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Rabah Aissaoui, Claire Eldridge, eds., *Algeria Revisited: History, Culture and Identity*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017. 280 pp. Illustrations and index. \$94.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 978-1-4742-2103-0.

Review by Elise Franklin, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

In a contribution to *Algeria Revisited*, Blandine Valfort quotes *pied-noir* poet Jacques S enac. The writer, Valfort asserts, “[denies] himself the comforts and conveniences of a colonized language, a ready-stewed language in which his fruits could now only macerate” (p. 104). S enac mulled over his own definition-defying position as an anticolonial resistant of European descent and, later, as an unwanted foreigner in Algeria. But his insight also gives rise to one of the important questions addressed in this exciting edited volume on the end of empire in France and Algeria. The essays individually and collectively ask readers to reconsider the language and concepts they have previously used to organize the complicated history of Algerian colonialism and decolonization. Each contribution reconsiders the representation of Algeria’s history as it was made and in the intervening years. As such, this volume adds to a growing literature that calls for interdisciplinary interventions that reject the binary narratives of colonized/colonizer, metropole/colony, pro-colonial/anti-colonial and so forth that have flattened the colonial enterprise into a “ready-stewed language” since its disintegration.

The volume, edited by literary scholar Rabah Aissaoui and historian Claire Eldridge, is organized chronologically and thematically to draw out certain moments in France’s and Algeria’s shared past that were particularly crucial in forming the fault lines between colony and metropole, independent nation and ex-colonial power. By breaking down these narratives, the editors and authors of each essay push scholars to understand the power of our own language as historians in obscuring the past. The volume is divided into three sections. Part one primarily concerns histories of colonial Algeria as it formulated an independence movement in the early twentieth century, while part two focuses on literary and film analyses of colonial and independent Algeria. In the final part, the contributors pull apart the disparate threads of memory that have contributed to our understanding of colonialism in the postcolonial period. In one way or another, however, each of these contributions assesses the paradox inherent in representing Algerians: who speaks for the legacy of colonialism? In what language? And with what authority?

Several essays begin by considering the experience of colonial subjects in the context of the civilizing mission. As historians like Alice Conklin and Frederick Cooper have shown, the language of the civilizing mission often differed dramatically from its implementation and from the experience of the colonized populations, its purported objects.[1] In the first section of the volume, Michelle Mann’s and Rabah Aissaoui’s contributions dissect these divergences. Mann examines the conscription of Algerian Muslims during the First World War to “expose the absurd circularity of assimilation’s logic in the colonial context” (p. 40). Could Muslim soldiers who had fought for France become citizens? Looking to the reformist group the Young Algerians, Mann reveals how the language of the civilizing mission thus became a tool in the hands of the colonized that threatened the stability of colonial rule. If those soldiers did not receive French citizenship for their service, then French rule over Algeria was as discriminatory

as the Young Algerians charged. Rabah Aissaoui draws out this analysis in his chapter on Emir Khaled, an early leader of Algerian nationalist politics. Khaled, like the Young Algerians whom Aissaoui also studies, found themselves trapped “between two worlds,” one that promised rights for Algerians through assimilation to French culture and education and another that promised religious and cultural distinction as subjects apart. These two essays frame the debate in the early twentieth century as one of possible accommodation limited by the impossibility of conforming to the ideals only vaguely outlined in the civilizing mission.

Consequently, the history of Algerian decolonization over the course of the twentieth century reveals the multiplicity of ways that successive French administrations designed citizenship around the shadow of their Algerian subjects. For this reason, Arthur Asseraf’s contribution, “Weapons of Mass Representation,” provides a coda to the concerns raised in the first part of the volume. Asseraf contends that Algerian Muslim representatives elected after the 1958 naturalization of Algerian subjects constituted human propaganda for the nascent Fifth Republic. But, he argues, this fact only underlines the limits of the civilizing mission. He emphasizes the “superficiality of the policy of integration” that this naturalization represented (p. 91). Elected *because* they were Muslim, these officials only magnified the shortcomings of the French colonial enterprise that ostensibly sought to make Algerians into Frenchmen. The legacies of this experimental multicultural empire shaped the terms of debate in the decades to come and in many of the other contributions to this volume.

Essays in parts two and three on postcolonial Algeria foreground personal experience and memory of the war for independence to demonstrate how the process of identity formation reacted against the definitions imposed under colonial rule. Blandine Valfort’s essay on Jean Sénac, mentioned above, zeroes in on the experience of a *pied-noir* who supported Algerian independence and found himself dispossessed in post-independence Algeria, a supposedly Arabo-Islamic state. Similarly, Samira Farhoud and Carey Watt examine the writing of Maïssa Bey. Bey attempted to reconcile personal experience with Algerians’ collective “colonial encounter” (p. 136). Farhoud’s and Watt’s use of “encounter” emphasizes its “nebulous” nature to explore Bey’s characters’ engagement with Algerian history, with independence, and with the post-colonial state. Jennifer Sessions’s chapter on *pied-noir* activism in the 1970s and 80s builds upon this theme. *Pieds-noirs* designed their own narrative of decolonization that they positioned over and against the experience of Algerian migrants and citizens during the transition to independence. Instead, their attempts to protect their “cultural identity” as embodied by the repatriated statue of the Duc d’Orléans ran up against local politics and civic commitments (p. 204). This encounter, as with others in this volume, reveals the tensions inherent in memorializing a war with no clear sides.

I return to the question I began with: who speaks for the legacy of colonialism in Algeria? Who represents this history? Nearly every contribution addresses these questions, but I will close by considering three. Patricia Caillé and James McDougall both contemplate the history of independent Algeria in the 1970s. A decade after decolonization, the Algerian state confronted the fraught politics of independence by putting forth a single narrative of the war that underscored Arabo-Islamic unity against the French colonizers. This representation, alongside others put forth in France and abroad, contributes to totalizing memories of the events that belie the tangled politics on the ground. The nationalized Algerian film industry in Caillé’s account found itself charged with disseminating the state’s narrative of the war for independence. The lack of autonomy shackled the film culture in Algeria in a period when international films increased in popularity in the country. Did films released in this politicized spirit do the work of “educating” that they were intended to do? Caillé and James McDougall answer this question together: culture functioned as “war by other means.” McDougall dissects this notion by examining the Algerian state as the site in which these cultural politics played out (p. 236). Culture in the 1970s thus took on outsize stakes in the definition of Algerian national character, especially as single-party rule sought to dictate Algerian national culture and the Algerian past as Arabo-Islamic. Across the Mediterranean, Claire Eldridge reflects on the 2012 commemoration of Algerian independence amongst French *pied-noir* communities. The fault lines of memory have only

fractured further in the fifty intervening years; she illustrates how second generation *pieds-noirs* became the torchbearers for colonial nostalgia. By 2012, though, these activists had aged, and their future goals had become less clear. Nevertheless, each group considered in these essays has asserted its own narratives of colonial rule and decolonization, contributing to the obfuscation of France's colonial past.

The essays in this volume complement each other well, but one might have hoped for more chronological diversity. There were no essays, for example, on the Second World War or the immediate postwar period, nor on the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. This reviewer also wondered about the experience of *harkis* or even of Algerian immigrants to France in the postcolonial period, groups whose stories went unreported in this volume, but who no doubt have interpreted the colonial past in diverging ways.^[2] Nonetheless, this volume will be valuable in undergraduate and graduate classrooms for educators who seek to complicate their students' understanding of France's colonial past and decolonizing present. These contributions provide excellent entrées into the historiography of French empire in Algeria while avoiding replicating the binaries so commonplace in French administrative documents and in popular culture.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Rabah Aissaoui and Claire Eldridge, "Revisiting Algeria"

Samuel Kalman, "Criminalising Dissent: Policing Banditry in the Constantinois, 1914-18"

Michelle Mann, "The Young Algerians and the Question of the Muslim Draft, 1900-14"

Rabah Aissaoui, "'Between Two Worlds': Emir Khaled and the Young Algerians at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century in Algeria"

Arthur Asseraf, "Weapons of Mass Representation: Algerians in the French Parliament, 1958-62"

Blandine Valfort, "Individual and Collective Identity in Algerian Francophone Literature: Jean Sénac's 'Poetry on All Fronts'"

Rachida Yassine, "Algerian Female Identity Re-constitution and Colonial Language: A Postcolonial Malaise in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la Fantasia*"

Samira Farhoud and Carey Watt, "'Encounters' of Frustration and Hope in the Writing of Maïssa Bey"

Patricia Caillé, "On the Shifting Significance of 'Algerian Cinema' as a Category of Analysis"

Sophie Bélot, "The Algerian Woman in Conflict in *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966)"

Jennifer E. Sessions, "The Entangled Politics of Postcolonial Commemoration"

Claire Eldridge, "Passing the Torch: Memory Transmission and Activism within the *Pied-Noir* Community Fifty Years after Algerian Independence"

James McDougall, "Culture as War by Other Means: Community, Conflict and Cultural Revolution, 1967-81"

NOTES

[1] Indeed, most works on French empire point to the asymptotic quest for “assimilation,” “association,” or “integration” underlying the civilizing mission. To name only a few examples across time and space, see Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Eric Thomas Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain’s National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[2] On the *harkis*, see most recently, Sung-Eun Choi, *Decolonization and the French of Algeria; Bringing the Settler Colony Home* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) or Claire Eldridge, *From empire to exile: History and memory within the pied-noir and harki communities, 1962-2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). On Algerian immigrants at the end of empire or after, see Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State during Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Melissa Byrnes, “Liberating the Land or Absorbing Community: Managing North African Migration and the Bidonvilles in Paris’s Banlieues,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31.3 (Winter 2013): 1-20; Elise Franklin, “A Slow End to Empire: Social Aid Associations, Family Migration, and Decolonization in France and Algeria, 1954-1981” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 2017); Ed Naylor “‘Un âne dans l’ascenseur’: Late Colonial Welfare Services and Social Housing in Marseille after Decolonization,” *French History* 27:3 (2013): 422-447.

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