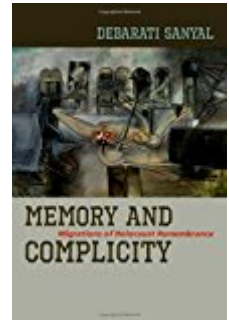


Debarati Sanyal. *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance.*
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It has been an eerie pleasure to read Debarati Sanyal's new work, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance*. A pleasure, because it has provided me new lenses through which to view old friends from Francophone literature (Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Alain Resnais) relative to France's mixed roles of victim and aggressor during the Second World War and the decolonization period, and eerie because I finished reading Sanyal's correlations between Nazism and Islamism coincident with the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015. *Memory and Complicity* provokes the reader to explore overlapping layers of historical memory, to recognize conversations between writers of the twentieth-century French canon and its aspirants, and to acknowledge all forms of complicity across the generations. Sanyal leads us through a timeline incorporating the Nazi occupation of France and the collaboration of Vichy France; the French-Algerian War and its longer-term aftermath; and late twentieth-century/early twenty-first-century global terror.

As Sanyal explains in her prologue, the word "complicity" in the title implies much more than guilt or *Mitschuld*, instead employing the Latin root *complicare*, or "to fold together," to illustrate her approach to historical events from diverse time periods as reflected in the literature (p. 10). The metaphor evokes an accordion pleat, where the timeline mentioned above is folded together in a way that the points representing 1940-1945, 1954-1962, and 2001-present collapse upon themselves, bringing them into such direct correlation that one time period highlights its interstices with another. But complicity is also complicated. It is not enough, Sanyal argues, to let Primo Levi's gray zone be the entire remembered paradigm for victims and perpetrators. Instead, one must weave a path that finds the points of convergence among violent pasts in order to more fully engage and uncover them. She critiques interpretations of the gray zone as either too universal, depicting history as trauma (p. 39), or as overemphasizing the transference of witness to victim.[1] This is the first of several "migrations of remembrance" that

Sanyal addresses in this work: the devaluation of Holocaust remembrance into a one-size-fits-all construction of any form of violent horror.

As chapter 1 transitions into chapter 2, Sanyal begins to consider allegory as a form of remembrance, turning to works by Albert Camus, notably *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1956). Sanyal reminds us that Camus is seen to connect the violence of the Holocaust with the violence of colonialism. Yet Camus has also been accused of committing “aesthetic genocide” through the disappearing of any Arab figures in *The Plague*. Contradictory readings of Camus, then, highlight French memory wars concerning genocide and war, prompting Sanyal to suggest allegory as a method of another migration—of memory across “national and ethnocultural borders ... into ‘multi-directional memory’” (p. 62).[2] It is misguided, she writes, to connect allegories to one history or another, i.e., “one memory [should not] displace or silence another” (p. 85). Instead, layered, or multidirectional, memory provides context for multiple histories at once. Connecting the North African camp in *The Fall* to the camp in the gray zone, to Vichy, to the GULAG, to the Algerian War, to 9/11—all at once—opens the means to a more comprehensive understanding of each event individually as well as collectively.

This is the central motif Sanyal employs throughout the book. Alain Resnais’s film *Night and Fog* (1955) depicts Auschwitz, yet is widely understood as a comment on Algeria. Sanyal enters Resnais’s film into conversation with *The Road to Guantánamo* (2006), a documentary film by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross. The two films, together with Ousmane Sembène’s *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), illustrate migrations of memory through a spatial medium. Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Condemned of Altona* (1959), and its indirect condemnation of torture, whether by the Nazis or by the French in the Algerian War, is used by Sanyal to illustrate that often history can only be approached indirectly, by a sideways

“crabwalk.” A circuitous yet patient and repetitive approach often works best to reveal complex interlacing of memories and meanings.

In the final chapters of the book, Sanyal most directly connects the history of Nazism with twenty-first-century French-Arab violence through the analysis of three novels: Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones* (2006); Assia Djébar’s *Les nuits de Strasbourg* (1997); and Boualem Sansal’s *The German Mujahid* (2009). Littell’s protagonist, SS officer Maximilien Aue, is a reflective perpetrator, who mulls the links between nineteenth-century colonialism and twentieth-century Nazi colonial efforts. Sanyal reminds us that this is similar to French writers, such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, viewing the Holocaust “through the lens of decolonization, and in particular ... the Algerian War” (p. 207). Sanyal insightfully points out that Littell is not drawing lines of cause and effect (colonialism did not cause the Shoah), but rather establishing a “field of resonance” among them (p. 210).

The works of Djébar and Sansal bring Algeria to France, the (de)colonized to the (former) empire. Here again we see how the motifs of camp, gray zone, and migrations of memory replay themselves in a new context. Arab Algerians have settled in Strasbourg and the banlieues of Paris, as French citizens, yet permanently cast as migrants, as outsiders. In the two novels, the protagonists trigger responses that are themselves a migration of Holocaust remembrance, namely, transferring the memory of Nazi violence into potential present violence against (or by) Arabs in Europe. In the first work, Strasbourg is a border city, yet also the city of German-French reconciliation; in Djébar it is both a triangular German-French-Algerian reconciliation, and a new merged land of *Alsagérie*: Alsace, Algeria (p. 227). Sansal draws the most direct comparisons between Nazism and Islamic fundamentalism with his protagonist, Malrich, calling the housing project in which he lives a concentration camp, and likening his fa-

ther's past involvement with the SS to his own past membership in a jihadist group in the banlieue. Sansal's work offers the memories of two brothers, side by side, each viewing related pasts (of the Shoah and of banlieue jihadists). This constellation is reminiscent of Debarati Sanyal's call to consider discrete pasts in relation to each other.

This was a difficult yet intriguing book to read. Sanyal is very thorough, expanding her analysis into abundant variations on the interconnectedness of the points on the accordion pleat. Each subsequent chapter recalls argumentation from the preceding one; so not only is Sanyal keeping all the juggled balls in the air at once, she demands of her readers that they do so as well. It is a densely written book, most accessible to readers familiar with recent discussions of Franco-phone literature, but it is also an important contribution to the scholarship of memory.

I conclude by stressing the utter timeliness of this work. The final chapter of the book brings us full circle, migrating memories of colonialism to the Holocaust to colonial wars to global terror. This circle is exemplified in a scene from Djébar's *Strasbourg*, where an Alsatian tries to incite a French crowd to violence against a restrained arrested Algerian outside the police station, kicking the man and shouting, "Dog! Foreign dog!" (p. 230). Such words are all too familiar in the contemporary world, whether from US presidential campaigns in 2015-16, or in PEDIGA marches in Dresden. Even cries of "Je suis Charlie" can in some instances carry a xenophobic edge. Holocaust remembrance, then, may have migrated from mourning Shoah victims to justifying new targets.

Notes

[1]. See, in particular, Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 1999).

[2]. Here Sanyal uses Michael Rothberg's term from his recent book, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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