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C.L. Quinan, *Hybrid Anxieties: Queering the French-Algerian War and Its Postcolonial Legacies*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020. xii + 276 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4962-0681-7; \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-4962-2426-2; \$30.00 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 978-1-4962-2361-6; \$30.00 U.S. (epub). ISBN 978-1-4962-2359-3.

Review by Blase A. Provitola, Trinity College (CT).

Sixty years after Algeria's hard-won independence, the recently rebranded far-right Rassemblement national received a staggering 41.5 percent of votes in the second round of the presidential elections and a grim eighty-nine deputies in the Assemblée nationale. Such stark facts leave little doubt that the colonial past persists in shaping contemporary French politics; what is more challenging to trace is its lasting impact on individual identities. This is one of the primary issues that C. L. Quinan takes up in *Hybrid Anxieties: Queering the French-Algerian War and Its Postcolonial Legacies*. While significant cultural and literary studies research has been devoted to this anti-colonial freedom struggle, this monograph stands out for applying a queer framework to literary and cinematic representations of this conflict and its legacies to subvert hegemonic understandings of history, memory, and identity. What results is a provocative analysis of contemporary French and Franco-Algerian culture and politics, which incites reflection on the stakes of applying a queer framework to postcolonial contexts.

The work's title refers to two interrelated phenomena: the "hybrid" forms of subjectivity that Algerian decolonization engendered, and the individual and collective "anxieties" that arise as the boundaries of identity are blurred and redrawn. *Hybrid Anxieties* draws out the profound impact of that conflict by "queering" it, though that verb is less an exploration of sexual non-normativity than it is a methodology that brings into focus decolonization's alternative temporalities, fragmented narratives, and challenges to rigid forms of identity. Part one (chapters one and two) looks to the ghosts that haunt hegemonic masculinities as (predominantly white) men navigate personal and collective anxieties resulting from the war. Part two (chapters three through five) explores forms of hybrid subjectivity that emerge in the aftermath of decolonization, including some that depict non-normative and same-sex desire and sexuality.

Chapter one looks at the impact of the Algerian Revolution on white French masculinity in two works depicting former soldiers grappling with memories of their colonial military service: Alain Resnais's film *Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour* (1963) and Laurent Mauvignier's novel *Des hommes* (2009).<sup>[1]</sup> Set and released several decades apart from each other and both featuring protagonists named Bernard, these works feature the complex interplay of remembering and forgetting for men coping with their complicity in colonial violence. Understood through the

lens of haunting, which comingles past and present, these works enact a “queering of temporality” that shatters the autonomous masculine subject (p. 43). Though this chapter acknowledges critiques that the absence of *Muriel’s* titular character (an Algerian woman whom Bernard and other soldiers tortured and murdered) problematically reinforces the unknowability of her perspective, it makes her haunting absent present by showing the eternal imprint that she leaves on Bernard.

Chapter two delves deeper into the war’s effect on masculinity in Michael Haneke’s award-winning thriller *Caché* (2005), in which a white French man must respond to apparent threats to his family by facing the colonial violence that structured his childhood, when he lied to get his family to send away Majid, a boy whose parents were killed in the massacre of October 17, 1961. Quinan weaves together personal and national denials of colonial responsibility that come back to haunt their perpetrators. This cinematic analysis is brought to bear on media coverage of the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks, since Majid, like the French brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, grew up in the foster system. This chapter critiques the media’s limited characterization of these attacks as “just another manifestation of radical Islam”, a reductive approach that glosses over the fact that the “satirical images were only one of many instances of the discrimination and stigmatization French Muslims of North African descent face on a daily basis” and that—however unintentionally—“helps bolster the already systemic violence directed against Muslims, which intensified with over fifty anti-Muslim incidents reported in France during the week after the attacks” (p. 90).

Chapter three continues to focus on white French masculinity, this time addressing same-sex desire in Pierre Guyotat’s controversial and formally experimental novel *Eden, Eden, Eden* (1970). Consisting of a single sentence and influenced by Guyotat’s military service in Algeria, this novel represents a dizzying landscape of sex and violence in the wake of decolonization, including forms of non-heteronormative masculinity that led to its partial censorship until 1981. Foucault published an open letter to Guyotat praising the work for its depictions of sexual acts over identity, inspiring Quinan to interpret *Eden, Eden, Eden’s* “full-scale dissolution of the subject” (p. 123) as a bridge between two theories typically understood to be mutually incompatible: Foucault’s explorations of pleasure beyond identitarian constraints and Herbert Marcuse’s conception of polymorphous perversity. This chapter makes the case that such postcolonial literary works constitute their own theoretical contribution to queer studies.

Chapter four builds on the memory politics of the 17 October 1961 massacre evoked in Chapter two, this time in Leïla Sebbar’s novel *La Seine était rouge* (1999).<sup>[2]</sup> Denis Provencher’s concept of transfiliation illuminates the kinship network that Louis, Omer, and Amel form to compensate for their parents’ relative silence about their experiences of the massacre: Louis’s filmed *témoignages* form part of the literary text, and Amel and Omer retrace the protests’ route through Paris, spray-painting their own commemorations of colonial violence against Algerians over plaques commemorating World War II casualties and resistance. This palimpsestic and “palimpsestuous” activity (a term credited to Philippe Lejeune and Gérard Genette) becomes an alternative memory practice that “makes visible the fallacy of reading history as a progress narrative” (p. 144). This chapter positions such practices as potentially healing to people coping with generational trauma from brutality for which the French state is unlikely to ever truly hold itself accountable.

Chapter five reads the gender and racial hybridity in Nina Bouraoui's novel *Garçon manqué* (2000) through the lens of queer theories of embodiment developed by Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz.<sup>[3]</sup> Quinan refutes reductive interpretations of the narrator Nina's masculinity as a mere desire to be a man and takes seriously her resistance to identitarian interpellation, demonstrating that Nina carves out space for multiple subjectivities by refusing existing categories—man, woman, French, Algerian—even as she constantly evokes them. *Garçon manqué* exemplifies how, to sum up part two of the book, “the anxieties of [the French-Algerian War's] protracted aftermath also aid in the creation of new modes of thinking about memory, identity, and embodiment that radically question identity and value more redemptive potentialities of in-betweenness” (p. 152).

*Hybrid Anxieties* covers a lot of interdisciplinary ground between queer studies, postcolonial studies, and French and Francophone studies. It deftly introduces Anglophone audiences to debates in the Francophone world, relating them to scholarship in gender and sexuality studies while also providing crucial historical context for understanding the media's current focus on radical Islam, national security, and the politics of colonial memory. Its interrelated chapters build on one another in such a way that the reader comes away with a multi-faceted view of how the Algerian War of Independence transformed racialized and gendered understandings of subjectivity in France. Chapters two, four, and five would work particularly well as a supplement to primary texts in gender studies, postcolonial studies, and French classes alike; each chapter's division into shorter sections also facilitates reading for an undergraduate audience. At the same time, it is important to note that this book looks to the legacies of decolonization in France and its Algerian diasporas more so than to contemporary Algeria, due of course to its French-language focus; a more accurate subtitle might have been “Queering the French-Algerian War and Its Postcolonial Legacies in France,” though this does not distract from the work's merit in understanding France as constituted by its former colonies. Though Quinan uses the term “French-Algerian War” almost exclusively, the book's demonstration of the war's revolutionary impact makes it surprising that the term “Algerian Revolution” is only employed once (p. 23)—politically complicated and sometimes limited as that conflict, like all revolutions, has proven itself.<sup>[4]</sup>

*Hybrid Anxieties* makes the case that queer postcolonial studies as a field and queer postcoloniality as an analytical framework are not limited to the Western academic contexts in which they emerged and indeed have the power to expand one-dimensional analyses of sexuality by decentering hegemonic perspectives. Drawing on Michael Warner's assertion that queer “is not autochthonous,” Quinan writes that “Even if it may have no ‘home,’ when the word ‘queer’ travels, its meaning evolves, and its inflections and nuances change” (p. 8).<sup>[5]</sup> However, given its centrality to the monograph's methodology, I wish that *Hybrid Anxieties* had substantially addressed epistemological critiques of the exportation of queer frames of analysis to other cultural contexts.<sup>[6]</sup> Indeed, even Warner later stated that queerness “does not translate very far with any ease” because it remains “thoroughly embedded in modern Anglo-American culture,” and thus carries risks when being universalized: “In the New World Order, we should be more than usually cautious about global utopianisms that require American slang.”<sup>[7]</sup> Furthermore, even just in the context of postcolonial “hexagonal” France, scholars have echoed Warner's concerns about the cultural contingency of *le queer*. For example, Sam Bourcier cautions against aspects of Butler's critique of identity politics that have never enjoyed the same influence in France, arguing that a “politique de l'identité post-identitaire [post-identity identity politics]” must be retained in the context of French universalism, where the adoption of sexual labels has

historically been dismissed as a threatening form of *communautarisme*.<sup>[8]</sup> Looking to a wider variety of theoretical sources would prove the usefulness of queer theory beyond its reputation as an “Anglo-American elitist tradition emerging from academic institutions” (p. 8).

Given queer of color critique’s lack of institutional recognition in French universities, it makes complete sense that *Hybrid Anxieties* looks to the U.S. However, radical anti-racist, Afro-feminist and decolonial activist groups have for years been developing autonomous ways of diffusing their own similar critiques (often influenced by and nuancing U.S.-based critical race theory). To name only a few based in France, one could look to the Groupe du 6 novembre in the early 2000s, and to existent sources such as the review *Les AssiégéEs*, and the collectives Lesbiennes of Color (LOCs), Mwasi, and Cases Rebelles.<sup>[9]</sup> Furthermore, some transnational initiatives such as the Decolonizing Sexualities network have provided a platform to groups like LOCs whose voices are excluded from the academy.<sup>[10]</sup> If one does not also look to local sources, U.S. queer of color critique can come to overshadow grassroots activism that has long dealt with such issues, further invisibilizing that important work.<sup>[11]</sup>

A similar citational concern arose for me in relation to the central conceptual tool that bridges the postcolonial and queer: hybridity. This became most apparent for me in the analysis of *Garçon manqué*, which depicts gender and racial hybridity as subversive in its creation of new identities. However, critics have long debated whether this concept—and others associated with fluidity and in-betweenness such as *métissage*—may, as Rey Chow’s well-known critique goes, tend in certain academic contexts to “downplay the legacy of colonialism understood from the viewpoint of the colonized...”.<sup>[12]</sup> *Hybrid Anxieties’* silence on such concerns results in a less robust portrait of hybridity’s political multivalence in postcolonial France.

Finally, while much of this work seems to treat queerness and transgression as practically synonymous, certain moments made me wonder whether Quinan intended to make a broader statement about the potential limits of a queer framework’s capacity to dismantle systems of white supremacy. In chapter three, Quinan acknowledges that the shattering of subjectivity in Guyotat’s *Eden, Eden, Eden* continues to center masculinity but then states that “It is, however, not a centering of white (French) masculinity, as the prostitutes are Algerian,” subsequently noting how “white French masculinity is freed at the expense of black and Arab males” (p. 114). With no other context given, it is hard to imagine how the presence of Algerian men engaging in labor for white French men would decenter whiteness and institutional violence. To cite one other example from the first chapter’s analysis of *Muriel*, Bernard once claims that Muriel is his girlfriend’s name, which is described as a “queering of kinship relations” (p. 49). If a former soldier processing his own guilt by briefly referring to his murder victim as his girlfriend is a form of “queering,” then queer seems a politically ambiguous tool at best.

The issues that I raise here are not unique to *Hybrid Anxieties* and echo many scholars’ concerns about the exportation and adaptation of queer theory across time and space, making this monograph a timely contribution to the field of queer postcolonial studies more broadly. Ultimately, *Hybrid Anxieties* affirms the importance of Algerian decolonization (and by extension other anti-colonial struggles) for queer studies today—a project that is especially welcome at a time when those racialized as Muslim and/or Arab are brandished by Right and Left alike as reactionary threats to the nation’s purportedly more progressive sexual values.

## NOTES

- [1] Laurent Mauvignier, *Des hommes* (Paris: Minuit, 2009).
- [2] Leïla Sebbar, *La Seine était rouge. Paris, octobre 1961* (Paris: Thierry Magnier, 1999).
- [3] Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jack [Judith] Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- [4] Following James Le Sueur, Quinan chooses the term “French-Algerian War” to contest the Francocentric nature of the term “Algerian War” (p. 189n3). See Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 261n1. Quinan states that this also applies to the term “Algerian Revolution,” though a bit more explanation would have been welcome to justify that choice, especially since the term is used once (p. 23).
- [5] Quinan quotes Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xvii.
- [6] See especially chapter three in Joseph A. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- [7] Michael Warner, “Something Queer About the Nation-State,” in Christopher Newfield, ed., *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 361-371 (p. 361).
- [8] Sam [Marie-Hélène] Bourcier, *Queer zones: politique des identités sexuelles et des savoirs* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2006), p. 141.
- [9] For information on the Groupe du 6 novembre, see their anthology *Warriors/Guerrières* (Paris: Nomades’Langues Éditions, 2001) and Blase A. Provitola, “In Visibilities: The *Groupe du 6 novembre* and the Production of Liberal Lesbian Identity in Contemporary France,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 27 (2019): 223-241. See also Mwasi Collective, *Afrofem* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2018) and Michaëla Danjé, ed., *AfroTrans: Perspectives, entretiens, poésie, fiction* (Paris: Cases Rebelles Éditions, 2021).
- [10] Lesbiennes of Color [Sabreen, Moruni, and Aria], “Decolonial Activism in White French Feminist Land” in Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Silvia Posocco, eds., *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions* (Oxford: Counterpress, 2016), pp. 141-153. See also <https://decolonizingsexualities.org/>.
- [11] This reflects a broader concern about the circulation of theoretical frameworks, as evidenced in European academic conferences on intersectionality during which organizers often minimize or ignore the contributions of local activists and researchers while prominently featuring well-known speakers from the U.S. and the U.K. See Sirma Bilge, “Le blanchiment de l’intersectionnalité,” *Recherches féministes* 28 (2015): 9-32.

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[12] Rey Chow, “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s”, *Diaspora 2* (1992): 151-170 (p. 157). For one such critique on discourses of *métissage*, see Anaïs Duong-Pedica and Agnès Delrieu, “‘Notre métissage est une richesse’: Critique d’une utopie post-raciale et post-coloniale”, *Les Assiégés* 4 (September 2020), pp. 23–27.

Blase A. Provitola  
Trinity College  
[blase.provitola@trincoll.edu](mailto:blase.provitola@trincoll.edu)

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