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BOOK REVIEW

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A NEW BOOK ON INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL DISPLACEMENT

Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience: From the Black Decade to the Hirak
by Latefa Narriman Guemar. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2023, Pp. 222.
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Abstract
When Exeter University Press notified the Journal of Internal Displacement about the publication of Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience: From the Black Decade to the Hirak by Latefa Narriman Guemar, the link between the terms diaspora and displacement was not instantly obvious. In addition to issues around geographical identities, displacement, and (forced) migration, Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience engages with the "Islamic State" (dawla Islamiya), "Foreign interference" (ayadi kharijiya), exile (Elghorba/ghrib), "those who risk their life to migrate" (harragas), "injustice" (hogra), "Gangs working within the Algerian state" (issaba), "Holy fighters" (jihad), "resistance" (moukawama), no constitution (la mithaq), "implied sexual aggression" (yetbelaouek) and the "Algerian political protest movement" (Hirak).

Keywords
Diaspora, Algeria, displacement, Hirak, feminist framework, 'the myth of return'

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When Exeter University Press notified the Journal of Internal Displacement about the publication of *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience: From the Black Decade to the Hirak* (hereafter, *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience*) by Latefa Narriman Guemar, the link between the terms *diaspora* and *displacement* was not instantly obvious. The word *diaspora* with its roots in the Greek language surpasses previous connotations of expecting immigrant to purge their ethnic identity and assimilate to white/European norms in settler-colonial states (Anteby-Yemini & Berthomière, 2005, p. 262).

Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg describe diaspora as a "double relationship or dual loyalty that migrants, exiles, and refugees have to places – their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with "back home"' (i.e., a phenomenon that calls for reimagining areas that enable understanding the dynamics of transnational cultural and economic processes to challenge limits imposed by national, racial, and ethnic boundaries) (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996, p. 14). Salman Rushdie explains the term as "a negotiation between what is gained and what is lost, frequently expressed through bodily and sensory exertion or alteration" (Ramone, 2023, p. 193).

In the particular context of *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience*, Gabriel Sheffer's definition of ethno-national diasporas is instructive in that it encompasses groups that remain minorities in their host countries and thus potentially may face the possibility of expulsion, as well as social, political, and economic hardships and rejection (Sheffer, 2003, p. 78). Guemar relies on three fundamental markers used by Robin Cohen to characterise a diasporic community. They are: 1) collective trauma as the main motivation for migration; 2) difficulties integrating into the receiving society; and 3) the cultivation of a 'myth of return' to an often-idealised homeland, which assumes a political character" (p20-21).

In addition to issues around geographical identities, displacement, and (forced) migration, *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience* engages with the "Islamic State" (*dawla Islamiya*), "Foreign interference" (*ayadi kharijiya*), exile (*Elghorba/ghrib*), "those who risk their life to migrate" (*harragas*), "injustice" (*hogra*), "Gangs working within the Algerian state" (*issaba*), "Holy fighters" (*jihad*), "resistance" (*moukawama*), no constitution (*la mithaq*), "implied sexual aggression" (*yetbelaouek*) and the "Algerian political protest movement" (*Hirak*) (pp xv-x-xvi).

In *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience*, based on fieldwork data collected between 2012-2016, Guemar examines the perspectives of highly skilled (~74 per cent of the 188 participants had acquired post-secondary education and higher), *see* p 190) empowered Algerian women "who were forced to flee after the *Hirak* and following traumatic events of the *Black Decade* (i.e., bloody internal conflict of the 1990s), only to end up battling prejudice and racism" (p xvii) in their host countries. Despite belonging to a wider transnational global community. These "youthful, secular, humane, feminist" voices are still able to assert their place in what they hope will be an independent

Algeria in their attempt to go "back home" to a country free of corruption, injustice, and inequality (p xvii).

Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience, a 222-page book is six chapters. Foregrounding a formidable reality of mass migration from Algeria amidst the horrid truth of deaths of Algerian children, women, and men across the Mediterranean cross (pp 1-3), Chapter One: *The Birth of a Research Project* begins with situating a feminist framework within a quest of defining the contested term, *diaspora*. Representing a significant cohort of women that are feminising global migration, the chapter utilises the concept of *diaspora* to analyse feminist conversation about "de-selving" and "re-selving" (p 5).

"De-selving" is the process of losing one-self due to displacement/migration and the accumulated psychological impact on girls and women of being predisposed to violence and patriarchy. "Re-selving" offers exiled women the chance to develop a new sense of self using their own narrative and discourse while rejecting imposed identities (pp 30-31). Chapter Two: *The Political Background to the Feminization of Algerian Migration* grapples with the creation of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Infatuated with the doctrine of "one land, one language and one religion," Guemar argues that the FLN is partly responsible for the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a male-centred radical Islamist political party implicated in the direct causes and patterns of Algerian women's forced migration during the *Black Decade*.

Amongst of 188 participants' collective trauma, Lamia's story surfaces in Chapter Three: One Woman's Story of Trauma, Migration, and Reconciliation. As an English teacher, Lamia lost her job and subsequently lost her cousin. But it was (gun/implied sexual) violence associated with terrorism and the ensuing mental health debilitation associated with such oppressive regimes that compelled her to leave Algeria. She recounts her migration journey from Algeria to the United Kingdom where she became an *au pair* before claiming political asylum:

> Personally, I think it was much more difficult for women because as a woman, you are not supposed to be outside, and terrorism was an opportunity to show more hatred and spite towards women. It was there already, you know, the need to control, the need to bully, the need to undermine women, and then there it was, the opportunity was there (p 68).

Chapter Four: *Fragmented Narratives of the Black Decade* builds on Lamia's personal story of traumatic violence, extrapolated to a shared collective of highly skilled Algerian women migrants, their reason for leaving Algeria, their experiences outside their homeland, and how they forged community support of belonging home and abroad. How did Algerian women in this research challenge the Algerian government to invoke change from their vantage points? In Chapter Five: *Women of the Black Decade and the Hirak*, Guemar examines the novel idea of "imagined homeland" (i.e., activism and disillusion of the *Hira*k) and the role played by Algerian migrant women to connect and engage with the current political issues in the country.

Guemar lays out her *Final Reflections* in Chapter Six. She chose to focus her research on

> these women lives and how they have attempted to construct new identities in new, sometimes hostile, environments while maintaining some sense of continuity with their country of origin [because it] can help [to] advance our understanding of adaptation, as well as she light on how to exert agency and resilience in exile relates to the "myth of return".

As an activist academic migrant woman who left Algeria after the *Black Decade* and the *Hirak,* Guemar's lived experience and professional expertise validate her authorship of *Algerian Women and Diasporic Experience* in a way that is deeply personal, yet objective, and intriguing. The book will attract anyone who studies, teaches, researches, practices, or advocates in the area of diaspora, displacement, refugee, and migration studies especially those with particular interest in gender, development, and peace/conflict studies.

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