
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 in analogous phases. 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.

Finally, the current hypermniesiac 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.

The new book by Djemaa 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
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 pied-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 Naima (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’Archi 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 filmmography 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 pied-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.

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

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