretations of the titular *partage*, Maazouzi's project posits the memories of the Algerian War as a shared archive, offering equal space to the cultural productions of three different *porteurs de mémoire* (memory bearers), each of whom represents--both in terms of personal trajectory and through the content of the work--a different *mémoire groupale* (group or collective memory). This approach allows Maazouzi to consider, in a non-hierarchical fashion, the memories of the *harki* (Algerian soldiers who served alongside the French and who have, as a result, been considered traitors); of rank-and-file Algerians; and of the *pieds-noirs* (residents of French Algeria of European extraction). Each of the three remaining sections of the book is devoted to the representations of the memories of one of these groups, as performed in both a paradigmatic work and in a small number of other works that either provide counterpoint or confirm the analysis of the primary cultural production.

The daughter of a *harki*, Zahia Rahmani represents the memories of the first group. An analysis of her autobiographical novel, *Moze*, serves as the backbone for the second section of *Le Partage des mémoires*, which uses the trope of the trial (*le procès*) to explore the complexities of the *harki* as perpetrator, but also as protector and pragmatist. Maazouzi's analysis privileges the text's ability to create connections with other groups (namely, Algerian Jews) and in this regard, it reveals an important distinction between *Moze* and the great majority of *harki* novels, which tend to remain focused on the drama of the *harki* and their families, often to the exclusion of other groups whose memories of the Algerian war are equally fraught. The novelist and filmmaker Mehdi Charef is the mouthpiece of the *beurs* (French-born children of Algerian immigrants), a group that defined its political subjectivity in the 1980s through social and cultural action. Articulated around the concept of the encounter (*la rencontre*), this third section takes its inspiration from three works by Charef (a play, a novel, and a film), all of which stage encounters between various actors in colonial Algeria (*pieds-noirs*, French administrators, the Algerian proletariat, Jews, and *harki*). The memories of the third group, the *pieds-noirs*, are represented in the figure of the filmmaker, Tony Gatlif, and this fourth section deploys the trope of the return (*le retour*)--a theme found not only in *piéd-noir* cultural productions, but also a veritable leitmotif in contemporary Franco-Algerian film and literature, generally. Maazouzi's granular analysis of Gatlif's "road movie," *Exiles* (2004)--in which French-born Zano (son of *pieds-noirs*) and Naïma (daughter of Algerian immigrants) travel from Paris to Oran and Algiers by train, boat and on foot--mobilizes the subtle memory negotiations at work, both visually and narratively.

All three bearers of memory--Rahmani, Charef, Gatlif--were selected for their capacity to "témoigner exemplairement" (bear witness in an exemplary fashion) (p. 82) and for a purported commonality: in all three cases, Maazouzi suggests, it is only their most recent work (*Moze* appeared in 2003; Charef's triptych in 2005 and 2006; and *Exiles* in 2004) that reveals a concern with memory, commemoration, and bearing witness to a particular past. It is a curious constraint, one that, in fact, weakens under factual and hermeneutical scrutiny. *Moze* is Rahmani's first novel, a detail that makes the text's interest in the past and the memory of the Algerian War foundational to her corpus. Moreover, while it is true that Charef's first novels were not about the Algerian War per se, it seems impossible to read his first novel, *Un thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed*, in all its inglorious depictions of the Parisian *banlieue*, without imagining an implicit commentary on the war and its aftermath. Finally, as Maazouzi notes, prior to *Exiles*, Gatlif's filmography was primarily focused on the gypsy milieu. At first glance, this fact would certainly support the claim that representing memories of the Algerian War belongs to the cineaste's "late work." But Gatlif, whose father was from Kabylia and whose mother is described as a gypsy, is a strange choice as the bearer of *piéd-noir* memory. Unlike Rahmani and Charef, he is reticent when it comes to speaking out about his Algerian experience and, when he does, the focus tends to be on his

gypsy heritage, rather than on *pied-noir* memories. *Exiles* itself, moreover, with its emphasis on characters who are the children of *pieds-noirs* and indigenous Algerians, offers a broad consideration of the various *mémoires en partage*.

Le Partage des mémoires is one of the most recent acquisitions to appear under Classiques Garnier's relatively new imprint, *Littérature, Histoire, Politique* (helmed by comparatists Catherine Coquio, Lucie Campos and Emmanuel Bouju). Of the twenty-three tomes published since the collection debuted in 2012, Maazouzi's is one of a few to address issues related to the Francophone postcolonial world and the only book to tackle the thorny question of the Algerian war's representation in literature and cinema. Given the number of cultural productions that represent and wrestle with colonization and its aftermath, and the relative paucity of robust scholarship devoted to these works, Classiques Garnier would do well to continue in this vein, offering a privileged intellectual space to authors attempting to make visible the texts and films that account for lost or forgotten memories and histories.

NOTES

[1] Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).

[2] Rousso, "Les raisons vertes de la guerre d'Algérie," in Yves Michaud ed., *La Guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), pp. 127-151.

[3] See for example: Pascal Bruckner, *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), or Eric Zemmour, *Le suicide français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014).

Lia Nicole Brozgal
University of California, Los Angeles
lbrozgal@humnet.ucla.edu

Copyright © 2016 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172