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H-France Review Vol. 23 (June 2023), No. 98

Nicole Beth Wallenbrock, *The Franco-Algerian War through a Twenty-First Century Lens: Film and History*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. xii + 210 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, filmography, and index. \$112.50 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1474262804; \$36.85 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1350246805; \$29.48 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-1474262828; \$29.40 U.S. (epub). ISBN 9-78-1474262828.

Review by Anne Donadey, San Diego State University.

The Algerian war of independence from the French (1954-1962) was at the origin of both the independent Algerian nation and the Fifth Republic in France. Its length and violence (between and within each camp) were so great that it continues to have aftereffects on both societies and to generate literary and cinematic depictions that tease out its lasting past and present stakes. Wallenbrock's book focuses on representations of the war in four documentary and eleven feature films made on both sides of the Mediterranean over a fifty-year period, between 1961 and 2013 (with a focus on 2006-2013 films). In her short introduction, she explains that she selected her corpus because it supports her interest in "films that challenge a previous, national narrative" (p. 4). These films generally include international collaborations and "exemplify the shift from nationalist portrayals of war toward the transnational" (p. 5). The book is composed of six chapters, with a small introduction, conclusion, and useful historical timeline (1827-2019) to contextualize the study.

Chapter one, "The Twentieth-Century Screen Geography of the Franco-Algerian War," addresses twentieth-century films that included "partnerships" (p. 11) and dialogues across the Mediterranean. Early on, French filmmakers René Vautier and Pierre Clément made a series of militant films for the FLN (Algerian National Liberation Front) in collaboration with Algerians. Socialist countries such as East Germany supported some of these films. Although the films are staunchly anticolonial, their international production aspect is to be noted. Vautier, an important figure in early Algerian cinema, trained Algerian filmmakers such as Ahmed Rachedi and Mohamed Bouamari. Wallenbrock also mentions that famed Algerian director Mohammed Lakhdar Hamina trained in Czechoslovakia. Through short analyses of close to twenty films made between the early 1960s and the mid 1990s, she demonstrates that in this period, "Algerian and French cinema operate primarily as separate entities that nonetheless influence one another" (p. 24).

Chapter two, "The Algerian Revolution in Three Transnational Documentaries: *Algérie Tours/détours* (Oriane Brun-Moschetti and Leïla Morouche, 2006), *La Chine est encore loin* (*China Is Still Far Away*, Malek Bensmaïl, 2008), and *Fidaï* (Damien Ounouri, 2012)," analyzes three

experimental twenty-first century documentaries. In contrast with films of the earlier period, Wallenbrock identifies these films as transnational due to the fact that they represent various forms of collaboration between Algerian and French people. In this chapter, she makes the poignant remark that given the very small number of movie theaters in Algeria, “even coproductions that the Algerian government helps fund tend to be marketed for European art-house theaters and a festival circuit” (p. 42). The French-Algerian production *Algérie Tours/détours* focuses on the impact of René Vautier, following him as he crisscrosses Algeria while showing classic Algerian films on the war and participating in discussions. Wallenbrock establishes the ways in which this film remains (perhaps inevitably) imbricated in neocolonial power structures despite its anticolonial goals. Her discussion of *La Chine est encore loin* similarly emphasizes the film’s neocolonial context of production and reception, due to primarily French financing and distribution. She highlights the film’s critique of contemporary Algerian politics, especially around the Arabization policy that excluded Tamazight (Berber, or minority indigenous) languages. Finally, *Fidaï*, a film with international backing, mixes “languages, generations, and cultures” (p. 54) as well as “past and present” (p. 57) in the life of a former FLN militant. Wallenbrock argues that “All three [films] resituate the Algerian Revolution in the twenty-first century, depicting its emotional resonances in the survivor population as well as presenting youth’s ignorance of national history amidst contemporary problems of homelessness and poverty” (pp. 52-53).

Chapter three, “The Specter of Torture and Atomic Bombs: *L’Ennemi intime* (*The Intimate Enemy*, Florent-Emilio Siri, 2007) and *Djinns* (*Stranded*, Hughes and Sandra Martin, 2010),” focuses on two French war films. Wallenbrock demonstrates that these films “position the French military as...themselves essentially victims of the torture they practice” (p. 62). *L’Ennemi*’s perspective aligns with that of its French officer’s, first in his shock at the military’s use of torture and later through his own participation in the act. Wallenbrock also compellingly analyzes the sexualized aspect of torture represented in this film. She traces the ways in which the film recenters French protagonists’ point of view and their sense of guilt over the violence done to Algerian characters. Ultimately, the film both exposes and legitimates the wartime torture perpetrated by the French military. *Djinns* addresses the unspoken aftereffects of French atomic bomb testing in the Sahara through the unusual military-horror genre. The spirits of the desert (*jinnns*) cause French soldiers to “hallucinate images that repeat their trauma” (p. 80) and lead them to turn against themselves and one another. Wallenbrock concludes that these two films proffer “plots that both punish and absolve the French military from a once hidden past” (p. 87).

In chapter four, “Reclaiming the Screen Algerian Revolution: *Cartouches Gauloises* (*Summer of ’62*, Mehdi Charef, 2006), *Hors-la-loi* (*Outside the Law*, Rachid Bouchareb, 2010), and *Les Folles Années du Twist* (*The Crazy Years of the Twist*, Mahmoud Zemmouri, 1986),” Wallenbrock hones in on the influence of 1960s and 1970s Algerian militant films (*moudjahid* cinema) on Charef’s and Bouchareb’s early twenty-first century films, contrasting them with how Zemmouri’s *Folles Années* satirized that legacy. She explains that, unlike the *moudjahid* films, Charef and Bouchareb evince a more transnational approach and include the French language. In particular, Charef is indebted to nouvelle vague films and Bouchareb mixes *moudjahid* and Hollywood aesthetics. Wallenbrock convincingly argues that *Hors la loi* “reterritorializes French cinema’s most common city [Paris] as an Algerian independence setting” (p. 99) and “French as a language of Algerian independence” (p. 101). I would add that this was true historically, even if not represented much in film prior to *Hors la loi*. In contrast, *Les Folles Années du Twist* takes place in Algeria but counters the tradition of *moudjahid* cinema with sarcastic humor.

Chapter five, “A Scission in the Memory of the Franco-Algerian War: *Mesrine Part I: L’Instinct de Mort (Killer Instinct)*, *Part II: L’Ennemi Public No. 1 (Public Enemy No.1)*, Jean-Paul Richet, 2008,” focuses on a two-part biopic of the famous French gangster Jacques Mesrine. In these films, the Algerian war serves as prelude and explanation for a life of crime. Wallenbrock convincingly compares details of the scene of wartime torture in Algeria with other scenes depicting Mesrine’s postwar criminal acts, pointing to parallels between them that place Mesrine—and by extension contemporary French society—in an ambivalent position regarding French colonialism, racism, and the war of independence.

Chapter six, “The Revolution through Utopian Dialectics: *Une si jeune paix (So Young a Peace)*, Jacques Charby, 1965) and *Loubia Hamra (Bloody Beans)*, Narimane Mari, 2013,” examines two Algerian films that stage children reenacting the war. In *Une si jeune paix*, real-life traumatized and physically maimed orphans “repeat the war” compulsively, standing in for “the new nation’s urgent situation” (p. 133). As *Une si jeune paix* references the earlier short *J’ai huit ans* (1961) and the art therapy led by Frantz Fanon with orphaned Algerian children, *Loubia Hamra* counters the children of *Une si jeune paix*’s “visual captivity” (p. 143) in gated gardens, forests, and cemeteries by moving its own location to the ocean and the beach and relying on metaphor as well as on an “improvisational, experimental format” (p. 151). One of very few films of the Algerian war made by a woman, *Loubia Hamra* also spends more time on its female characters than the other films discussed in the book (with the exception of Assia Djebar’s earlier films). Wallenbrock concludes that, whereas twentieth-century films on the war tended to “primarily depict one nation’s perspective”, early twenty-first century films are co-productions that highlight “shared memories” (p. 155) and allow for more nuanced portrayals. She closes on a (perhaps too optimistic) vision of these films’ healing potential.

Wallenbrock has included discussion of a large number of films on the French-Algerian war, an impressive feat given that many of these films are hard to find. Throughout, her framework is grounded in theories of the rhizome and deterritorialization by Deleuze and Guattari, of the archive, the scission, and the specter by Jacques Derrida, and of heterotopia by Michel Foucault. She admirably embeds her close readings of the films within their socio-historical context of production. Her analyses are fine-grained, sophisticated, and generally convincing although occasionally, references to secondary sources are missing (especially in chapters one and four). The book would have benefited from stronger editing from Bloomsbury Academic to rid it of typos and minor inaccuracies. While a small portion of this material was previously published in article form, the bulk of the book represents new scholarship on the topic. There has been a resurgence of critical interest in filmic representations of the war of Algerian independence in the past ten years, from Ahmed Bedjaoui’s *Cinéma et guerre de libération* (2014) to Mani Sharpe’s *Late-colonial French Cinema* (2023).<sup>[1]</sup> Wallenbrock’s book is a major contributor to this corpus.

#### Note

[1] Ahmed Bedjaoui, *Cinéma et guerre de libération: Algérie, des batailles d’images* (Algiers: Chihab, 2014); Mani Sharpe, *Late-colonial French Cinema: Filming the Algerian War of Independence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

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ISSN 1553-9172