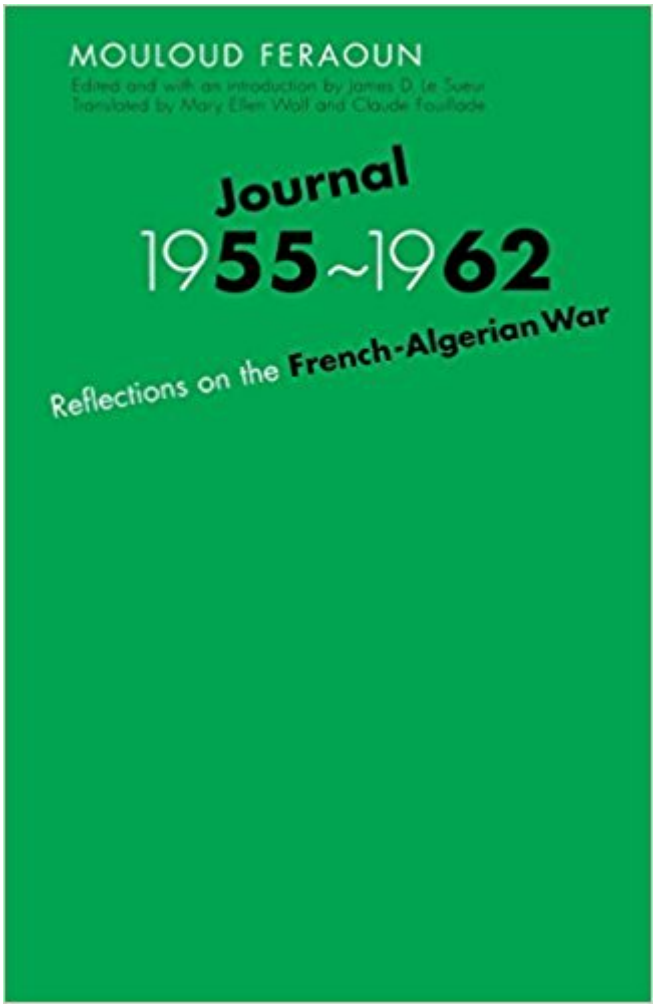
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Journal, 1955-1962: Reflections On The French-Algerian War



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Synopsis

Ã¢â ¬Å“This honest man, this good man, this man who never did wrong to anyone, who devoted his life to the public good, and who was one of the greatest writers in Algeria, has been murdered. . . . Not by accident, not by mistake, but called by his name and killed with preference.Ã¢â ¬Â• So wrote Germaine Tillion in Le Monde shortly after Mouloud FeraounÃ¢â ¬â„¢s assassination by a right wing French terrorist group, the Organisation ArmÃƒÂ©e SecrÃƒÂ¨te, just three days before the official cease-fire ended AlgeriaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s eight-year battle for independence from France. However, not even the gunmen of the OAS could prevent FeraounÃ¢â ¬â„¢s journal from being published. Journal, 1955Ã¢â ¬â œ1962 appeared posthumously in French in 1962 and remains the single most important account of everyday life in Algeria during decolonization.Feraoun was one of AlgeriaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s leading writers. He was a friend of Albert Camus, Emmanuel RoblÃƒÂ¨s, Pierre Bourdieu, and other French and North African intellectuals. A committed teacher, he had dedicated his life to preparing AlgeriaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s youth for a better future. As a Muslim and Kabyle writer, his reflections on the war in Algeria afford penetrating insights into the nuances of Algerian nationalism, as well as into complex aspects of intellectual, colonial, and national identity. FeraounÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Journal captures the heartbreak of a writer profoundly aware of the social and political turmoil of the time. This classic account, now available in English, should be read by anyone interested in the history of European colonialism and the tragedies of contemporary Algeria.

Book Information

Paperback: 340 pages

Publisher: Bison Books (June 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 080326903X

ISBN-13: 978-0803269033

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,307,237 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #65 inÃ Â Books > History > Africa > Algeria #712 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Africa #786 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > France

Customer Reviews

Feraoun never fit into a neat category in colonial Algeria. He was a Muslim who counted French

intellectuals among his closest friends, including Albert Camus. Although an Algerian nationalist, he was a Berber who neither spoke nor wrote Arabic. As a result, his journal brings a unique perspective to what was perhaps the most brutal of the anticolonial wars. This is not a chronicle of the war itself; rather, it is an intensely personal memoir detailing how the savage conflict affected the daily lives of people on both sides of the divide. Feraoun is clearly sympathetic to the rebel cause, but he is no mere shill for their side. He passionately examines the human condition with all its flaws and nobility, yet he occasionally describes events with an eerie detachment. Since he was assassinated by a French terrorist group just three days before the cease-fire that ended the war, his account is especially poignant. An emotionally draining and important work. Jay FreemanCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

After years of anticolonial and post colonial theory, Feraoun’s journal is truly refreshing to read. -- The New Republic, November 6, 2000Feraoun’s Journal reads like a message in a bottle.... [It is] such a timely and timeless historical, political, literary, and human document. -- The Village Voice, January 10-16, 2001

I gave this book five stars--I should point out that even in English it is difficult--perhaps the translators intention. For example often it is difficult to find the antecedent to a particular pronoun.I read this book first because it is one of the few I could find in English written by an Algerian (Feraoun was Kabyle and spoke no Arabic ironically) second because it is nuanced and though pro-FLN is not propaganda. I should state that after what my father told me he had witnessed at Setif in 1945 I am perfectly content with the most extreme condemnation of the French whose conduct makes any sanctimonious condemnation of "the brutality of Islam" a farce. (I should add the US follows the French --even to the point of having former French torturers train US army soldiers--this is verifiable ((see latest edition of The Question--by Alleg for verification)). Nevertheless I felt that the views of a "moderate"--and at the time one of Algeria’s greatest writers should be respected--and indeed they complicate the whole problematic of the war--though not for me. I do not like propaganda and am not oblivious to the savagery of the war on both sides. But now more knowledable say about FLN’s "brutality" my support for them has not wavered only grown. Anti-Colonial fighting is not a sentimental business and the FLN did things it should not have in my opinion. Having said that however it is well to remember that NONE of this would have happened had the French not decided to invade Algeria in 1830--had they not locked up whole communities in

caves during the 19th century --and let them starve to death. Even Pontecorvo's great film does not present the real savagery of the French who are in the end responsible for ALL of the deaths of the Algerians between 1954-62 (1/9 of the whole muslim population) WHETHER OR NOT "indigenes" were killed by the liberation forces. It is the same in Iraq Afghanistan and Palestine.Feraoun--friend of Camus, lover of French culture--a man who deplored the few French "improvements" destroyed by the Liberation forces--a man who loved France and Algeria was murdered by the OAS three days before the war ceased.

The Kabylians are lions and they freed Algeria from the French. The Arabes where hiding and never fought. in 62 they STOLE the power and destroyed Algeria with their STUPID culture that denies the Kabylians the right to speak the Kabyle Language. We should Help the GPK that protect the Kabylian people from the Arabs.

That sentence from Mouloud Feraoun's JOURNAL, 1955-1962 summarizes the Algerian War of Independence as he experienced it. JOURNAL is one of the major, if lesser-known, eyewitness accounts of the political atrocities that marked the twentieth century. It belongs in the same group of books as Primo Levi's "If This Is a Man" and Eugenia Ginzburg's "Journey into the Whirlwind". Hitler's Holocaust and Stalin's Gulag are much better known, but for many Muslim Algerians caught up in the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), life was almost as hellish.Feraoun lived through that maelstrom as a Muslim Berber from Kabylia. In November 1955 he began writing a journal from the maw of the War of Independence. He was one of the most respected writers in colonial Algeria and a friend of such noted figures as Emmanuel Robles and Albert Camus. He also was a schoolteacher, living in Fort-National, in the middle of Kabylia. In July 1957, due to the death and mayhem that had overwhelmed the Kabylie, Feraoun and his family moved to a suburb of Algiers. (That was during the Battle of Algiers, but still Algiers was safer, less violent, than was Kabylia.) Feraoun continued to live in the vicinity of Algiers until March 15, 1962, when he was assassinated by the fascist OAS just days before the cease-fire ending the French-Algerian war.Reading JOURNAL, 1955-1962 is profoundly depressing. It contains a litany of barbarities; it is a testament of inhumanity. Time and again, it documents physical torture. Example: A friend tells Feraoun: "What got me talking more than anything else is the spring * * *. It is a tool that is introduced into the anus and that increases in size when they push on the spring. Then they pull it out brutally, and you feel your entrails tear." Torture leads to false confessions, which lead to more arrests and more torture and more deaths. JOURNAL also documents psychological torture, both of

individuals and of entire towns and, indeed, of all native Algerians.Who are the native Algerians? The French wanted to think that Algeria was part of France and that there were such people as "French Algerians". Feraoun would have none of that. "This people of eight million men is not French, and on its soil the French * * * are battling for the sole purpose of deciding the manner in which they are going to continue to impose their will upon it, to continue to live there, to continue to exploit and despise it, in the name of imperishable principles, in order to fulfill a highly civilizing mission."But Feraoun's world was not an either/or world. His implacable anti-colonialism did not place him in the camp of the FLN. In January 1956, he wrote: "The rebels' expectations are both excessive and disappointing. They include prohibitions of all kinds, nothing but prohibitions, dictated by the most obtuse fanaticism, the most intransigent racism, and the most authoritarian fist. In a way, this is true terrorism." In March 1956, he asked: "Can people who kill innocents in cold blood be called liberators? If so, have they considered for a moment that their 'violence' will engender more 'violence,' will legitimize it, and will hasten its terrible manifestation?"Curiously, JOURNAL, 1955-1962 was written in French. (Feraoun, who was born in 1913, was one of the Muslim elite of Algeria and he was educated within the French system. He also spoke Tamazight, the native Kabyle language, but he did not speak or write Arabic. There was, in fact, much friction and some violence between the Berbers and the Arabs, but Islam and anti-colonialist sentiments tended to unite the two groups. Certainly, the French looked down on and exploited both of them.) JOURNAL has long been known to be one of the seminal documents of the Algerian War of Independence. Alistair Horne lists it as one of his sources for his classic account of the War, "A Savage War of Peace". But it was only in 2000, with the publication of this volume, that it was made available in English.James D. Le Sueur, a French professor of history, contributes a useful forty-page introduction. In it, he compares Feraoun and his JOURNAL with Frantz Fanon and his "Wretched of the Earth". Le Sueur discusses how Feraoun and Fanon "held antithetical views on violence." "For Feraoun, the question was not whether violence could be used, when need be, as a response to colonial oppression but was a matter of when violence should stop and what the effects of violence were." Feraoun feared that the unrestrained, often unprincipled, violence of the FLN would result in a new "colonization" and a social environment that would breed yet more violence after independence. In this regard, Feraoun was prescient. Le Sueur concludes: "Because [Feraoun] was alive and writing throughout the war, his insights into the apocalyptic violence of decolonization are far more revealing than theories written about the conflict out of harm's way, especially the observations written by Fanon in 'The Wretched of the Earth' and celebrated by Sartre in his preface to that book."It is not always easy to follow Feraoun. Often his reactions to events happening

around him -- in his town, outside his house on the street, to people he knows -- are raw. Sometimes his writing is impressionistic. Sometimes he is not altogether logical, and occasionally he contradicts himself. He often refers to people by a single initial, and one also has to deal with a kaleidoscopic alphabet stew of organizations -- FLN, SAS, ALN, CRUA, MNA, SAU, OAS, etc. But the book is not inordinately difficult, and it is very rewarding. Certainly any student of the Algerian War of Independence should read it.

There are a few important works on the Algerian Civil War available for the English reader. Franz Fannon, Alistair Horne's history, the film "Battle of Algiers, and recently Feraoun's diary are the ones that readily come to mind. Feraoun was a western educated Algerian and well accquainted with the French. His desire for an independent Algeria was strong, but tempered by a strong sense of historical reality. He reveals the day to day impact of the violence. It is in this respect that the work is most moving, and reveals the senselessness and degradation that occurs to all people involved, Feraoun eventually a victim himself. An essential view of the psychological costs of guerrilla and anti-colonial war.

First, I will comment on the book itself from an American point of view. The book is not easy to read because it is not a book: it is the author's journal he kept during the French Algerian War. Knowing that still, his journal entries, which at the beginning were frequent and detailed, were focused on keeping track of who was killed, tortured or who was doing the killings. It was as if the author, Mr. F.(his notation of using people's initials to hide their identity from I suppose the French secret police), was keeping a testimony of the murders occurring all around him as evidence. This makes for dull reading; however, given the events of 9-11, I made a valiant effort to immerse myself into the author's mind and try to understand this incredibly brutal civil war.(...)

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