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Michael F. O'Riley, *Cinema in an Age of Terror: North Africa, Victimization, and Colonial History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 198 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-8032-2809-2.

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On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence, issues of memory and forgetting continue to dominate academic engagement with France's imperial past and multicultural present. Published in the University of Nebraska Press's "France Overseas" series, Michael O'Riley's contribution to this ongoing debate highlights the role of cinematic representations in what he termed in an earlier volume "postcolonial haunting and victimization."^[1] This new study serves to underline the continuing centrality of narrative, and thus the commemorative tension between individual stories and national histories. Much has been written about the failures of historiography which have prevented the emergence of a consensual history of France's presence in North Africa between 1830 and 1962, and especially of the traumatic complexity of the Algerian war. If anything, the conventional model of state-encouraged forgetfulness has been reinforced by the two decades of systematic enquiry which began with the landmark conference organized by the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent in 1988.^[2] This process was intensified by the commemorative *ouverture* prompted by the thirtieth anniversary of Algerian independence in 1992 and was given fresh fuel by the 1999 decision to open the relevant state archives. The myriad studies produced in this period may consequently be understood as the results of a collective determination by French, Algerian, and other scholars to puncture the "silence" which was typically felt to have characterized the three decades which followed the conflict.

Yet, in spite of the sheer volume and often excellent quality of such work—helpfully inventoried by Raphaëlle Branche in 2005—*histoires* in the plural continue to be at least as significant as *histoire* in the singular (with or without a capital letter).^[3] Against this backdrop, the present volume constitutes a thoughtful and frequently challenging contribution to the scholarly debate, presenting an innovative reading of a selection of significant artistic representations of the 1954-1962 conflict. Here again, previous studies have tended to centre on the cultural insertion of durably disturbing military and political events into the broader narrative of Franco-Algerian relations, including especially the complex legacy of mass migration first to and then from the Maghreb.^[4]

A related scholarly project has been the engagement with the cultural history of empire which has encouraged a broader exploration of colonial practices, locations, and representations. Borrowing from the methods of geography, historians such as Martin Thomas have looked particularly to illuminate the "mental maps of empire" which informed French thinking during the colonial period and which, arguably, may still underpin contemporary responses to the enduring challenges of Franco-Maghrebian geo-politics and demographics.^[5] From this point of view, Michael O'Riley's study of cinematic representations might very usefully be set alongside David Slavin's *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939*.^[6]

As its title suggests, this particular example of the cartographic "turn" in French and Francophone Studies seeks to link the representation of past (colonial) and present (postcolonial) injustices, situating both within the specific context of a world reshaped by the events of September 11, 2001. In the introduction, the author succinctly states his rationale for

adopting “the age of terror” as a combined chronological and conceptual frame for his analysis, together with the closely associated phenomenon of “victimization”: “My use of the phrase ‘the age of terror’ is meant to designate a tendency in the post-cold war era of reciprocal forms of terrorism and torture where victimization referencing colonial history functions as a central organizing tenet of national and international relations” (p. 1). A footnote to this statement explains that: “My focus in this book is not the United States...I attempt to distance the phrase from any one national perspective” (p. 161, n.1). However, the author adds tellingly, “Although my focus here is more on the relationships between France and its former colonies, my central argument concerning the space of the victim as central to the dynamics of terror can be seen to have direct implications in the larger post-9/11 climate” (p. 161, n.1). Such an approach may meet with contrasting reactions from readers on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as of the Mediterranean Sea.

Of course, there can be no doubting the global resonance of the 9/11 attacks or their military and political fall-out, most obviously the so-called “war on terror,” and thus the American-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it is not immediately obvious to this reader that the troubled legacy of France in Algeria since 1830, and *a fortiori* in the period 1954–1962, may best be understood by being subsumed within the totalizing concept of terror, even if that explanatory category is applied with the subtlety and sophistication undoubtedly displayed in this book. Nor is the suggestion that there exists some form of reciprocity between terrorists and torturers a wholly comfortable one, given the tenacity of the variety of military pragmatism which balances the ostensible preservation from harm of the many against the state-sanctioned suffering of the few—whether such “terrorist” prisoners are held in Algiers or Abu Ghraib, to highlight a linkage of which Michael O’Riley is, in fairness, himself clearly well aware (pp. 44–45).

In spite of such reservations, this book’s focus on victimization is undoubtedly thought-provoking, making for a series of challenging reassessments of a number of iconic films and one important film-related novel, all dealing with France’s contested past in Algeria. The close readings offered here make what is generally a persuasive case for the view that, in the selected works, “[w]hat is at stake is a contest over the space and image of the victim” (p. 2). This perspective is, perhaps, not wholly surprising given the author’s central focus on the Algerian war, with particular emphasis on the Battle of Algiers and the so-called “Battle of Paris,” the long denied massacre of Algerian demonstrators which occurred on 17 October 1961. Thus regarded, it is difficult to deny that victims and victimhood must, indeed, be central to representations of France in North Africa. However, to adopt this particular asymmetric conflict as a touchstone for understanding “terrorism in the wake of September 11,” as this book would seem to advocate, seems less straightforward (p. 25).

Yet, whether or not this critical survey is ultimately successful in its aim, considerable interest is to be found in what “could be considered a compilation of reflections on the process of mapping colonial-era victimization—its returns, appropriations, and spectacles” (p. 19). The five essays presented here undertake this cartographic survey in an absorbing fashion, beginning with the author’s reflections on the Pentagon’s 2003 screening of Gillo Pontecorvo’s classic *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which is productively analysed as an example of “how the texts of postcolonial resistance can be easily appropriated by new incarnations of contemporary imperialism today” (p. 26). According to Michael O’Riley, this is precisely because of the centrality of the figure of the victim in this film, as in virtually all of the other works considered here. He argues that the individuals and communities that suffered historically from (Algerian) bomb attacks and (French) torture may, through the processes of narrative reconstruction and filmic spectacle, equally well be recovered and reinvested by activists on both the Right and the Left of the contemporary political spectrum and the terror/counter-terror debate.

The link between postcolonial cinema and the apparatuses of the state, in this case official French recognition (or the lack of it) of the nation's debt of gratitude to its Second World War colonial troops, is further explored in the second essay's investigation of Rachid Bouchareb's *Indigènes* (2007). Here, in line with his broader critique of victimization, the author focuses attention on "the film's larger message of fractured union and partial historical vision" (p. 65), ultimately rejecting "Bouchareb's attempts to speak in the name of victims of colonial history" (p. 77). This critical verdict applies equally well to Michael Haneke's widely applauded treatment of the 17 October 1961 massacre in his film *Caché* (2005), which is the subject of the book's third essay. For Michael O'Riley, this acclaimed work is also a failure, in that "Haneke's film ultimately demonstrates that the desire to view and retrace the history of colonial victimization in a cartographic manner remains at the very heart of a certain postcolonial inability to see outside the recurring paradigm of victimization from colonial history" (p. 80). It is argued that underlying all such representations is a generalized and paralysing culpability, which has its origins in an unabated focus on colonial guilt. Although doubtless unintended, such a formulation has echoes of Pascal Bruckner's altogether more controversial, but not necessarily contradictory, denunciation of alleged postcolonial sentimentalism and even masochism in his polemical essays *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc* and *La Tyrannie de la pénitence*.^[7]

The fourth essay is devoted to the filmic representation of an archaic Maghreb, which serves to generate "East-West polarities" by contrasting this space with a self-consciously modern and at least potentially liberating France, specifically in the so-called *cinéma de banlieue* or *Beur* cinema. The films subjected to scrutiny are *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1997) by Azouz Begag and Christophe Ruggia, *Samia* (2000) by Soraya Nini and Philippe Faucon, and *L'Autre monde* (2001) by Merzak Allouache. Here again, the close readings of these popular depictions of the experience of immigration are both sensitive and instructive, but in the end the author is critical of most of what he sees. He is particularly dismissive of what he terms Begag's "fetishization of French national space" (p. 113), seeing all of these works as examples of a broader "Algeria syndrome," on the model of Henry Rousso's influential *Le Syndrome de Vichy* (p. 127). For Michael O'Riley, referring to the highlighted contrast in these films between a "traditional" Maghreb and a "modern" France, "when colonial era tropes, accurate as they may be within the scope of the realities of contemporary Algeria and its diaspora, function as elements that visually propel filmic narratives, we must ask how the very critique of that type of victimization might ever emerge as an oppositional narrative" (p. 126). The imperial past, it would seem, is not only a foreign country, but one which may continue to imprison contemporary cinema-goers in colonial mindsets if postcolonial film-makers continue to generate narratives of victimhood, however critical of past and present injustices these may be intended to be.

What is the alternative? In the concluding pages of this penultimate essay, we are finally presented with a film which is viewed positively, namely Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah Dimanche* (2001), which, "with its gesture toward a transcendence of the colonial divisions of the Algerian War, would seem to point in a direction that would like to map a new history outside the colonial paradigm" (p. 127). In Benguigui's film, as read here, this transformative potential consists in the openness to cross-cultural encounters of a minority of self-aware individuals, represented by the first-generation immigrant Zouina, who manage to overcome the victim-centred narratives of their conflicting and conflicted communities. However, by definition, such individuals are rare on either side of the Mediterranean, as are their cinematic incarnations, and the final essay consequently looks to a literary narrative for its concluding example of a possible escape route from the highlighted concept of victimization. Assia Djebar's *La Disparition de la langue française* (2003) charts a returned exile's inability to live freely in France or Algeria, and specifically in the archetypal North African space of the Casbah. This novel is discussed in terms of its linkage to *Pépé Le Moko* (1937), Julien Duvivier's masterpiece of colonial *noir*, which is

fruitfully explored as an intertext for Djébar's literary debunking of mythified heroes who continue to generate all too real victims. In the end, the novel's protagonist is no more able to escape the city and its dangerous secrets than is the film's eponymous hero. However, Djébar's archaeological investigation of memory, narrative, and language itself does, on this reading, emerge as one possible way of finding our way out of the Franco-Algerian memorial labyrinth.

Does the reader ultimately come to share Michael O'Riley's view that "[a] comparison of these works demonstrates that the refusal of the victim's posture is central to arresting the cycle of victimization in the age of terror" (p. 20)? Not necessarily, but that same reader will certainly have discovered much of interest in the course of this very stimulating survey. More generally, the author's case might have been strengthened by drawing on a number of additional critical works, including David Slavin's previously noted study of colonial cinema. Other significant works of possible interest would include David Murphy's *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Fiction and Film*, especially given the extended comparison of Sembène and Bouchareb in the second essay, and the major investigation of the events of October 17, 1961 co-authored by Jim House and Neil MacMaster.^[8] Perhaps most significantly, this work could have benefited from Todd Shepard's ground-breaking analysis of the French "invention of decolonization" in Algeria and the consequent remaking of France, and "Frenchness," in the fractured image of that conflict by the putatively postcolonial Fifth Republic.^[9] A further useful inclusion might have been Bertrand Tavernier's long documentary *La Guerre sans nom* (1992), arguably still the most striking example of the French cinematic engagement with the repressed memory of the Algerian war. However, this remains a very thoughtful book which deserves to be read both widely and attentively.

NOTES

[1] Michael F. O'Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization: Assia Djébar's New Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

[2] Jean-Pierre Rioux, ed., *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

[3] Raphaëlle Branche, *La Guerre d'Algérie: Une histoire apaisée?* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

[4] See, for instance, Lila Ibrahim-Lamrous and Catherine Milkovitch-Rioux, eds., *Regards croisés sur la guerre d'Algérie* (Clermond-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2005).

[5] Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind: Vol. 1, Mental Maps of Empire and Colonial Encounters; Vol. 2, Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

[6] David H. Slavin, *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). See also Guy Hennebelle, ed., *CinémAction*, no.85 [special number devoted to 'La guerre d'Algérie à l'écran'] (4^e trimestre 1997). Also of interest is a recent thematic journal issue edited by Joseph McGonagle and Edward Welch on "France and Algeria in Contemporary Visual Culture," *Modern & Contemporary France*, 19/2 (May 2011), in which space and its mapping are particularly to the fore (but which only appeared after the publication of the present volume).

[7] Pascal Bruckner, *Le Sanglot de l'homme blanc* (Paris: Seuil, 1983); *La Tyrannie de la pénitence* (Paris: Grasset, 2006).

[8] David Murphy, *Sembène: Imagining Alternatives in Fiction and Film* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); translated as *Paris 1961: Les Algériens, la terreur d'État et la mémoire* (Paris: Tallandier, 2008). See also Josh Cole, "Remembering the Battle of Paris: 17 October 1961 in French and Algerian Memory," *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 21/3(Fall 2003): 21-50; "Entering History: The Memory of Police Violence in Paris, October 1961," in Patricia Lorcin, ed., *Algeria & France: Identity, Memory, and Nostalgia, 1800-2000* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 117-134; and "Massacres and their Historians: Recent Histories of State Violence in France and Algeria in the 20th Century," *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 28/1(Spring 2010): 106-126.

[9] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); translated as *1962: Comment l'indépendance algérienne a transformé la France* (Paris: Payot, 2008).

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