H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Zeynep Çelik, Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, Frances Terpak, eds. *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image.* Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009. 283 pp. $40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-98868-9.

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Published on H-Urban (May, 2012)
Commissioned by Colette Apelian

Kaleidoscope-Algiers

Among the numerous images in *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image* is an albumen print taken by Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Alary in the late 1850s (fig. 3.13). Featuring the Place du Gouvernement, a monumental public square created shortly after the French invasion of Algiers in 1830, the photograph provocatively thematizes the dialectical relationship between the history of the city and the history of urban representation that forms the subject of this book. Unlike other images focused either on the square itself or on the adjacent al-Jadid mosque, Alary's photograph emphasizes the strange spatial disjunction between the two. Initially created by the French army as a military parade ground, the square was recast as the city's symbolic center, with its distinctive face visible from the water, following the construction of adjacent new docks and port facilities in the early 1850s. Here the spatial politics of colonization were explicitly brought into view. As Zeynep Çelik argues elsewhere in the volume, an equestrian statue representing the Duke of Orleans erected at one end of the square "underlined the statement of French control over Algerians," as it pointedly turned its back on the al-Jadid mosque (p. 206). The photograph thus conveys the book's overarching concern of tracing how the city of Algiers was reconfigured through historical processes of French imperialism and settler colonialism.

In the photograph, the figures lined up along the balustrade looking out toward the port also reveal that the Place du Gouvernement was both an iconic subject of representation, pictured in a seemingly endless parade of prints, photographs, postcards, and paintings, and a formative viewing point, from which the city was perceived and understood by residents and visitors alike. In her accompanying essay, Frances Terpak draws our attention to the small structure designed as a camera obscura that was erected next to the balustrade, with its projecting lens directed out toward the water (pp. 103-104). This modest pavilion was designed to capture an image, available for purchase, of the distinctive panorama that the blurry figures in Alary's photograph enjoyed from the edge of the square. On multiple registers then, the image points to this anthology's most distinctive contribution: the new light it sheds on how specific histories of viewing and representing Algiers had significant effects on the city's built forms, everyday experiences, and urban imaginaries.

Edited by Zeynep Çelik, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Terpak, *Walls of Algiers* focuses on the history of the city and its transformations under French colonial rule, with select references to the earlier Ottoman period and to the era following Algeria's independence in July 1962. The volume grew out of a workshop at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles in 2004, which was intended to provide an opportunity for scholars knowledgeable about the history of Algiers to examine relevant visual materials in the GRI's Special Collections. The publication of the book five years later was planned to coincide with the exhibition organized by Çelik and Terpak, *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City*, that was held at the GRI Exhibition Gallery, May 19-October 18, 2009.

Neither a conventional exhibition catalogue systematically documenting featured artifacts nor simply an anthology of revised conference proceedings, *Walls of Algiers* includes seven critical essays examining the city and its representations from varied disciplinary perspectives. While some essays originated in the GRI workshop, the editors also solicited new contributions, most notably two essays from French historians, Omar Carlier and Isabelle Grangaud. The final result is a volume that amplifies both workshop and exhibition by locating materials from the GRI's collections within broader, critical investigations of the city's history and in relation to a

wide range of representational practices. Indeed, the rich array of visual materials–prints, photographs, postcards, and architectural drawings–reproduced in the book represents a significant contribution in itself. While objects from the Getty's collections predominate, they are supplemented by an impressive range of artifacts drawn primarily from archives, museums, and collections in France.

The first section of *Walls of Algiers*, "Peoples," features two essays by historians of the modern Maghrib (North Africa). While Julia Clancy-Smith recovers the remarkable ethnic and class diversity of the city's inhabitants in the early decades of French colonial rule, Omar Carlier traces the critical role cultural societies and sports associations played in the emergence of Muslim civic society during the 1920s and 1930s. The second section, "Images," brings together essays by Getty photography curator Frances Terpak, urban historian Zeynep Çelik, and filmmaker and critic Eric Breitbart, examining Algiers in prints and photographs (Terpak), architectural drawings and photographs (Çelik), and film (Breitbart). The third section, "Places," explores the shifting contours of the city's built landscape and spatial imaginary across Ottoman, French, and postcolonial periods. In this section, Isabelle Grangaud reveals how the Ottoman conception of the *hawma* (which might be loosely translated as quarter or neighborhood) was effectively dismantled under colonial rule, and Zeynep Çelik traces the radical transformations of the area along the waterfront. The volume concludes with a historiographical essay by Patricia Lorcin assessing existing accounts of Algiers, from the captivity stories of Europeans taken prisoner by Ottoman corsairs to recent writings of Algerians who have offered a counterdiscourse on the city in the wake of the 1990s civil conflicts. Lorcin's analysis focuses primarily on "the Western narratives that have emerged about [Algiers] in the past two hundred years" (p. 227), here organized chronologically by critical themes which echo many of the issues raised in the book's preceding essays.

As Lorcin's chapter makes clear, *Walls of Algiers* takes its place within a rich body of literature on modern architecture and urban planning in the Algerian capital and across the Maghrib.[1] Most notably, both the Getty exhibition and publication follow closely on the heels of the major exhibition, *Alger: Paysage urbain et architectures, 1800-2000* (*Algiers: urban landscape and architectures*), held in 2003 at the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris and accompanied by a voluminous catalogue edited by Jean-Louis Cohen, Nabila Oulebsir, and Youcef Kanoun.[2] Sponsored by the Institut Français d'Architecture/Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, the exhibition and catalogue brought together extensive visual documentation of architectural and urban planning efforts in the city, culled from archives and museums in Algeria and France. Focused primarily on the period of French colonization, from 1830 to 1962, this ambitious project reclaimed Algiers as a significant site of experimentation by architects and planners, while training a critical eye on the cultural politics of these endeavors.

By contrast, *Walls of Algiers* represents a shift in focus from tracking the interventions of designers to also considering how visual images, collective narratives, and everyday urban experiences help shape the city. Çelik, Clancy-Smith, and Terpak's approach is perhaps closest in spirit to Susan Slyomovics's edited volume from 2001, *The Walled Arab City in Literature, Architecture, and History: The Living Medina in the Maghrib*, both in its interdisciplinary ambitions and in its desire to bring together historical investigations of urban representation and use.[3] A crucial methodological difference, however, is that *Walls of Algiers* brings visual materials to the fore, while narrowing the focus to a single city. Embracing urban spaces as sites of exchange and contestation amongst diverse actors, the contributors to this anthology participate in a well-established trend of moving beyond the frame of the nation-state and monolithic oppositions between "colonizer" and "colonized" that characterized previous histories of colonialism and empire.[4]

One of the volume's key insights is that Algiers played a decisive, if largely overlooked, role in the development of new visual technologies of reproduction, most notably lithography and photography.[5] Terpak's essay provides a valuable compendium of available examples and significant artists, many of whom were attached to the French military. Like other scholars before her, Terpak argues that the military conquest of Algiers progressed hand in hand with the city's systematic visual documentation. Whereas early lithographs and Jean-Claude Langlois's virtuoso panorama of 1833-34 aimed to convince metropolitan audiences that French intervention overseas was necessary, by midcentury, "photography helped the French public consider Algeria as 'la nouvelle France"' (p. 103).[6]

On the whole, the volume's essays carefully attend to the processes through which colonial ideologies were constructed and naturalized over time, especially as they were conveyed in visual images and urban forms. Çelik's contributions are particularly noteworthy in this regard, as she draws attention to the shifting political sig-

nificance of the colonial preoccupation with houses in Algiers, to which numerous documentary projects bore witness. In this essay and in her second one on urban transformations along the waterfront, Çelik traces the evolution of dominant visual tropes and iconic urban spaces, in part through recourse to counter-examples. In the case of the Algerian house, for example, "the pervasive everyday quality" of a photograph from 1884 is seen to disrupt familiar orientalist clichés that habitually structured images of domestic interiors (fig. 4.16). By contrast, Breitbart's essay on cinematic representations of Algiers contradicts the volume's guiding logic in its surprisingly ahistorical reading of five films, most notably *Pépé le Moko* (1937) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1965). Inexplicably addressed to the imagined expectations of American film-going audiences, Breitbart's analysis fails to grapple adequately with the spatial politics of these films and of the urban spaces they depict.

Several essays provide incisive critiques of familiar visions of colonial Algiers as a city structured by an absolute spatial and social binary between "European" and "indigenous" spheres. Clancy-Smith's essay sheds new light on mid nineteenth-century Algiers as a multiethnic city of immigrants, whose working-class population was drawn from areas in Algeria far beyond the capital and from sites across the Mediterranean. Her contribution reveals that the constructed categories of "European" and "indigenous" were the products of concerted erasures, facilitated by legal reforms and images that systematically repressed earlier representations of the city as a melting pot of recognizable ethnic types. From a related vantage point, Carlier argues that Algiers was not solely the product of European interventions, as Algerians also played critical roles in recreating the city, especially during the interwar period. New urban institutions–including youth associations, cultural circles, and political parties–bore witness to exchange and contestation between "European" Algerians and "Muslim" Algerians, even as they transformed the Casbah and the Place du Gouvernement into spaces of political and cultural resistance.

Walls of Algiers offers compelling portraits of the city under French colonial rule, often through the examination of previously overlooked sources or by reading against the grain of official narratives. However, it barely scratches the surface of the half-century that has elapsed since independence. By contrast, the continuing imprint of Ottoman Algiers forms the subject of Grangaud's insightful essay on the *hawma*, a dynamic spatial category during the Ottoman period that defined urban neighborhoods and conferred on their inhabitants a sense of shared belonging. New legal systems the French established for transferring property to Europeans "effectively delegitimized [this] basic urban institution, whose existence from then on would be an informal one" (p. 188). At the same time that Grangaud redresses this profound historical erasure, she provocatively exposes the methodological limits of the volume's focus on visual and textual representations by pointing to the difficulties of recuperating urban histories and everyday experiences defined significantly by oral cultures.

Given the considerable overlaps with materials published elsewhere, the book's promise of providing of an entirely new vision of Algiers falls somewhat short.[7] Nevertheless, even familiar episodes are enriched by being put in dialogue with the new materials examined here. At its best, *Walls of Algiers* not only offers a compelling model for understanding how representations actively participate in the shaping of cities and urban experience, but it also opens promising new avenues for further research.[8] An unusually successful interdisciplinary endeavor, the volume has much to offer both newcomers to the topic and established scholars well versed in the history of Algiers. Its essays provide essential reading for historians of modern Algeria and France as well as scholars of the Maghrib and the Mediterranean region more broadly speaking. Urban historians, art historians, and cultural historians will find much of interest in this collection, as will scholars of modern empire and colonialism. The failure of *Walls of Algiers* to deliver on its promise to reveal universal lessons that might be learned from the Algerian capital (p. 2) is, in the end, one of the volume's strengths, as the most compelling essays are those in which the particularities of the city and its urban spaces are brought vividly to light.

Notes

[1]. Previous investigations of Algiers set within the broader umbrella of French colonial architecture and urban planning in the Maghrib and beyond include François Béguin, *Arabisances: Décor architectural et trace urbain en Afrique du Nord, 1830-1950* (Paris: Dunod, 1983); Marie Sgroï-Dufresne, *Alger 1830-1984: Stratégies et enjeux urbains* (Paris: Éditions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1986); Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Maurice Culot and Jean-Marie Thiveaud, eds., *Architectures françaises outre-mer* (Liège: Mardaga, 1992); Saïd Almi, *Urbanisme et colonisation: Présence française en Algérie* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2002); and Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). The writings of Jean-Jacques Deluz, based on

his own experiences as an architect and urban planner working in Algiers from the 1950s through the post-independence era, also constitute a significant, if less scholarly, contribution: Jean-Jacques Deluz, *L'Urbanisme et l'architecture d'Alger* (Liège: Edition Mardaga, 1988).

[2]. Jean-Louis Cohen, Nabila Oulebsir, and Youcef Kanoun, eds., *Alger: Paysage urbain et architectures, 1800-2000* (Paris: Éditions de l'Imprimeur, 2003). Zeynep Çelik contributed an essay to this catalogue, "Bidonvilles, CIAM et grands ensembles," 186-225. Maristella Casciato reviewed the exhibition in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63, no. 3 (Sept. 2004): 380-84.

[3]. Susan Slyomovics, ed., *The Living Medina in the Maghrib: The Walled Arab City in Literature, Architecture, and History* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

[4]. On this broader trend in histories of colonialism, see Alice L. Conklin and Julia Clancy-Smith, "Writing Colonial Histories," *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (2004): 499-500; and Jean-Louis Cohen, "Architectural History and the Colonial Question: Casablanca, Algiers and Beyond," *Architectural History* 49 (2006): 354.

[5]. A similar contention motivates the more recent volume edited by Omar Carlier, *Images du Maghreb, Images au Maghreb (XIXe-XXe siècles): Une révolution du visuel?* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

[6]. Terpak's discussion of Jean-Charles Langlois's virtuoso panorama of Algiers follows closely on the work of John Zarobell, who is cited in the notes, but his quite similar conclusions were certainly worthy of further discussion. See John Zarobell, "Jean-Charles Langlois's *Panorama of Algiers* (1833) and the Prospective Colonial Landscape," *Art History* 26, no. 5 (2003): 638-68.

[7]. In addition to the essays by Carlier and Grangaud here translated for the first time into English, Zeynep Çelik's two essays draw on material previously published in *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations:* "Learning from the Bidonville: CIAM Looks at Algiers," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 18 (2003): 71-74; and "Framing the Colony: Houses of Algiers Photographed," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 616-26.

[8]. For example, as much as the editors insist that "by the fin-de-siècle, if not before, the walls of Algiers stretched in a metaphorical sense across the Mediterranean and the Maghrib thanks to the movements of people, things, and ideas" (p. 1), considerable work remains to be done to elucidate the radiating influence of Algiers within such networks. Zeynep Çelik's *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) is an important model in this regard.

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Citation: Sheila Crane. Review of Çelik, Zeynep; Clancy-Smith, Julia Ann; Terpak, Frances, eds., *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image.* H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. May, 2012.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33784

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