



Algeria Is Beautiful Like America

Olivia Burton , Mahi Grand (Illustrator)

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Olivia had always heard stories about Algeria from her maternal grandmother, a Black Foot (a “Pied-Noir,” the French term for Christian and Jewish settlers of French Algeria who emigrated to France after the Algerian War of Independence). After her grandmother’s death, Olivia found some of her grandmother’s journals and letters describing her homeland. Now, ten years later, she resolves to travel to Algeria and experience the country for herself; she arrives alone, with her grandmother’s postcards and letters in tow, and with but a single phone number in her pocket, of an Algerian Djaffar, who will act as her guide. Olivia’s quest to understand her origins will bring her to face questions about heritage, history, shame, friendship, memory, nostalgia, fantasy, the nature of exile, and our unending quest to understand who we are and where we come from.

Algeria Is Beautiful Like America Details

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From Reader Review Algeria Is Beautiful Like America for online ebook

Kimi says

How did I not know about this!

Maxine says

The graphic novel Algeria is Beautiful Like America is written by Olivia Burton and illustrated by Mahi Grand. It tells Olivia's own story, a woman of Algerian descent, as she returns to Algeria to try to better understand her heritage after discovering her grandmother's memoirs. Her family is 'Black Foot' (Pied-Noir), French settlers during France's occupation of Algeria who left after the Algerian War of Independence. As she travels using her Grandmother's words as a guide, Olivia compares her family's recollections of the country including their distain for the Arab indigenous population with what she sees and learns as she travels across the country - much of the book recounts her internal struggle as she try to reconcile the two different accounts.

The graphic novel form may seem an odd choice for a memoir but, in fact, in the few I have read, I have found it works very well and Algeria Is Beautiful Like America is no exception. I admit I knew little about Algeria before reading this but I found Burton's history of the French colonialism and the Algerian War fascinating as well as her own reactions to her discoveries. Mahi's illustrations are beautifully done in black and white, the only exception the photographs Olivia takes on her journey and they complement Olivia's story perfectly. For anyone who enjoys graphic novels as well as memoirs, this one is well worth the time.

Thanks to Netgalley and Diamond Book Distributors/Lion Forge for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for an honest review

walid says

This was a lovely quick read.

I really enjoyed this graphic novel. The art style was beautiful and the story was even more beautiful. Besides, the colored "photos" in this book were a nice touch. And I appreciate that Olivia is honest about the conflict she feels about colonialism and her family's history.

Je le recommande fortement

Rod Brown says

The author's grandparents and parents were French colonists in the Algerian countryside who fled the country during its struggle for independence decades ago. The family has mythologized its time in Algeria,

compelling the author to tour the country herself to see if she can discover something about herself by searching for any remnants of her family's experience in the modern reality of this lost paradise.

While well told and illustrated, I'm frustrated that the book basically amounts to nothing. The author meets some nice people, is scared by stories about dangerous people who may be lurking nearby, sees some stuff that ties directly to her family and a bunch more that does not, and repeatedly draws attention to how poorly the Algerian women fare in their society. She pokes a bit at the idea that her family may have been evil imperialists, but balks at really drawing any conclusions that may be awkward to talk about at the next family get together. Deciding Algeria IS beautiful is about as deep as it gets.

So in the end we are left with the vacation slides of a privileged European white woman touring an African nation and passive aggressively finding fault with how things have progressed since the end of colonization. That seems problematic.

Joseph says

Really nice memoir graphic novel detailing a French woman, whose parents and grandparents were the pied noir of Algeria, traveling to a place she had only experienced in the memories of her family. Although she doesn't tackle the historical problems of the French in Algeria, she comes away with an understanding of the complexity of the French and Algerian relationship. Perhaps the most poignant moment in the book is when she is standing on the balcony of what she believes to have been her grandparent's apartment in Algiers, alongside the young Algerian mother who lived there now with her family. The Algerian notes that the war was something neither of them had anything to do with, yet still affected them in ways they must navigate. (Paraphrase)

The art is simply beautiful and makes me want to see more of his work.

Derek Royal says

A nice journey and self-discovery narrative. I enjoyed Burton's story, and Grand's art was an effective complement. Pascal and I will discuss this as one of the text we look at for the May Euro Comics episode.

Laura says

How much French colonial history do you know? As an American, I know that the French were in North Africa because of the movie *Casa Blanca*, and that *The Stranger* takes place in Algeria, but beyond that, zip. So little colonial history is taught in American school, which is probably why we don't understand so much of the world.

I had never heard of the term, Black Foot, other than used for Native Americans. But, according to this graphic novel, and online sources, this refers to people of French descent that were born in Algeria.

Olivia, the author of this memoir, is a descendent of Black Foot, but who now live in France. Her grandparents grew up in Algeria, and have memories that they have shared with her, how the beaches are

more blue there. How the melons are more sweet there. How the palm trees were too scrawny in France.

With stories such as that, what would have kept her from wanting to visit the land her family left behind when the war broke out, and Algeria was liberated from the French.

It is interesting story of a former colonist, or child of a colonist, visiting her families home. It is a little slow, but that is part of the travel. She took a lot of pictures and they were incorporated into this novel. Two examples below.

I thought the title of the book was odd, but it is the same in French as it is in English. And she does compare the wide open spaces to the American west.

Despite the lack of history, enough is explained that I felt I was up to speed as I read this. Very thoroughly enjoyed it.

Thanks to Netgalley for making this book available for an honest review.

Kenna says

A story about a French girl who wanted a glimpse of her family's past in Algeria. It's a rare view since Olivia, the French girl is part of a colonial family who owned vast lands in Algeria before its independence. It's a reminder that our past is what makes us now and how important it is to look back and acknowledge our past in order to move on. And that no matter how our past was, it's all up to us, now, to change the way things are. That we are not responsible for the mistakes of others, including our family, but we are responsible for finding out about them and learning from it. The wonderful story with the beautiful illustrations is a delightful quick read.

Preethi says

My first few thoughts were -

- wait, was Algiers prettier than Marseilles? Whoa!
- And locusts destroying a crop was a real thing?
- Whoa, the colonial life in Algeria feels so similar to how it was in India in the early 19th century!

Who among us hasn't wished to know where they come from? Am sure, growing up, we've all been surrounded by family histories, and as we understood the right from the left, we've questioned everyone of those stories and asked ourselves what our families' leanings were, really.

I thought this book was honest. This was the author's yearning to know the place she came from, curiosity in what her family was all about, and attempt to understand both these. I also loved the drawings, to me, they felt life-like.

If one is bothered to think deeper, this book also talks about the ravages of colonialism. One could argue that

we've all learnt a little of the Western civilization thanks to being colonies, but the atrocities related to the Independence wars are something everyone in this generation should know about, to know their roots and what their ancestors have been through.

Indeed, as Newton said, men build too many walls and not enough bridges!

Note - I read this book thanks to Edelweiss

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Publisher summary:

Olivia had always heard stories about Algeria from her maternal grandmother, a Black Foot (a "Pied-Noir," the French term for Christian and Jewish settlers of French Algeria who emigrated to France after the Algerian War of Independence). After her grandmother's death, Olivia found some of her grandmother's journals and letters describing her homeland. Now, ten years later, she resolves to travel to Algeria and experience the country for herself; she arrives alone, with her grandmother's postcards and letters in tow, and with but a single phone number in her pocket, of an Algerian Djaffar, who will act as her guide. Olivia's quest to understand her origins will bring her to face questions about heritage, history, shame, friendship, memory, nostalgia, fantasy, the nature of exile, and our unending quest to understand who we are and where we come from.

This was a lovely quick read that takes an honest look at the difficulties of a spotted family history, an exploration of what "home" means and if you can find one you never knew, the differences between nostalgia places and real spaces, and a bit of a love story to a landscape that is not frequently celebrated in western culture - the Algerian landscape. I came away feeling like I knew more about certain periods in Algerian history, and the appeal of the place.

Also this counts for the 2018 Reading Women Challenge: graphic novel or memoir (by a woman, obviously.)

Thanks to the publisher for approving my request through Edelweiss. I read it earlier than I meant to, because I was really interested in the experience! It comes out April 24, 2018.

♥Sana♥ says

Book kindly offered to me by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

???stars!

"When you don't know where you're going, take a look at where you came from."

I've never been to Algeria, but I know that there are great and generous people, delicious dishes and wonderful places to see.

Algeria Is Beautiful Like America is about a French girl who was brave enough to go on her own and

explore a place she only heard of from her grandma's stories.

When her grandma passed away, Olivia decided to visit Algeria and see for herself the places that stole her grandmother's heart. Meeting all those generous people filled Olivia with love and gave her hope to come again and visit the place where her family was born and was always welcome to stay.

BookCupid says

Even though I'm a huge fan of graphic memoirs and found the subject emotional enough to maintain the readers' interest throughout the story, it felt weak. Nothing really happened to the MC other than make friends everywhere she went.

All in all, Algeria seems friendly!

Laura says

A thoughtful look at exploring verbal family history and confronting the disparities and difficulties in the delve. I also found it very educational, covering parts of time and the world that I am not the most familiar with. Art is distinct and absolutely portrays the beauty of Algeria. Definitely recommend.

Yann says

Cette bande dessinée autobiographique raconte l'histoire d'une jeune française, petite-fille de colons pieds-noirs des Aurès, qui part en Algérie pour affronter les questions qui la taraudent, un héritage qui la pèse, pour voir à quoi ressemble un pays dont elle entend parler depuis son enfance mais qu'elle n'a jamais vu, pour mettre à l'épreuve ce qu'elle entend depuis toute petite sur les Arabes, un voyage auquel elle songe depuis dix ans, mais qu'elle a toujours repoussé, car la simple idée suscite autour d'elle énormément de craintes.

La première partie relate sa jeunesse entre une famille qui ressasse le chagrin du déracinement, vit refermée dans des souvenirs, tournée vers le passé, soudée et repliée sur elle-même, plongée dans une amertume et une mémoire qu'elle ne peut partager, dont elle se sent même exclue, mais qui l'affectent pourtant. Vis à vis de l'extérieur, elle peine à assumer le regard et le jugement des métropolitains par rapport à sa famille, elle a honte de leurs manières africaines expansives, de leur accent, de leur cuisine épicée, de leur remarques raciste, des valeurs qu'elle ne partage pas. Surtout, le spectre de la guerre la hante, et l'imagination se glisse dans les non-dits.

Suite à ces accrochages, je me replie dans un silence indifférent. Aux amis, je réponds le moins possible. La famille, je l'écoute ressasser en silence. L'Algérie m'ennuie et me pèse à la fois. Je ne peux partager ni leur douleur ni leur nostalgie. Mais elles me traversent, m'imbibent. A la seule mention du mot "Algérie", mon rythme cardiaque s'accélère. J'hérite d'une guerre que je n'ai pas vécue.

Dans la seconde partie, elle a la chance d'avoir un contact sur place avec lequel elle peut faire le voyage. Elle se rend à Alger, puis dans le village de sa grand-mère. Les appréhensions sont nombreuses, les échanges avec son contact local sont parfois difficiles pour elle au début, mais ils parlent beaucoup, et finissent par se connaître et s'apprécier. Sur place, l'hospitalité est au rendez-vous, les rencontres sont chaleureuses, le pays est magnifique; elle comprend la nostalgie de sa mère. Elle semble rentrer heureuse et apaisée de son voyage. Un témoignage intéressant sur un sujet sensible, mais peut-être un peu court, et que j'aurais préféré plus développé, mais c'est sans doute la faute du format bande dessiné...

Hafsa says

Disclaimer: Received a free digital copy of the book through *Netgalley*.

This graphic memoir captures Olivia Burton's journey to Algeria to trace back her roots and deals with the French colonisation of Algeria and the subsequent independence of the country. The first 30 pages of this book or so were very hard to get into because of how the author's family kind of justified colonisation and lamented the ill treatment of colonisers by the colonized once they took over. As a history student and someone whose country was once colonized, it just made me angry in a way I can't describe. I got through those pages solely on the basis that this was non-fiction and the author was just presenting the family she grew up in and trying to give a background to the story.

After the said pages though, this got better. *So much better*. Once the protagonist (the author), grows up and her historical knowledge extends beyond listening to the stories of her family members about Algeria and she starts to question who her family really was in French occupied Algeria: racist colonisers or what her family describes, I was totally in for it all.

The history buff me really enjoyed all the eye-opening insight that this short book provided about Algerian independence and it prompted me to search more about it which says something considering the fact that I read this when my exams were going and I DID NOT want to read more history than I already was because of my textbooks. The story also had intriguing commentary about war and memory and I loved that it highlighted how history is actually what the rulers make of it by giving references to things such as the museum of massacres. It was also interesting to see how the same government who encouraged French people to settle in Algeria so many years ago now kind of discriminate against them.

Moreover, the story is crafted in a way that it traces Algeria's history from colonisation to present day alongside the author's family history which I think engages the reader in a way that only one of those things alone wouldn't have been able to achieve. The coloured photographs were a nice touch and although the format and layout of the book weren't that appealing at the start, they became impressive as the book went on.

The dilemmas, feelings and personalities of the characters were fully fleshed out and I could connect to Burton a lot as someone who has heard a lot of stories about her country's journey to independence. Her character also provided some food for thought on how it feels like to be the children of colonists and realize all the wrong which runs in your family history. One particular quote stands out to me:

"I had inherited a war I hadn't experienced."

I liked Djaffer's character and his musings on how "we maybe children of colonists but we're nothing like

them". His humour and sarcasm were a treat throughout, e.g.

Djaffer= "What are you doing?"

Olivia= "Soaking it in."

Djaffer= "You should fill a bottle and take it back to Paris."

Despite this there were some things which were exasperating and off putting such as Burton's lack of political awareness and some sentences/dialogues were just beyond reading without feeling like I wanted to punch someone, especially this conversation between Olivia and her mother:

(view spoiler)

I realize and appreciate that the author unabashedly tried to show the feelings of french settlers towards Arabs in Algeria but this still left me uncomfortable and furious. Overall, my reading experience definitely made me realize that memoirs might just be my favourite sub-genre of graphic novels, especially the ones which involve travelling and finding your roots by doing a pilgrimage to discover your family origins. This was emotional, brazen in its exploration of colonisation and the issues which emerge as a result of it, accompanied with pleasing illustrations and a story worth reading!
