

Algeria is Beautiful Like America

Olivia Burton

Mahi Grand, Illustrator

Edward Gauvin, Translator

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In her graphic novel memoir *Algeria is Beautiful Like America*, Olivia Burton travels to her family's former homeland, only to find that many of her beliefs about her family's past, and Algeria as a whole, are wrong.

Burton begins by establishing the reason for her curiosity about Algeria: many relatives, including her mother and grandmother, spent years relating stories of their life in that country. After years of postponing her trip because of safety concerns, Burton finally decides to go. She slowly realizes that many of her family's stories have been idealized through the lens of time or skewed by a particular point of view.

Guided by locals and her deceased grandmother's written memories of Algeria, Burton sifts through the bloody and sometimes confusing history of French colonists like her family and their relationship with the Arab natives who sought independence and gained it in 1962.

Translated from French by Edward Gauvin, the book doesn't get bogged down in politics, but rather focuses on the people and personalities behind them. Mahi Grand's artwork is perfect for this sort of travelogue, with map elements to put the geography in context and detailed representations of faces and places.

The art is black and white, with the exception of Burton's own photographs as replicated by Grand; these are rendered in color, and they give a sense not just of the landscapes depicted, but of their impact on Burton. *Algeria is Beautiful Like America* is an illuminating glimpse into a mysterious country, its history, and its inhabitants.

PETER DABBENE (May/June 2018)

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