

BOOK REVIEW

Laila Amine. *Postcolonial Paris: Fictions of Intimacy in the City of Light*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018. 241 pp. \$44.95. Cloth. ISBN: 9780299315801.

There is an urgent need for postcolonial approaches to Urban Studies to be applied to European contexts. To gain a better understanding of France and Europe today, the different ways to live in Paris and to be French (as well as the differing notions of Europe and of European citizenship) must be considered. Institutions and states that oppose change cower behind rancid discourses about what has characterized them in the past, underscoring the need to debate the construction of otherness. This debate, meanwhile, reveals discourses of supposedly color-blind whiteness while offering new voices and points of view.

Laila Amine's book, *Postcolonial Paris: Fictions of Intimacy in the City of Light*, offers just such a refreshing new voice. Its purpose is "to respond to the demonization of Arab and Muslim men by rewriting colonial tropes of intimacy," (3) specifically those concerning interracial couples, the harem, and Arab-queers, in order to "uncover the long-standing deployment of gender and sexuality in constructing and contesting racial boundaries between Paris and its outskirts, France and Algeria, the West and the rest." Amine describes what it means to be Arab and Muslim in Europe, scrutinizing the role and place of certain minorities. She focuses on minorities in the racialized periphery in order to present new cultural cartographies representing their marginalized narratives. Various other researchers have discussed some of the central themes of this book, highlighting the racialization of otherness, the influence of colonial reflexes, and the criminalization of the banlieues.

Amine's research brings all this inherited knowledge together and takes an unsparing look at the peripheries of Paris by utilizing Maghrebi and Franco-Arab voices, along with African-American expatriate authors writing about interracial and imagined spaces in Paris. She analyzes novels, films, and street art using "imaginative geography" and "postcolonial narratives" as proof of the colonial legacies that permeate the metropolis. Her work challenges the City of Light to justify its claim to be the French symbol of such values as equality, fraternity, and justice.

The first chapter, "Colonial Domesticity," reflects on Francophone Maghrebi novels. As Amine says: "This chapter shifts the focus from the colony to the metropole, from European men's interaction with female

others to Algerian men's encounters with Parisian women" (37). These themes are further explored in the second chapter, "Romance and Brotherhood," in which Amine studies how "colour-blind Paris noir is represented through the language of interracial romance" (9). In the third chapter, "The New Harem," she takes a provocative approach to the *banlieues*, referring to them as exotic sites of sexual tourism where "we find the harem as a central figure of analysis in the scholarship of Orientalism and colonialism in North Africa ..." (91). The fourth chapter looks at "Other Queers" as a way of approaching Arab men who comprise sexual minorities. As Amine explains: "As a social phenomenon, Arab queer intimacy had been largely invisible until 2009, when two popular books on homosexuality in the impoverished suburbs were published ..." (116). "Embodying the City" offers a final reflection, using graffiti and street art to approach the politicized city via the work of Leila Sebbar. As Amine correctly observes, "The emergence of the graffiti in the city disturbs the order of place by representing people, traumatic memories, and concerns located at the margins" (153).

This is a noteworthy book, although there is a tendency for the research to become Arab-centered. Also, there is a small inaccuracy in that the Kabyle community is Amazigh, not Arab, and it has some historical significance in France. Overlooking Amazigh cultural expressions in Paris reproduces Amazigh invisibility in Algeria and North Africa. A better representation of Algerian diversities would not have affected the overall work and conclusions while allowing for a more complete understanding of the way this community sees itself in the diaspora. Categorizing the Kabyle peoples as "tribal and local identities" (9) seems inadequate, considering the enormous care the author gives to the construction of French otherness. This is perhaps symptomatic of how visualizing and dignifying minorities in Europe seems to require the recognition of other ethnic and cultural identities in their countries of reference.

In closing, two important observations and conclusions must be highlighted: on the one hand, poverty and precariousness lie behind Muslim women's lack of freedom, and on the other, it is essential that visibility be given to cultural productions that are able to reverse the clichéd view of Islam as a threat. These two lines of thought point the way for future research while offering insight into current tensions and misunderstandings.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Gunkel, Henriette. 2013. "Some Reflections on Postcolonial Homophobia, Local Interventions, and LGBTI Solidarity Online: The Politics of Global Petitions." *African Studies Review* 56 (2): 67–81. doi:10.1017/asr.2013.42.
- Orlando, Valérie K. 2014. "Being-in-the-World in the Global Age: Marginal Spaces as Alternative Places in the Belgian–Moroccan Transnational Cityscape of Les Barons." *African Studies Review* 57 (2): 163–81. doi:10.1017/asr.2014.53.