

Qur'anic Joseph/Yusuf is depicted in Ottoman Literature and resurrected to a new modern life. Through Hickman's translation, the modern audience is introduced to the worldview of a fourteenth century poet in order to understand an inter-religious and literary text and how it used archetypal characters to entertain and inspire. ✂

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**JENNIFER JOHNSON.** *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. xiii + 270 pages, endnotes, references, index. Cloth US\$75.00 ISBN 978-0-8122-4771-8.

**P**rofessor Jennifer Johnson's book examines how Algeria's National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN) sought to internationalize its struggle for independence from France. Her study complements Matthew Connelly's *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2002), Irwin Wall's *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), and Jeffrey James Byrne's *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization & the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2016). Johnson concentrates on the competition between French authorities and Algerian nationalists to provide for the health and welfare of Muslims. It particularly studies the FLN's stratagem to engage the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In chapter 1, Johnson offers historical context. After reviewing colonialism in Algeria, she describes the humanitarian discourse emerging from World War II, e.g., the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, notably, the revised Geneva Conventions (1949) that aspired to enhance the protection of civilian populations. Decolonization was theoretically thorny, especially for the ICRC, since it raised questions regarding the limits of international investigation, international involvement, and sovereignty. The FLN quickly recognized the strategic importance of appropriating humanitarian discourse dealing with medical care and human rights, which advanced its political objective of independence.

Chapter 2 studies "medical pacification," the French effort to win Algerian hearts and minds highlighted by the inauguration of Governor-General Jacques Soustelle's Special Administrative Sections (Sections Administratives

Spécialisées, SAS) in 1955. The SAS aimed to furnish a variety of services including building infrastructure (roads, houses, and schools) as well as providing health care. Johnson recounts similar earlier colonial efforts to offer the colonized with medical attention as intrinsic to the ideology of the *mission civilisatrice*. Nevertheless, the colonial medical engagement, even if well intentioned and enhanced by the SAS, remained inadequate given shortages of staff and supplies (and the rapidly growing size of the Muslim population).

As described throughout chapter 3, the FLN realized that “medicine and health care were vital necessities to claiming sovereignty of Algeria” (63). Furthermore, it legitimated the FLN before international audiences and residual rival nationalists. The health-services division of the FLN’s military wing, the Armée de Liberation Nationale (ALN), modeled itself on the SAS. In order to earn political and material internal support, its medical personnel also sought to treat civilians as well as soldiers. Consequently, the French disrupted pharmaceutical networks supplying the nationalists and arrested physicians and nurses. The lack of medical supplies constantly concerned ALN units operating within Algeria.

The FLN’s Proclamation of 1 November 1954 listed nationalist objectives including the internationalization of the Algerian Revolution. Recognizing that the French Red Cross (Croix-Rouge Française, CRF) would not play an independent, neutral role in the conflict, the FLN lobbied the ICRC to intervene given French actions that included torture and population displacement. As explained in chapter 4, the FLN eventually inaugurated the Algerian Red Crescent (Croissant-Rouge Algérien, CRA) in 1957, which lobbied international organizations and publicized French human rights abuses. The CRA condemned torture, conducted prisoner exchanges, and amplified the internal and external refugee plight. The establishment of the CRA and its skillful use of humanitarian rhetoric implicitly challenged French sovereignty and, especially the ICRC, the principal subject of chapter 5.

Johnson explains the tenuous position of the ICRC since the revised Geneva Conventions of 1949 dealt with international not internal conflicts such as those caused by decolonization. Nevertheless, Premier Pierre Mendès-France permitted a closely qualified ICRC mission to Algeria with an essential condition; its report would be privately shared with the government. Despite officials’ resistance in Algeria, the ICRC still exposed police brutality. Subsequent ICRC missions’ reports interpreted French actions as violations of the Geneva Conventions. Nevertheless, still endeavoring to be neutral,

the ICRC requested prisoner lists from both sides. Despite the French government's insistence on keeping the mission reports private, one was leaked and published in *Le Monde* in January 1960. According to Johnson: "The leak... forced French officials to respond publicly about military and police action in Algeria... and were compelled to explain and justify their behavior to a wider audience, a significant departure from their early insistence that Algeria was not an international concern" (152).

The final chapter surveys nationalist global diplomacy, notably the FLN's endeavors to correlate Algerian decolonization with United Nations principles in order to earn international recognition. It also includes the FLN's engagement with the rising Third World, dating particularly from having representation at the Bandung Conference of 1955. While the FLN's successful pursuit of internationalism has been described before (see the books mentioned above), the author, working from recently opened Algerian National Archives documentation, presents a particular nationalist rather than Western perspective.

Johnson concludes: "The nationalist strategy showed the tangible power of discourse and, when used with acumen, despite the odds, how political aspirations for sovereignty could be transformed into reality" (199). Commendably, she avoids a triumphalist nationalist interpretation, despite the FLN's diplomatic achievements. For example, she questions Frantz Fanon's canonic observation that "every interaction between a French doctor and an Algerian patient was a colonial confrontation and could only be understood in dialectical terms"; Johnson counters that "this was certainly not the case when SAS units drove into town and were surrounded by entire families who eagerly awaited their help" (57). Furthermore, she notes concerning the investigation of missing persons and the protection of *harkis* (Algerians loyal to France) as Algeria transitioned to independence, the new nationalist government "quickly adopted a rationale vis-à-vis the ICRC and sensitive political questions that emulated the outgoing colonial administration's stance... Once again ICRC delegates were working with a government that did not want them poking around in its internal affairs" (154).

This book is impressively researched and underscores the importance of non-state actors concerning the internationalization of Algerian decolonization. Johnson's approach is novel and welcomed. ✨

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