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Aoife Connolly, *Performing the Pied-Noir Family: Constructing Narratives of Settler Memory and Identity in Literature and On-Screen*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2020. ix + 223 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$100.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4985-3735-3; \$45.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-1-4985-3736-0.

Review by Amy Hubbell, University of Queensland.

Performing the Pied-Noir Family by Aoife Connolly is the first book to explore how gender roles are modeled by French-Algerian settler characters in both literature and film relating to colonial Algeria. Connolly's book goes some way to fill the gaps left by my own work and others' by examining the performativity of settler identity. While authors including Fiona Barclay study how France is haunted by its colonial past in Algeria and I focus on how memory of Algeria functions in Pied-Noir literature, history, and art, Connolly examines models in literature and film that perform unique gender roles of French-Algerian women, men, mothers, and children in the colonial context.[1] Her approach, based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, allows Connolly to contribute original analysis to both well-known and obscure Pied-Noir artistic production. While she establishes the cultural specificity of the settlers in Algeria, she also gives destabilizing examples to provide nuance.

Starting with the most famous Pied-Noir, Albert Camus, Connolly offers a unique perspective on works which have often been read and criticized through a French lens rather than through a colonial Algerian scope. Connolly innovatively examines cultural habits that were well in place during colonial rule, and also how time passes, how people relate to their families, and even how burials are conducted differently from usual practice in metropolitan France. Her provision of that level of cultural specificity for classic works like *L'Étranger*, "L'Hôte," and *Le Premier homme* allows us to appreciate Camus within the frame from which his works originated.

Connolly extends her analysis across Pied-Noir authors and directors who occupy both central and liminal roles in their culture. These works range from literary classics such as Marie Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975) to lesser-known novels like Anne Loesch's *La Valise et le cercueil* (1963). By organizing her book according to prescribed gender roles, Connolly is able to give layered and rich insight into, for example, how Pied-Noir women were taught to perform their femininity. The difficulty with this approach is that the numerous counterexamples she explores are not neatly summed up, and Pied-Noir gender roles become quite blurred despite the insistence upon clear ideals. For example, while settler women are described as the bearers of religion and subordinate to their husbands, many of the selected examples demonstrate the female protagonists' frustration with weaker men and the women's own capacity for agency. This

is especially apparent in Connolly's analysis of *Outremer*, the 1990 film directed (and performed) by Brigitte Roüan. This beautiful film shows the lives of three colonial sisters who represent three distinct moments in Algeria's transition from colonial rule to independence. Each of the women has an absent, effaced, or subordinate partner, and though they express desire for masculine men, the sisters also demonstrate their capacity to perform the pioneering roles required of them (as parents, laborers, directors, carers, and adventurers). Connolly examines this film and the gender roles the women play in depth; however, she identifies the prescriptive norms that frustrate them in a slightly more pessimistic way than the historic context might indicate. Given the film was released in 1990 during France's willful silence on the Algerian War, *Outremer* presented a surprisingly candid look at colonial women in the war, and it ultimately showed women in the colony to be upholding tradition while being strong and insubordinate figures. Ultimately, Connolly successfully shows that *Outremer*, along with many other texts under analysis, depicts the settlers "as victims of events beyond their control" (p. 87) and in this example Roüan "constructs the memory of a disempowered community with which the audience is inclined to sympathize" (p. 87). Later in the chapter, she states that H el ene Cixous, like the other female authors studied, "depicts a situation born of tragedy, in which the female protagonist is a victim of circumstances. It also serves to position French Algerian men as uniquely masculine conquerors" (pp. 94-95), and this despite having demonstrated several men in the chapter to be incompetent in that role. Connolly's criticism of the Pieds-Noirs' self-victimization in their works is astute, but she swiftly moves onto the analysis of other situations and other texts without drawing conclusions. By trying to elucidate so many broad aspects of Pied-Noir identity (and specifically gender roles) within the individual chapters, her critical analysis becomes diffuse.

On the whole, Connolly's groupings of authors is well-founded and productive, but the change in time and perspective across the texts often disrupts her central arguments. In the aforementioned chapter on "Performing French Algerian Femininity," the complexity of the topic is elided by her examining together texts of a broad political spectrum. The chapter considers the roles of women as bearers of collective memory, how hyperfemininity is displayed, how European women orient themselves towards Arabo-Berber identities, and the place of feminism in colonialism. In the first section, Francine Dessaigne's 1962 *Journal d'une m re de famille pied-noir*, depicts a collective image of the community as victims and engages with the pioneering nature of Pied-Noir women. This is joined to the analysis of Loesch's novel *La Valise et le cercueil* (1963) which is the story of a woman married to an OAS (Organisation de l'arm e secr te) militant (pp. 64-65). The women's varied political positions are introduced, but not highlighted or clearly contrasted. Similarly, in the last section of the chapter, diverse texts such as Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975), *Outremer* (1990), and Cixous's *R veries de la femme sauvage* (2000) are brought together, yet there is no accounting for the drastic shift in how the French remembered Algeria from 1975 to 2000. Cixous's liminal position as a French, Algerian, female Jew is well discussed but without regard to Cardinal's place (she was raised in a Catholic, conservative *colon* family) in the same chapter. While the individual narrative analyses are rich, well-researched, and interesting, the lack of clear structural links across the topics leaves the reader wondering where the author wants to take us.

In a similar way, Connolly's chapter on Pied-Noir masculinity examines the most famous authors-- Jules Roy, Emmanuel Robl s, and Jean P l gri--as well as lesser-known writers such as Gabriel Conesa. She successfully demonstrates how each author depicts both masculine and feminine ideals (especially their relationship to the mother) within their work. However, while demonstrating the macho, Connolly highlights an anti-macho hero in the subversive film *Le*

Macho (1979). By structurally eliding these works, Connolly loses the space to contrast and nuance how gender might be performed or how resistance to prescribed roles might arise. Instead, the book often reads as a series of examples from one text to the next.

Where Connolly is especially successful is within a subsection of this chapter on masculinity, as she analyses representations of homosexual, intersex, and transgender Pied-Noir figures. Titled “Pied-Noir Pride: Pioneering Sexuality,” this section provides an excellent overview of non-heteronormative identities that have not hitherto been examined. Her in-depth analysis of French-Algerian poet Jean Sénac is especially elucidating and brings new life to the discussion of Pied-Noir identity that is, on its own, condemned to die out. The various non-conformist ways in which gender is performed across her corpus sheds new light on these works. It is also enormously valuable to examine liminal and resistant roles within the context of the relationship between Algerians and their colonisers at the time of independence because so many had envisioned the two groups cohabiting in Algeria without France post-independence. Connolly writes of Sénac’s texts, “It implies that the *Français d’Algérie* could serve to unite the Orient and Occident in an alliance that the Orient appears to have chosen” (p. 133). This is a dream that, of course, did not come to fruition but one that many of the authors she examines had tried to keep alive. She classifies Sénac as a *piéd-vert* who chose to live in Algeria after independence but he was ultimately denied citizenship.

Among Connolly’s strengths in this book is her ability to select the most pertinent authors and the most useful supporting research available. She covers all of the essential bases for her topic and has created a complete piece of research. At many points while I read, I wanted her to draw deeper conclusions from the diverse examples presented, whether those be taken across time, political standpoints, or purely in terms of gendered identities and how they would have transformed from the colonial period until now. It is not until the conclusion that these appear. There she rightly says that her book “highlights ways in which fictionalized narratives can subvert hegemonic discourses” (p. 191). It is exactly that subversion at which she hints throughout the chapters but rarely underscores directly. Her conclusion also rightly claims that by examining this Pied-Noir corpus through the prism of family, she is able to highlight “the politics of inclusion and exclusion which characterized colonial encounters and which continue to shape policies within nations” (p. 192). Furthermore, she finally justifies her choices of diverse Pieds-Noirs to show that the “frequently essentialized ‘community’ is made up of individuals who were continuously renegotiating their identities in response to personal and political concerns, over which the Algerian conflict and its aftermath did not necessarily take precedence” (p. 192).

Despite her hesitancy to point her reader directly to these well-conceived conclusions within the chapters themselves, Connolly has provided a thorough and solid work which allows even a non-initiated reader to follow along. She offers careful and succinct narrative and plot summaries as appropriate for each text discussed. As such, the work would be useful to any academic interested in gender roles in specific cultural and historic contexts, but especially for scholars examining French, Mediterranean, and colonial identities in literature and film. I commend Connolly on this much needed and elucidating study on the performativity of Pied-Noir gender roles across films and texts. Her work fills an important gap and allows us to more clearly see the social expectations imposed within families and between individuals in, and after, colonial Algeria.

NOTES

[1] Fiona Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature and the Maghreb* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011); Amy L. Hubbell, *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity and Exile* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

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