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## Anne Donadey. *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012*. Lexington Books, 2020.

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**Abstract**

Review of Anne Donadey. *The Algerian War in Film Fifty Years Later, 2004-2012*. Lexington Books, 2020. 246 pp.

**Keywords**

Films, Algerian War, Anamnesis, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, Algeria, France

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Lexington Books, 2020. 246 pp.

Algeria celebrated 60 years of independence from France on March 19, 2022, but the memory of the Algerian War remains powerful, as much in Algeria as in France. The Algerian War of Independence has been deemed one of the most deferred subjects in French history.

The cinematic representation of the Algerian War of Independence and French society's difficult anamnesis of it are the themes of Anna Donadey's valuable work. Her analysis of the many narrative French-language films produced in both countries between 2004 and 2012, during the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence, describes the current state of war remembrance. The book explores the historical and psychological scars that still have collective and private implications. This commendable study not only shows how the memory of the Algerian War has been re-apprehended through Algerian and French films, but also reexamines how effectively these films counter French historical denial of its colonial exploitation and systematic torture of Algerians carried out in the name of the French Republic. In order to do so, Donadey meticulously chooses movies and memories and then engages them in a conversation that often offers conflicting accounts of this traumatic war.

Using both historical sources and cinematic analysis, the author asks critical questions about the memory of violence, pain, and trauma and the possibilities of a healing process between two countries that share a past of war and atrocity. Donadey draws inspiration from historian Henry Rousso's 1987 book *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours (The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944)*, which examines the stages of problematic memory concerning World War II in France. Adapting Rousso's nomenclature, Donadey defines the "Algerian syndrome" as French society's struggle and failure to confront its colonial past and the war in Algeria (3). In the footsteps of Rousso, Donadey traces four historical stages of the syndrome: mourning, from 1962 to 1964; repression, up to 1989; the return of the repressed, up to 1998; and the difficult anamnesis from 1999 to the present. The film production made during the decade corresponding to the fiftieth anniversary of the Algerian independence, she argues, helped France to advance from a period of the return of the repressed to one of difficult anamnesis. This latter stage, Donadey maintains, continues today in its processes of both invoking yet occluding memories of the war, routinizing and then burying them, a progression that she defines as the "hiccups of memory" (4).

Based on the analysis of twenty fictional movies, the monograph is organized in four chapters. The first investigates three areas: the representation of war and the brutality of the French military and police; the depiction of colonization; and the function of Algerian characters. Building from Benjamin

Stora's analysis of the Algerian war films made before the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence, Donadey detects few changes when analyzing the film production during the fiftieth anniversary. Except for *La Trahison (The Betrayal)*, which focuses on the Algerian characters' perspective, most of the films still depict war as an internal French matter. Violence, colonial exploitation, and racism are condemned, but Algerian characters continue to have very limited agency while female characters are almost absent. In the second chapter, the film selection focuses on civilians and their memories of war. Stora's vision of the "double civil war" within both Algeria and France during the conflict helps us understand the complexity of the characters' memory when evoking enemy encounters, collisions, misperceptions, and historical denials (10). It also allows Donadey to point at the psychological consequences for present and future generations of French citizens living in France and at potential spaces for the reconciliation of memories. At stake in this chapter is the meaning of French national and multinational belonging, identity, assimilation, and integration.

The third chapter analyzes the memory and nostalgia of *pied-noirs* in films made by *pied-noir* and Algerian directors, and by a collaboration between the two as well. Assessing the *pied-noirs*' perspective on the Algerian war more than twenty years later, Donadey notices how some films have been able to alter that phantasmagoric vision of an undamaged prewar colonial Algeria and to confront both the harm that French colonization and the war brought to Algeria. If loss memory, melancholia, disconnection from the past, feelings of loss and nostalgia still characterize these films, Donadey commends Mehdi Charef's *Cartouches gauloises (Summer of '62)* for the inspiring process of its characters dealing with individual and collective trauma. Chapter four focuses on pro-independence militant leaders' war memories, whose value has been erased by Algerian and French governments and official historiography. Donadey effectively brings into dialogue two films made by Algerian directors, two additional ones centered on European supporters of Algerian independence, and finally two films on the Algerian and French women's perspective, political agency, and female solidarity. Given the limited discussion on women's participation in the war due to the book's film selection, this chapter highlights the transnational aspects of the Algerian national liberation and includes the perspectives of underrepresented groups, as well as their identities, languages, and religious affiliations.

By examining resilience, wounds, and the move towards challenging negotiations by means of cinematic representations of the Algerian War and the colonial past, Donadey calls attention to the discussion of the nature of pasts and histories. If historical consciousness varies in its degree of symbolic elaborations, the author shrewdly illustrates how history exists as a negotiable resource that can be reworked by protean social worlds and cinematic art. This monograph will be of

interest to critics of Francophone film, historians, and students and teachers of colonialism, war, and memory.

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