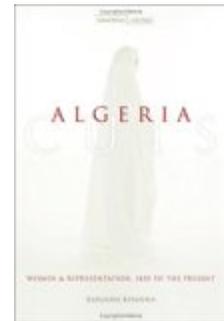


Ranjana Khanna. *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. xx + 301 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5261-9; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5262-6.

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Women, Violence, Trauma, and Hope in Algerian and French History

Scholars of the French Empire who teach Algeria, France, and the manner in which their histories have collided, meshed, and interlocked since 1830, often rely upon certain primary sources.[1] These include Assia Djebar's writings, such as *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), a book that like Ranjana Khanna's *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the Present* intersperses history with poetic narration, past with present, written with oral sources, and national with personal memories. Another such source is Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), including the striking and oft-cited scene in which three Algerian women Europeanize themselves before crossing checkpoints in Algiers and planting bombs amidst the *colons*, or European settlers. Scholars also gravitate towards Simone de Beauvoir and the lawyer Gisèle Halimi's accounts during the Algerian War of Independence of how the young Djamila Boupacha was tortured and raped with a bottle by French police officers in Algiers.

Ranjana Khanna's book tackles these sources and adds significant layers to this corpus. Her introduction starts with a lesser known, although no less nauseating, story of violence: that of the 1959 gang rape by thirty to forty French soldiers over several months of a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girl named Kheira, her ensuing pregnancy, the soldiers' attempts to force an abortion by beating her with electrical wires, and the birth of her son. The son, Mohamed Garne, grew up in an orphanage. When he tracked her down Garne found his mother living in

a graveyard, and only later learned the truth about his "father." In 2001, Garne won the exceptional right to disability benefits and a partial military pension from France because of the trauma he had suffered upon learning he was the child of sustained rape. Kheira's violation and potential rights to reparations, however, were "cut" from the trial. Khanna's gripping recounting of Kheira's story leads to a clarification of the term *cut's* multiple meanings, inspired by cinema as "the edge that belongs neither to one frame nor to the other" (p. 5). In *Algeria Cuts*, Khanna "attempts to find those cuts that both highlight violation and present a future justice" and to show how women "elude and confound the dominant structures of colonial and postcolonial representation" (p. 7).

Khanna does not go easy on her readers. Nor should she. Her narratives vividly describe the violence visited upon Algerian women. She also evokes a multitude of other representations (including self-representations) of Algerian women and analyzes in detail the manner in which women evaded easy categorization. Her theoretical explications, which occasionally overshadow the sources that encase them, draw from anticolonial, postcolonial, critical, feminist, and other theories. Her introduction alone segues from Kheira's story to a juggling of theorists and philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Theodor Adorno, Rosa Luxemburg, Messali Hadj, G. W. F. Hegel, Plato, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Benedict Anderson, Malek Alloula, Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault

and Giorgio Agamben. This choice limits her readership, but also enables Khanna to pursue her ultimate goal of theorizing an internationalist feminism.

With a focus on three periods in Algerian history—French colonization (1830-1962), the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62), and contemporary Algeria (1962 to present)—*Algeria Cuts* explores how national history is developed through culture, with cultural artifacts (the author's sources) "acting out" national identities. Khanna does not engage extensively—with a few exceptions including Benjamin Stora's work—with existing historiography on Algeria (or Algeria in France), privileging theoretical texts over histories of gender, war, and nation. However through theory she reveals "how the figure of woman cuts into the masculinist frame of the Franco-Algerian relationship" (p. xv), and her work makes for a provocative and useful addendum to such histories.[2]

Khanna divides her book into three parts. Part 1, "Theorizing Justice," starts with "Frames, Contexts, Community, Justice." Building on a photograph of Jacques Derrida in his childhood home of Algiers this chapter explores framing and hospitality while relying upon deconstruction to further define feminist internationalism. The Algerian origins of Derrida and Hélène Cixous, along with their theories, explain their presence in a chapter structured by four parergons ("subordinate or accessory materials that nonetheless are necessary for the work," p. 34). In the fourth parergon, Khanna turns to women and critically engages with hospitality versus hegemony, revealing that whereas a focus on hegemony invites considerations of how power structures shift and are replaced, hospitality draws attention to the damages caused by transfers of power. The analysis is grounded by a concluding segment on the conceptual art of Zineb Sedira, a French-Algerian woman working and living in London.

Chapter 2, "The Experience of Evidence: Language, the Law, and the Mockery of Justice," opens with a mock trial held in Algiers on International Women's Day in 1995 for crimes against humanity. Veiled women organizers placed, among other men, leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) on "trial." Khanna uses this event as the jumping point for an exploration of the impact of language upon justice, the relationship between politics and language, how symbolism and performance confront violence, and the possibilities for transnational feminism. The focal point is Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's handling of Djamilia Boupacha's case. Khanna adds greatly to our reading of both the trial and the rhetoric surrounding

it by adeptly comparing de Beauvoir's responses to the Algerian War of Independence with those of Albert Camus and Sartre. This case and the mock trial with which she starts this chapter lead Khanna to argue that trauma "brings a notion of temporality into justice" (p. 98).

Part 2, "Melancholic Reminders," starts with chapter 3, "*The Battle of Algiers* and *The Nouba of the Women: From Third to Fourth Cinema*." Through her reading of *The Battle of Algiers* and Fanon's well-known 1959 essay "Algeria Unveiled," Khanna contends that Third Cinema ("the cinema of decolonization," p. 105) does not adequately explore the violence done to women during decolonization, not only by colonizers but also by the colonized. She thus argues for a Fourth Cinema, characterized by Assia Djebar's *The Nouba of the Women* (1977). This chapter devotes far more space to examining women in *The Battle of Algiers*, and to an analysis of sound and voice, than it does to a detailed presentation of Djebar's film. Yet even with all the attention paid to *The Battle of Algiers* by scholars across disciplines, Khanna's presentations of the film and its context mark a significant contribution, and her reflections on Fourth Cinema are revealing.

Chapter 4, "*Women of Algiers in Their Apartment: Trauma, Melancholia, and Nationalism*," starts with Eugène Delacroix's orientalist paintings, before turning to Pablo Picasso's 1954-55 *Femmes d'Alger* series (his homage to Henri Matisse), and concluding with Assia Djebar's 2002 short story whose title references Delacroix's "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" (1834). More grounded in "cultural artifacts" than most of the book, Khanna argues here that trauma lies at the heart of nation-state formation. She engages with Ernest Renan, Raymond Betts, and Benedict Anderson before describing trauma as a phantom possession, or "shameful secret from a past generation that possesses someone else's unconscious" (p. 145). This trauma works its way out as guilt in contemporary France whereas in contemporary Algeria, she argues, it has led to the resurfacing of the French colonial policy of assimilation, but this time reformulated as Arabization.

Part 3, "Algeria Beyond Itself," starts with chapter 5, "Latent Ghosts and the Manifesto: Baya, Breton, and Reading for the Future." Khanna explores the impact postcolonial theory has had upon art history, including the ethics it imposes upon that discipline. Linking surrealism and colonialism in an uniquely sustained fashion she argues that postcolonial studies have "often failed to allow for readings of the aesthetic and the political to oc-

cur simultaneously” (p. 175). Her analysis of politics focuses intensively upon Breton and the various colonial manifestos he helped to craft, including the “Manifeste des 121,” before turning to the art and politics present in paintings by the female Algerian surrealist Baya Mahieddine. The chapter also explores definitions of “manifesto” and its modern origins in Marx, the importance of mediums (including H  l  ne Smith, or Elise-Catherine M  ller) to Breton, and Breton’s text *Nadja*. Its final claim is that there is hope located in the work of women such as Baya.

Chapter 6, “‘Araby’ (*Dubliners*) and *A Sister to Scheherazade*: Women’s Time and the Time of the Nation,” considers how cutting makes “women’s time” possible in metropolitan colonies such as Ireland and Algeria. James Joyce and Assia Djebar in their reimagining of *The Arabian Nights*, as well as Homi Bhabha and Julia Kristeva (who employs Joyce’s phrase “Father’s Time, Mother’s Species”) have all shaped the notion of women’s time. Khanna adds to this body of work by linking women’s time to nationalism, and analyzing how the concept of cutting makes alternative forms of politics available to women.

In her afterword Khanna acknowledges that early European feminists, with their complex and often self-serving approaches to feminism in the colonies, have made contemporary international feminism a delicate endeavor, but one that must be attempted. She argues that paying attention to the local, and listening, will be necessary if a new form of international feminism is to succeed.

Like its title Khanna’s book cuts: between disciplines, between history and memory, between a more traditional narrative and theory, between violence and hope. In this sense, *Algeria Cuts* is a striking homage to the artifacts upon which it rests, and provokes readers to consider how women elude traditional forms and disciplines, as well as how they are marked by violence and in need of new forms of justice. Khanna’s delineation of her new internationalist feminism remains vague. Yet when Khanna writes, “the ethics of encounter is one of reading

the other for singularity and therefore seeing the possibility of something new in the world, something beyond the confines of historical discourse, something we could call the gift of hope” (p. 210), the reader understands why, along with grouping in one book references to a wonderfully dense collection of sources about Algerian women, and a sustained theoretical analysis of women and representation in Algeria, Khanna’s text also reads simultaneously as the author’s opening sally, and something akin to a reverie of ideas and activism to come.

Notes

[1]. On teaching such sources see Alice L. Conklin, “Boundaries Unbound: Teaching French History as Colonial History and Colonial History as French History,” *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 215-238.

[2]. For example, Julia Clancy-Smith, “Islam, Gender, and the Making of French Algeria, 1830-1960,” in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Andr  e Dore-Audibert, *Des Fran  aises d’Alg  rie dans la guerre de lib  ration: Des oubli  es de l’histoire*; Monique Gadant, *Le Nationalisme alg  rien et les femmes* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); and Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). Three texts published after this book came out (although in the case of MacMaster with a preexisting article), but which would certainly have had their places in its bibliography, are Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the ‘Emancipation’ of Muslim Women, 1954-1962* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Judith Surkis, “Ethics and Violence: Simone de Beauvoir, Djamila Boupacha, and the Algerian War,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 38-55; and Natalya Vince, “Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion, and ‘Fran  aises Musulmanes’ during the Algerian War of Independence,” *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 445-474.

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