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Dominique Kalifa. *L'Encre et le sang: recits de crimes et sociÖ©tÖ© Ö la Belle Epoque.* Paris: Fayard, 1995. 351 pp. ISBN 978-2-213-59513-9.

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Contagious Criminality: Fin-de-Siècle Tales of Crime in the Mass Press and Pulp Fiction

During the "reign of the *apaches*", those notoriously violent thugs who captured the Parisian popular imagination in the opening decade of the twentieth century, the daily newspaper *Le Gaulois* lamented: "it seems impossible to determine if the recent emergence of the Apache has inspired a genre of writing, or if it is the genre that has created the Apache." At the heart of historian Dominique Kalifa's *L'Encre et le sang* ("Ink and Blood") lies this critical and historical problem of determining whether depictions of criminality in mass culture fundamentally express an underlying social reality or instead fashion a social imagination. This book traces the production of stories of crime in mass circulation daily newspapers, popular novels, and early cinema; analyzes cultural systems established by these forms of mass culture; and charts the influence and reception of social and political discourses on crime in turn of the century France. I highly recommend it to social and cultural historians working on the Belle Epoque, and to cultural studies critics interested in debates over the social effects of the depiction of violence in the mass media.

In the introduction to *L'Encre et le sang*, Kalifa rejects the notions that press sensationalism and pot-boiler crime novels can be dismissed as having no social or literary value, a charge that can emerge from the Marxist Left as readily as the conservative Right. The author also disagrees with the tendency in structural anthropology and semiotics to reduce popular tales of crime and banditry to a fixed set of themes. Instead Kalifa insists upon the historically specific nature of crime stories in various forms of mass culture in turn-of-the-century France. Although having cultural origins in traditions of criminal *complaintes*, which recounted the crimes and confessions of murderers on broadsheets, and *Bibliotheque bleue* chapbook tales of banditry, the criminal milieux depicted in the sensationalist press and popular novels were thoroughly modern and urban. Yet social preoccupations with the criminal underworld of Paris, and the "naive" narrative strategies and "primitive" technological techniques employed by publishers and movie studios during the Belle Epoque, also clearly demarcate this brand of criminality from the realms of international mafias and espionage, mystery and hard-boiled detective novels, and *film noir*, which developed from the interwar period forward. Throughout the book, Kalifa is attentive to what is particular to this era and what is peculiarly French about this culture of criminality.

The first of the book's three sections deals with the production of crime stories during the Belle Epoque. According to Kalifa, the development of a mass *fait-divers* (sensationalist) press and weekly illustrated supplements, the promotion of crime and police serials by such publishers as Eichler, Fayard, and Ferenczi, and the advent of the cinema, were fundamental in cultivating an ever expanding popular market for crime stories. Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kalifa argues, there was a shift in narrative emphasis in crime stories from recounting horrific events to a preoccupation with investigative details surrounding a case. This new emphasis upon criminal investigation not only drew greater attention to the figure of the detective, both real and fictional; it also carved out an important role for the investigative reporter. Mass circulation newspapers such as *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Journal*, and *Le Matin* all had their "*envoyes speciaux*," their special correspondents, who uncovered additional sordid criminal details when the police were slow in producing evidence. Investigative reporters predominated in French

detective fiction as well, such as Gaston Leroux's Joseph Rouletabille, in contrast to amateur sleuths such as Sherlock Holmes in England, or private detectives such as Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton in American serials.

The second part of the book describes the contours of the social imagination generated by these mass crime stories. This mass culture of criminality was French, urban, predominantly Parisian, and public (although private crimes and locales were often the themes of detective fiction). There was an over-emphasis in the press upon violent physical crimes of assault, murder, and rape, often attributed to uncontrollable passions or alcoholism, and usually committed by hand, such as strangulation, or by extension with knives or revolvers. The violent "*armee du crime*" was characterized by the press, and mythologized in such popular serial novels as *Zigomar* and *Fantomas*, as emerging from *la pegre*, a parallel social underworld on the margins of normative society, whose most notorious members were the dreaded *apaches*. However, the image of the corrupt bourgeois as the perpetrator of thefts and crimes against property was a theme more frequently found in detective fiction than press reportage.

In the final part of the book, Kalifa considers the ramifications felt throughout French society as a result of this culture of criminality. One was the sense of social insecurity generated through association of violent crime with anarchist politics, a connection periodically fueled during the era of outrages at the end of the nineteenth century and by the exploits of the Bonnot anarchist gang in the early twentieth century. Anarchist radicals in a certain sense encouraged this affiliation, notably in Gustave Herve's championing of *apache* assassin Liabeuf in *La Guerre Sociale*, and in Felix Feneon's articles in *La Revue Blanche*. But Kalifa emphasizes that the connection between anarchism and criminal violence was overwhelmingly one of political rhetoric and press sensationalism, lacking a substantial basis in social reality (anarchist activities accounted for a minuscule percentage of criminal violence). Kalifa also elaborates upon the conservative social critique of criminal anthropologists, doctors, and jurists against press sensationalism, popular crime novels, and film serials. These experts believed that such mass culture provoked what Kalifa calls a *criminogene*, or "criminal gene," whereby latent hereditary traits of vice among the "less well fitted" members of society were supposedly activated by reading stories or viewing images of violent sensationalism. Such fantastic political and biological characterizations did not remain in the cultural realms of the social imagination, Kalifa insists, but contributed to anti-crime legislation and changes in judicial investigative and court practices. In their *fait-divers* "slice of life realism," these stories of crime also provided the format and motifs for a broader social discourse on "degeneration" in turn-of-the-century France. In the conclusion, Kalifa refrains from making authoritative claims about the perversity or normality of this mass culture of criminality, but appropriates its characterization by *Le Gaulois*, "a dreadful mirror which transforms terrifying images into reality" (p. 304), as a useful historical perspective for "looking awry" at the Belle Epoque.

North American historians of France will find Kalifa's book a valuable supplement to Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France* (1984), Ruth Harris, *Murder and Madness* (1989), and Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (1992). *L'Encre et le sang* develops a complex historical field that illuminates cultural connections among the sensationalist mass circulation press, popular stories of crime and vengeance, political debates on public security, and *fin-de-siecle* currents of social psychology. By focusing upon the mass cultural depiction of crime, the evidential basis for Kalifa's historical reflections is socially more widespread than the professional discourses of law, medicine, and parliamentary debates emphasized in Nye and Harris. Kalifa also charts in some detail the intricacies of the historical context within which Berenson's micro-history functions. In sum, Kalifa has performed the valuable service of establishing a "from below" cultural perspective on crime in France in the pre-Great War era.

Kalifa's book also displays methodological innovations in relation to French social and cultural historiography of the modern period. Kalifa's critical sensibilities express an intellectual flexibility that I find preferable to the socially reductive methodology of Louis Chevalier in *Labouring Classes and Dangerous Classes* (trans. 1973) and *Montmartre du plaisir et du crime* (1980). In contrast to Chavalier's social realist mode, Kalifa understands the cultural relationship between crime and the social imagination as a critical problem: "l'imaginaire du crime ou criminel imaginaire? " (p. 156). The author does not focus on the confluence of the social reality and literary representations of crime; rather Kalifa is attuned to the gap created in the social imagination by the over-representation of violence in mass-cultural depictions of crime, when the underlying social reality was actually different. Here, Kalifa's argument could be strengthened by the inclusion of additional crime statistics, which would emphasize even more strongly the cultural influence of the imaginary aspects of these crime

stories.

I also find Kalifa's intertextual practice of teasing out cultural and social contours from these crime stories preferable to the "archaic mentality" of murderous peasants approach suggested by Alain Corbin in *The Village of Cannibals* (trans. 1992). At the outset of the book, Kalifa insists upon the historically specific nature of the criminal milieux, and rejects recourse to "biological fixity" or "primitive mentalities" to explain the social persistence of crime. A direct parallel may be difficult to establish between the works of Kalifa and Corbin; the criminal tales in *L'Encre et le sang* are modern and predominantly Parisian, whereas Corbin's story relies heavily upon the pre-modern aspect of his villagers' lives. Still, there is a critical advantage in Kalifa's eschewal of the "savage" versus "scientific" mind distinction of an earlier, and in our post-colonial era somewhat suspect, school of French anthropology (cf. G.E.R. Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, 1990). Kalifa avoids playing into the "insufficiently civilized or educated" line of argument that was current among both liberal supporters and conservative detractors of the secularized French Third Republic.

Rather, this book is a fine example of a new generation of French historiography and literary criticism. Common to this generation of scholars is the willingness to explore contemporary French history as a complex cultural fabric, which includes popular and mass culture, in addition to the state sanctioned "official" culture of artistic, literary, and intellectual mandarins. While historians of early modern France, both in France and North America, have been operating under this sensibility for two decades, the study of contemporary French cultural and social history generally continues to suffer from a preference for "high" over "low" culture. Fortunately, in my opinion, this situation appears to be changing. I recommend reading Kalifa's book alongside sympathetic French scholarship, such as Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien: lecteurs et lectures populaires a la Belle Epoque* (1984) and *Ecrire la France: le mouvement litteraire regionaliste de langue francaise entre la Belle Epoque et la Liberation* (1991), and critical studies in *paralitterature* such as Jean-Claude Vareille, *Filateurs: itineraire a travers les cycles de Lupin et Rouletabille* (1980), *L'Homme masque: le justicier et le detective* (1989), and *Le Roman populaire francais, 1789-1914: ideologies et pratiques* (1994). Within this scholarly milieux, Kalifa's *L'Encre et le sang* is valuable in helping to make this transition to a richer description of contemporary French cultural and social history.

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