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Anne Donadey, *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2020. 235 pp. Notes, works cited, filmography, and index. \$110.00 U.S (hb). ISBN 9-78-1793626646; \$45.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-781793626653.

Review by Michael Gott, the University of Cincinnati.

The media productions that we collectively watch on screens, be they little or big, in our living rooms or in *les salles obscures*, are crucial components in the wider cultivation, creation, and circulation of shared (or contested) narratives. Due to the revered status and privileged position of cinema in France, films made there or at least partly funded by the French apparatus, have intervened in and sometimes had notable impacts on social and political debates. For an example of this we need look no further than French-Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb's *Indigènes* (2006), a film that brought the contribution of North African soldiers to the *Forces françaises libres* to light for a wide audience. Of course, films, when representing the past, often comment quite directly on contemporary society and politics. A resistance film made in the twenty-first century, to use another example germane in a certain parallel fashion to the book under discussion here, is not only inscribed in the lineage of cinematic portrayals of resistance and collaboration in World War II but also deploys the stakes and stage of that historical setting in order to fashion contemporary outlooks on politics and narratives of identity and belonging.

These notions are central to Anne Donadey's argument in *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012*. Drawing on the work of historians such as Benjamin Stora on the "imaginaire historique" of cinema, Donadey opens the book with a convincing overview of the ways that film can be an important site of memory work that can ultimately provide many complex and multifaceted narratives that both reflect and gradually contribute to changing social and political perspectives on memory.[1] Her study of cinematic representations of the Algerian War builds on her earlier theorization (in *Recasting Postcolonialism*, 2001) of an "Algeria syndrome," adapted from historian Henry Rousso's famous formulation on the French collective memory of World War II. Rousso's four stages of the "Vichy syndrome"—mourning, repression, the return of the repressed, and obsession—inspired Donadey's four periods of the "Algeria syndrome": mourning (1962-1964), repression (1964-1989), the return of the repressed (1990-1998), and what she labels a "difficult anamnesis" that begin in 1999 and is ongoing (p. 3).[2] The films covered in *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012* fit with the continued reshaping of the latter stage. Donadey observes that some thirty feature length films (including productions destined for cinematic and television release) that she identifies as dealing directly with the Algerian War were released during the span of the fiftieth anniversary, a quantity that demonstrates cinema's notable contribution to the fourth phase of the Algeria syndrome (p. 15). Examined together,

these films link the Algerian War and its legacy to a complex web of issues, from battles over multidirectional post-colonial memory and the commemoration of the massacre of Algerians in and around Paris on October 17, 1961 to *pied noir* memory and the ongoing legacy of the war on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Returning to my opening examples, films about World War II come readily to mind as a comparison because of the parallels between the memory work and battles over memory involved in the Vichy and Algeria “syndromes.” There are also numerous intersections and lines that can be drawn between the two periods and their representations on screen and in culture. There is of course the connection between Maurice Papon’s role in the deportation of Jews in France during World War II and his responsibility for the massacre of Algerians in Paris in 1961, an event that plays a role in several of the films Donadey examines. The fact that his trial for crimes against humanity in the former led to the revelation of his latter deeds demonstrates the interwoven threads connecting the occupation to post-WWII colonial affairs. This connection, as seen through the trajectories of Algerian protagonists, is evident on screen in *Hors-la-loi* (2010), the sequel to Bouchareb’s very successful and influential *Indigènes*. *Hors-la-loi*, which is brought up numerous times as a point of comparison by Donadey but not analyzed in depth in the book because she has written about it extensively elsewhere, generated a great deal of controversy, showing the degree to which the memories of the Algerian War and the end of the French colonial presence in that nation are still deeply contested, while the fight over the Vichy era faded in Rouso’s own estimation by the turn of the twenty-first century (p. 3). Although the comparison is inviting and perhaps unavoidable due to the way that both the occupation of France and the Algerian War have been instrumentalized on screen, the parallels between the two historical periods are perhaps less revelatory than the contrasts that emerge throughout the book. First, as Donadey notes on the very first page, there is a clear link between festering wounds related to the 1954–1962 war of decolonization and the societal and political racism towards populations of Maghrebi origin in France that became increasingly normalized starting in the 1980s (p. 1). Secondly, as the book’s last chapter on films about Algerian militants explores in detail, cinematic representations of the war are generated not only from a variety of perspectives within France but also by voices and institutions in Algeria.

The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004–2012 offers a detailed and engaging assessment of this ongoing and troublesome process of memory work. One of the most impressive aspects of Donadey’s book is the significant corpus of films that it covers. Not only does it encompass in impressive detail a large number of films—twenty out of a total of thirty on the topic that Donadey identifies from the period, both feature and made for television films—but it also engages productively with a variety of source materials and intertexts. This includes documentary, historical work, and novels adapted for the screen (Yasmina Khadra’s *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* and Francis Zamponi’s *Mon colonel*) as well as those that some of the films are in intertextual dialogue with (from Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma* to *L’Étranger* and other works by Camus). Close readings of key elements of the text complement the extensive contextual and comparative analysis. This makes the book particularly useful for a broad audience of scholars and students, whether one is interested in the cinematic product (and to some degree its apparatus, which is discussed in particular in relation to Algerian productions and co-productions) or focused on using films as a window onto culture or history or analyzing them as a form of cultural critique.

The twenty films selected for detailed assessment in the book’s four chapters are appropriately representative and diverse. The selection includes both objects of significant attention and relatively overlooked or little-known works. It includes productions by French, international,

French-Algerian (Mehdi Charef and Malik Chibane), and pied-noir directors (Alexandre Arcady, Philippe Faucon, Nicole Garcia), as well as films made by Algerian directors within primarily French (Merzak Allouache) and Algerian production frameworks (Ahmed Rachedi, Saïd Ould-Khelifa). The paucity of women on this list is striking but a result of the fact that only four films that address the Algerian War from the period studied by Donadey were made by women.

The four chapters are organized based on thematic classification and the types of memory work undertaken in the films. Chapter one analyzes five films that focus on military and police involvement in the war and assesses their representations of violence on the French and Algerian sides. The second chapter continues the discussion through a selection of films that engage indirectly with violence and the ways that it impacted civilians, resulting in screen memories that Donadey argues may “hide more than they reveal.” Chapter three assesses the extent to which four films that address French colonists’ experiences during the war effectively critique the colonial order and show relations within communities during the war. The final chapter covers six films that offer what Donadey calls “pro-independence militant memories” (p. 152). Three of these films are from France and made primarily in French and three from Algeria and contain primarily Arabic dialogue. This selection allows for a productive discussion of the comparisons and contrasts between the ways that the war is viewed in individual French and Algerian films and the broader differences in how and when the industries have addressed the war.

Donadey’s assessment of the films in her corpus leads to the conclusion that despite the significant number of films on the topic of the Algerian War, the “memory of the war still has difficulty expressing itself” (p.5). She identifies this state of affairs as a continuation of the period of “difficult anamnesis” that she argues began in 1999 (p. 5). Her assessment of these films leads her to highlight a very small number that endeavor to venture outside of and beyond the compartmentalization of memory according to one’s community or personal background and position towards Algeria and the war (Algerians, Algerian immigrants and their children in France, former soldiers and fighters, etc.): *Cartouches gauloises* (2007, Mehdi Charef), *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2012, Alexandre Arcady), *Le Choix de Myriam* (2009, Malik Chibane), *Je vous ai compris* (2012, Franck Chiche), *Nuit noire, 17 octobre 1961* (2005, Alain Tasma) and to a partial extent *La Baie d’Alger* (2012, Merzak Allouache). At their best these screen productions show varied perspectives, endow Algerians with agency, tend to avoid the trap of archetypal characters, and clearly frame critiques of the colonial order. One notable example is *Cartouches gauloises*, which Donadey argues both mounts a strong critique of French colonialism and portrays the “pied-noir community in complex and nuanced ways” (p. 136). Donadey’s discussion of Charef’s film is a highlight of the book and shows how her framework and approach that ties textual with historical and contextual offers new readings of works that have already been the subject of extensive scholarly attention (Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (2005) is another notable example of this). As Donadey shows, Charef’s film effectively uses a young child protagonist without any evident allegiances and therefore ready access to various places and all sides to reveal the richness and complexity of the situation in Algeria near the end of the war. Donadey draws on a close reading of the mise-en-scène of a key episode in the film, the revelation of the killing of a *pied-noir* family, to construct a picture of the ways that Charef uses artistic distance effectively to add nuance to the film. This is but one example of Donadey’s method: classifying and approaching films thematically but engaging strategically with the ways that the filmmakers deploy the tools of cinema to reinforce her main arguments. The section on *Cartouches gauloises* is notable in one other aspect. As Donadey incisively argues, the mise en abyme of the act and process of filmmaking reveals considerable insights into the ways that film and art in general are used to

work through trauma. The semiautobiographical film was Charef's ninth, and Donadey posits that the fact that he waited forty-five years to make it "attests to the traumatic aftereffects of the war and the long period of latency that was necessary for him to begin to work through the trauma" (p. 136).

Donadey's coverage and analysis of films from the period is thorough and the arguments that she draws from it are compelling. That said, I found myself hoping on occasion for more engagement with certain aspects of the films that the author convincingly argues are representationally problematic or historically one-sided. Donadey's meticulous analysis across the corpus clearly shows the deficiencies in many films' perspectives and the limitations of to whom they offer agency and voice. Donadey's analysis is particularly insightful when it comes to the films that do add complex and multidirectional contributions to the decompartmentalization of memory work and to those that are more narrowly focused yet in the author's assessment, give the audience difficult questions to ponder (for example Faucon's 2006 *La Trahison*). It would be fascinating to have seen this analysis developed further to include a more comprehensive critique of what social, political, or commemorative purpose the films that do not, on the surface, compel audiences of the late Chirac and Sarkozy years to ask themselves difficult questions about the past or the current meanings of Frenchness. Returning to the initial comparison that I made--invited by the parallel "syndromes"--several notable French films about WWII made during the same period use underexamined stories from the occupation era to make a sharp critique of Sarkozy-era discourses and policies that remains scarcely hidden under the surface of the historical narrative. Films such as Robert Guédiguian's 2009 *L'Armée du crime* invite viewers (with varied degrees of subtlety) to discern what side or allegiances traitors, quislings, heroes, or torturers from WWII represent in the contemporary French political landscape and, in a broader sense, use the redressing of historical memory to fire a shot in ongoing debates over national identity. Donadey's incisive readings of films about the Algerian War reveals a great deal about which films thoroughly and fairly address the diversity of memories of the Algerian War and of colonial domination and what tools they deploy to do so. Yet there is also another level of the story about what these films, their making, and their reception reveal about contemporary France. This is certainly not ignored in the book, but it takes a back seat to the discussion of constructive, inclusive, and equitable memory work. This line of inquiry might also be extended in more depth to questions of institutional funding. There is some discussion of co-production between France and Algeria and of Algerian funding, but it would have been interesting to also include some consideration of the role that French CNC funding priorities played in the creation of certain strains of Algerian War film and what, if anything, changed during or after this period in terms of priorities.

Of course, the thorough analysis of twenty feature-length films is already a substantial task and it is impossible to cover all potential angles in satisfactory detail. My own musings do not detract from the important contribution made by *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012*. Indeed, it is a testament of the book's value that it continues to inspire questions related to and beyond its topic. We can hope, just as Donadey suggests, that there is significant opportunity for scholarly engagement with more than twenty Algerian films made on the war of liberation between 2008-2018, and that researchers interested in this topic will use this book as a jumping off point for new inquiries. In the meantime, *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012* offers a thoroughly researched and clearly and concisely argued picture of the representation of the war and struggles over its memory that will be of immense value to scholars and students in French and francophone studies.

NOTES

[1] “Hommage à Benjamin Stora, MUCEM Marseille 31 mai 2018,” Université Sorbonne Paris nord, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://benjaminsora.univ-paris13.fr/index.php/hommage-a-benjamin-stora-mucem-marseille-31-mai-2018/585-lecture-de-benjamin-stora-mucem-31-mai-2018.html>.

[2] Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy (1944-198...)* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

Michael Gott
University of Cincinnati
michael.gott@uc.edu

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