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Lia Brozgal, *Absent the Archive: Cultural Traces of a Massacre in Paris, 17 October 1961*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020. xiv + 351 pp. 16 illustrations, bibliography, and index. £83.60 U.K. (hb). ISBN 9781789622386; £24.00 U.K. (pb). ISBN 9781800348196; £24.00 U.K. (pdf). ISBN 9781789622621.

Review by Guy Austin, Newcastle University.

In the conclusion to this meticulously researched work of cultural history, Lia Brozgal notes that while “governments have papered over their crimes and scripted national narratives” to hide them, “literature and culture have been busy making history” (p. 315). The crime in question here is the massacre of 200 unarmed Algerians peacefully protesting in Paris on 17 October 1961, and the French state’s subsequent reluctance to open sensitive police archives for decades after the event—an event which is “at once visible and invisible..., remembered and forgotten” (p. 7). In the absence of an accessible official archive, a counter-hegemonic, anarchic “anarchive” around 17 October developed, whose texts Brozgal hunts down and analyses, from an American novel (published only a year later) to popular fiction, poems, films, plays, posters, and rap songs in French, those texts accreting over the years and judged by Brozgal to have formed three waves of cultural activity between the sixties and the present.

Wading into those waves, Brozgal pieces together a fascinating survey of a counter-discourse that grew while the doors of the historical archive remained closed. Following Derrida and Massumi, Brozgal defines the anarchive as a “variegated body of primary material” which exists outside the official archive (p. 24). Brozgal suggests that the texts of the anarchive have as their guiding reader and investigator not the archive’s “archon” (a term behind which the figure of the authoritative historian might perhaps be glimpsed?), but the “literary scholar” (p. 26). Hence the study includes fiction as well as documentary, and pursues revealing errors as well as uncovering hidden facts. This approach is reiterated immediately before Brozgal embarks on the case studies, with the unequivocal statement that “requiring cultural productions to function as transparent reproductions of reality is to misconstrue their purpose and their function. As far as the October 17 anarchive is concerned, errors in fact...can be turned into productive moments for interpretation” (p. 70).

Chapters focus on stories about the archives; maps and graffiti; the Seine as the site of violence; ethnicity and racial profiling; and the imbrications between 17 October, colonialism, Vichy, and the Holocaust. Some of the phenomena and texts analysed here are well known: the fact that the French press at the time did publish accounts and photos of the massacre yet these did not seem to enter the national imaginary; the way that the deaths of nine French protestors at the

Charonne metro station four months later eclipsed the fate of the murdered Algerians; the importance of Daeninckx's detective novel *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1983) in addressing Maurice Papon's role in October 1961 and in the deportation of Jews to the death camps twenty years before. Others are much less well known and hence their inclusion here is especially welcome: American author William Gardner Smith's novel *The Stone Face* (1963), the first full-length fiction to address the massacre and yet bizarrely never translated into French—a novel, moreover, which places next to each other the experiences of Algerians in France and Blacks in the United States; various French (or Franco-Algerian) plays, films, young adult novels, and songs; and perhaps most thrillingly, as a coda, an account of rap group Zik Zitoun's song *On a appris à nager*, which takes the iconic graffiti photographed immediately after the massacre—"Ici on noie les Algériens"—as well as various other texts from the archive, and from them generates an optimistic "performance of resurfacing" (p. 317).

The book makes use of very detailed and thorough research, and its theoretical underpinnings are also strong. Astutely citing Mbembe's point that the official removal or hiding of the archive creates a space in which "imaginary thoughts" can flourish (p. 77), Brozgal works through numerous texts which illustrate those thoughts, and which collectively challenge Pierre Nora's assertion that modern memory is primarily "archival" (p. 113). In terms of memory, Brozgal is careful to follow Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory rather than the competitive kind. Hence instead of conflicting memories and competing versions of the past, both Rothberg and Brozgal try to suggest imbrications and non-hierarchical connections. Brozgal therefore speaks of "entanglements", rather than competing comparisons, when addressing the inter-relations between representations of the fate of the Algerians (both on 17 October and in the wider colonial project) and issues of Vichy and of the Holocaust. However, in a confident move, Brozgal is also prepared to critique Rothberg for presenting memories of the 17 October massacre as a "derivative of, and subordinated to, memories of the Holocaust" (p. 307).

Meanwhile Brozgal's use of Frantz Fanon is very apt, not just on the Manichean colonial universe but also on the eruption of the rebellious colonised peoples into the forbidden spaces of the settlers' towns—so evident in the 17 October demonstration. Textual analysis is perceptive and detailed, as for example in the account of framing in Adi's documentary, *Ici on noie les Algériens* (2011), or in the attention to a *mise-en-scène* in Haneke's *Caché* (2005). The latter features in a strong chapter on the Seine and its function as a "dumping ground" for the victims of the massacre (p. 166), as well as a signifier of "bourgeois leisure" in the France of the post-impressionists and the Belle Époque (p. 169). In cases like this the breadth and depth of Brozgal's cultural scholarship is most apparent: for example, there is a perceptive linkage between Kettane's 1985 novel, *Le Sourire de Brahim* and Apollinaire's 1912 poem, *Le pont Mirabeau*.

Brozgal's writing style is clear and effective, though at one point their interest in metaphors becomes too dominant. Chapter two, "Archive Stories", features no less than nine references to a "smoking gun". At one point we read "can our work have meaning if the notion of a smoking gun turns out to be a red herring?" (p. 90). It is possible that these mixed metaphors are a deliberate reference to the style of the popular literature which is the focus of this chapter, but even if so, I'm not sure it was worth it. A couple of other quibbles: the photos and film stills reproduced in the book are too dark. For instance, the "triple layer of sedimentation" that Brozgal describes in the final image of *Ici on noie les Algériens* is rendered illegible in the gloomy image on the facing page (p. 198). A few times in the book French nouns of nationality (especially *Algériens/nnes*) are missing their capital letters. And Brozgal's avoidance of the gender-neutral pronouns "they" and

“their” results in a surprisingly patriarchal-sounding statement when we read that 17 October “marked the first time the colonized subject made *himself* visible” in Paris, a place other than the site of “*his* revolution” (p. 14, my italics). This is particularly jarring when we reflect that the Algerian protest march of 17 October included many women, as Brozgal points out.

Nonetheless, all in all this is an important book, successful in its aim to collate and investigate the “anarchive” around 17 October 1961. It presents an excellent analysis of primary and secondary materials, of para-literary and popular cultural texts in particular, an extremely comprehensive bibliography, and a very effective grasp of relevant theory.

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