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Mildred Mortimer, *Women Fight, Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War*. (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2018). pp. 284.

Alexis Rae

In *Women Fight, Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War*, Mildred Mortimer draws attention to the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of women who were active participants in the Algerian War of Independence from the French. All too often, historical accounts of war chronicle the stories of men and silence women's voices, portraying armed struggle as a collection of masculine triumphs. Meanwhile, women are painted as the victims and passive bystanders of war in academic research. Mortimer joins a recent wave of scholarship that highlights women's participation in violence as combatants,¹ perpetrators of violence,² and strategic noncombatants,³ as well as women's political participation once conflict concludes.⁴ In doing so, Mortimer contributes to our understanding of women's participation in war by dispelling binary assumptions regarding women's wartime roles through the critical analysis of primary sources written by women. Weaving together literary, historical, and testimonial texts that reflect upon women's participation during and after the Algerian war, the book explores female voices fighting against colonial and patriarchal oppression in Algeria.

Mortimer's objective is to shed light on the woman's struggle to appropriate the Algerian war story as her own. Though the war formally lasted from 1954 to 1962, women continued the battle to have their perspectives heard well beyond the war. The author therefore selects texts written by Algerian women from 1962 and 2016 to draw attention to the persistence of women's battle against patriarchal norms. The book contextualizes and analyzes the voices of women as the chroniclers of conflict and the participants of war, combining first and third-person narratives. As the author writes, "the subjects are women who speak, women who are spoken for, and women who collaborate in their narrative with a journalist or historian."⁵ The central premise of the book is that female perspectives provide a vision of African society and of African experience that can be found nowhere else. Because their voices have been silenced for so long, women must recast their nation's political memory, collective trauma, and pursuit of

independence so they become a part of the story. Women not only fought for freedom; they continue the fight to be recognized as legitimate sources of Algerian history.

The book seeks to decolonize the history of the Algerian War of Independence and the subsequent “dark decade” of the 1990s. As the author states, “when Algerian women break their silence, they not only revise perspectives on their nation’s history but also destroy the stereotype of the mute and passive ‘Oriental woman.’”⁶ Mortimer disrupts current approaches taken by sociologists and political scientists to understand women’s roles during war because it provides rich, illuminating detail about women’s nuanced experiences with and perceptions of political conflict. At the same time, it historicizes the political processes within which women endured struggles and triumphs throughout the war. It is particularly helpful that the author considers the post-war environment in Algeria by drawing attention to the persistent social and political obstacles women continue to face following conflict.

The primary strength of this text is its methodological eclecticism and its transitions in analyzing one form of data to the next. By bringing together works of fiction, memoirs, and historical studies, Mortimer tests whether it is necessary to use fiction and nonfiction sources to understand the complexities of war. Although an unconventional approach, I was convinced by the author’s pointed critique that writing under the guise of literary fiction can prove a powerful tool of political expression for the oppressed and result in novel findings. Each of the seven substantive chapters provides an analysis of the texts of a single author. Rather than limit Mortimer’s ability to make definitive claims from the data at hand, the depth of the analyses compensates for the lack of breadth in material. Fewer data sources allow Mortimer to more fully explore women’s perceptions of war and trauma and political empowerment, as well as provide richer detail through which to think about collective memory, historical objectivity, and women’s often unspoken part in political history.

Overall, *Women Fight, Women Write* is a powerful book with methodological and historical relevance to gender scholars as well as political sociologists and historians interested in war and armed conflict. Mildred Mortimer provides an exemplary approach to

analyze women's experiences with and perceptions of political oppression, social marginalization, and armed conflict. At the same time as being analytically rigorous, it provides an enjoyable read that will intrigue regional specialists and readers interested in Francophone literature.

Notes

¹ Jocelyn Viterna, *Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² See Dara Kay Cohen, "Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War," *World Politics* 2013, 65(3), 383-415. Cambridge University Press. Jane Freedman, *Gender, Violence, and Politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015).

³ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil war in El Salvador*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War." *The American Political Science Review*, 2013, 107(3), 418-432.

⁴ See Melanie Hughes, "Armed Conflict, International Linkages, and Women's Parliamentary Representation in Developing Nations." *Social Problems*, 2009, 56(1)1 ;74-204 Melanie Hughes, and Aili Mari Tripp. Civil War and Trajectories of Change in Women's Political Representation in Africa, 1985-2010. *Social Forces*, 2015, 93(4), 1513-1540; Berry, Marie. *War, Women, and Power: From violence to mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Marie Berry, "From Violence to Mobilization: Women, War, and Threat in Rwanda," *Mobilization*, 2015. 20(2), 135-156; Marie Berry and Milli Lake. *Book Review: Gender, Violence and Politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics in Post-Genocide Rwanda; Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University. 2017. PAGES; Aili Mari Tripp, *Women's Movements and Constitution Making after Civil Unrest and Conflict in Africa: The Cases of Kenya and Somalia*. *Politics & Gender*, 2016, 12 (2), 78-106.

⁵ Mildred Mortimer, *Women Fight, Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War*, (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

