

H-France Review Vol. 18 (July 2018), No. 163

Samia Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria*. Zurich: gta Verlag, 2018. 336 pp. Illustrations, maps, plans, bibliography, index. \$59.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-85676-376-3.

Review by Neil Macmaster, University of East Anglia.

This book is derived from Samia Henni's PhD thesis in the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture of the University of Zurich (ZTA), and her approach, including the numerous and interesting illustrations, reflects this discipline. Henni's focus is on the way in which the French civil and military authorities profoundly transformed the built environment during the course of the Algerian War of Independence, and the underlying logic of architects, urban planners, and technocrats in restructuring space in the context of a terminal, bloody crisis of decolonisation. The study is divided into three parts of unequal length. The first (chapters one to three) looks at the programme of forced removal of the rural population into militarised holding centres, the *camps de regroupement*. The second part, (chapters four to eight, half of the book's length), explores the period after May 1958 when de Gaulle, through the Plan de Constantine, accelerated programmes to eliminate the bidonvilles, both in Algeria and Paris, and to develop mass housing projects and the "Mille villages." The final part (chapters nine and ten), the most innovative, investigates the extraordinary project to build the fortress administrative centre of Rocher Noir (today Boumerdès) in the dying days of Empire. I examine each part in turn.

Henni's starting point, the *camps de regroupement*, provides the clearest, and in some ways the most direct, evidence to back up her overall thesis on the links between the French army, counterinsurgency, and built form. The underlying logic is well known to historians, that of the forced removal from the mountainous *zones interdites* of the peasantry, which offered a support base to the guerrillas of the *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN), into squalid, militarised camps. Henni's account, while solid, adds little that is new to the two standard works of reference, Michel Cornaton's *Les Régrounements de la décolonisation en Algérie* (1967) and Abdelmalek Sayad and Pierre Bourdieu's *Le déracinement: La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* (1964). It is rather odd that the latter, which has had the greatest impact on historians and sociologists, should receive no mention at all, apart from one footnote (p. 49n74), especially as Bourdieu discusses in detail the spatial characteristics of the camps, the theme that most interests Henni. Perhaps the important recent work of Fabien Sacriste may have appeared too late to gain a mention. [1]

The longer, middle section of the book, is focused on the period after the army coup of May 13, 1958 and de Gaulle's announcement of the Plan de Constantine, a major increase in investment

in the modernisation of the Algerian economy and infrastructure, including the provision of mass housing, the *grandes ensembles*, of a type that had already been developed in metropolitan France to resolve the post-war housing crisis. The relationship between the military and urbanism is most clearly drawn in relation to army strategies to police the bidonvilles of Algiers and Paris, viewed as hotbeds of militant nationalism, to break them up through demolition, and by decanting inhabitants into massive, low-cost housing projects. Most attention, however, is given to the multitude of state and private agencies, the architects, civil engineers, urban planners, and other technocrats, in designing, costing, and implementing standardised forms of economic housing for Algerians. Henni has added some new detail to a field that has been investigated by a number of historians following in the footsteps of Zeynep Çelik's *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (1997). Here Henni begins to drift away from her main theme, and a great deal of the architectural and urban planning process that is discussed seems to have little, if any, connection to military or security matters, but relates more to the kinds of debate taking place in metropolitan France and elsewhere on the scale, design, and technology of HLM construction. This military-urbanism nexus needs further treatment. My feeling is that as de Gaulle attempted to reduce the influence of the military after the coup of May 13, 1958, so power was increasingly restored to civilian planners, of which Delouvrier was the leading figure. Technocrats, among them Jacques Bugnicourt, who, with Michel Rocard, blew the whistle on the *camps de regroupements*, began to carve out a degree of autonomy from the generals in the way in which they carried out their duties in the various planning committees and architectural practices.

Samia Henni's approach is very much "top-down," how issues of housing and *aménagement* were viewed from the world of the European professional. It is rather disappointing that while, from an architect's perspective, we have a great deal of information, backed up by illustrations, of the layout and design of model housing units, almost nothing is said about the Algerians who came to inhabit them. Henni is not a social historian and can claim, as she does in the Epilogue, that this is not her remit, hence the decision to exclude "the Algerian response" (p. 293). But the almost total absence of Algerians from the narrative makes it difficult to understand how the architecture of counterrevolution worked in practice, and how far it was based on an ethnological and intelligence understanding of the geography of the FLN urban quarters. It would have helped to engage to some degree with the work of Muriel Cohen, James House, and others on the social history of the bidonvilles and urban planning.

The third and final part, on Rocher Noir, which has not been previously studied by historians, is the most interesting. Between March and November 1961, de Gaulle's government constructed, fifty kilometres to the east of Algiers and at extraordinary high speed, using the industrial building techniques that had been developed in the *grandes ensembles*, a new administrative capital that was Algeria's answer to Brasília. Why did the French, even as they were negotiating with the FLN, invest such huge sums in a vast new town that they were soon to evacuate? Three explanations are offered. First, Rocher Noir fulfilled a promise of the Plan de Constantine to engage in the decentralisation of government. Second, the "fortified camp" served to protect the General Delegation, viewed by the OAS and many generals as "traitors," from armed revolt. Third, and this could be made clearer, de Gaulle's strategy during 1961 was to increase pressure on the FLN prior to any final negotiation by playing hard ball, laying claim to the oil-rich Sahara, suggesting an Israeli style partition of Algeria, creating a "Third Force," the FAAD, and increasing police and army repression, of which the Paris massacre of 17 October was a symptom. Rocher Noir can be seen as one element in de Gaulle's poker game, a smoke screen to signal

French intent to stay and to continue with a long-term implementation of the Plan de Constantine from a spanking new capital.

Rocher Noir, following the Evian accords of March 1962, became the location of the joint French-Algerian Provisional Executive under the presidency of Abderrahmane Farès.^[2] However, the master plan for Rocher Noir (fig. 69, pp. 258-9), far from providing an opportunity to express a new spirit of reconciliation between Europeans and Algerians, reproduced in built form the classic ethnic and racial divisions of the colonial city. To the east of the new town, separated by the barrier of a motorway, was the so-called “cité d’accueil,” a vast, squalid bidonville of thousands of low-paid Algerian construction workers, compelled to work a seven-day shift system in breach of the labour code, that was suspended in the interests of “national defense.” Across the motorway in the splendid apartments of the senior ministry officials, the wife of the General Delegate, Jean Morin, corresponded with the chief architect on interior decoration, the importation of luxury furniture, and the design of radiator covers. The colonialist mindset of the French establishment remained very much intact, even as the Algerian flag was raised over Rocher Noir on July 2, 1962.

Although with the exception of part three, Samia Henni’s study does not break new ground, it provides a clearly written and well-illustrated account that will be of interest to students and academics seeking to understand the process of urban planning during the terminal crisis of French colonialism in Algeria.

NOTES

[1] See Fabien Sacriste, “Les camps de ‘regroupement’: Une histoire de l’Etat colonial et de la société rurale pendant la guerre d’indépendance algérienne (1954-1962)” (Doctoral thesis, University of Toulouse 2 Le Mirail, 2014.)

[2] This neglected episode has been studied by Aïssa Kadri, “L’Exécutif Provisoire, les enjeux d’une transition chaotique,” in Aïssa Kadri, Moula Bouaziz and Tramor Quemeneur eds., *La guerre d’Algérie revisitée. Nouvelles générations, nouveaux regards* (Paris: Karthala, 2015), pp. 213-28 and in the same volume Fabien Sacriste, “La ‘Méthode Mao’ contre les ‘Milles villages’? Réflexions sur l’historiographie des ‘regroupements’”, pp. 179-185.

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ISSN 1553-9172