

economía, de la arquitectura y amantes de la historia, que encontrarán en la obra una buena síntesis de las ideas médicas de la medicina social de la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII pero, también, de las ideas químicas, de las prácticas médicas y sanitarias, y de otros muchos aspectos relacionados con la vida cotidiana del Antiguo Régimen. ■

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William Gallois. The administration of sickness. Medicine and ethics in nineteenth-century Algeria. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan; 2008, vi + 262 p. ISBN: 978-0-230-50043-3, £ 50,00.

The third book of William Gallois, after his previous works entitled *Zola. The history of capitalism* (1999) and *Time, religion and history* (2007), consists of a historical as well as ethical research on French colonial medicine in 19th century Algeria. The book starts with a mixed theoretical and narrative introduction which is followed by six chapters under the headings «On the idea of medical imperialism», «On humanitarian desire», «On extermination», «On attendance to suffering and demographic collapse», «On the just and sovereign testimony of Abdel Kader ben Zahra» and «On injustice and the disavowal of autonomy». The last two of them are essentially an extended re-work of his 2007 *Social History of Medicine* article «Local Responses to French Medical Imperialism in Nineteenth Century Algeria» which must apparently have been either a first step, or a decisive stimulus for writing the present monographic essay.

A little more than 200 pages in length, the author attempts to demonstrate a wide array of interrelated hypotheses around the general topic of the book. On the one hand, he points to the persistence —with few remarkable changes— of a particular «health culture» in Algeria during the whole colonial period (1830-1962), a culture which determined invariable responses to epidemics and fixed interactions with the local Arabic medical tradition among many other things. On the other hand, Gallois states the centrality of medicine and physicians to the French colonial project in Algeria, conceived as a «fantasy» or an «illusion» of medicalization which in its actual implementation became «one of the most pernicious effects of French colonialism», as Franz Fanon put it decades ago. In this sense, Gallois also sets out to make an ethical assessment of the benefits and

disadvantages of French medicine for Algerians, in terms of the improvement or deterioration of their health status during the colonial period. His ultimate goal is to analyze the process of the country becoming a «sick State» despite the belief in a morally right actuation held by the political, military or medical power elite of the colony.

Gallois also takes the Algerian case as a particularly well-suited example for the need of an «ethical history of medicine» that ought to deal with questions such as massacres or famines, hitherto beyond the field's normally assumed interests. The author intends to prove the existence of an «exterminatory» or «genocidal» logic nuclear to French colonialism in Algeria in whose definition and implementation doctors and medicine would have been systematically involved. For example, massacres of Algerians in the course of military campaigns would have found an ethical justification when interpreted as «the natural consequences of situations in which beneficial gifts as medical progress would have been despised» by the local population. Regarding famines, the «humanitarianism» displayed by the French medical community towards Algerians would have acted as a veil of well-intentioned morals to effectively hide any objection raised against the sanitary and demographic failure revealed by the widespread deaths following starvation.

Finally, Gallois endeavors to recuperate the voices and biographies of local actors in order to re-write the history of colonial medicine in Algeria that has traditionally been limited to the «triumphs» of the French sanitary administration or to the scientific discoveries of great doctors such as Alphonse Laveran. According to the author, the writings of and archival documents on the small number of Algerians who entered the colonial medical system in the second half of the 19th century should be considered as «precedents of the ideas of Fanon and the Front de Liberation National in their conviction that the opposition against France should be based on the acknowledgment of the pernicious contribution of the colonial power to the health of the Algerian nation». Other non-medical individuals, for example the merchant of Turkish extraction, Sidi Hamdan ben Othman Khodja, author of the book *A historical and statistical glimpse on the regency of Algiers* (1834), provide invaluable insights on the contradictions of French «medical imperialism» and the damages it caused to the local society from its very start.

Save for this last purpose and for the reconstruction of the onset of French Algeria's civil and military health administration during the 1830s and 1840s, Gallois' research fails however to be convincing for a variety of reasons. Prominent among them is the modest documentary basis upon which the

historical statements are elaborated. In order to develop in a satisfactory manner, just a small part of the topics presented in this book —some of them are in need of a highly rigorous approach, such as the definition of French colonization in Algeria as a «genocide» or the central role of physicians and medicine in the «exterminatory designs» of French colonialism— a great mass of documentary evidence and primary bibliography would have been required. On the other hand, some of Gallois' conceptual keys which could be as decisive as those we have already mentioned, for example the idea that «before the arrival of the French in 1830 there was of course no Algeria» and therefore that it is «quite erroneous to see the metropole and the colony as wholly separate realms» because there existed a «strong correlation between war, medicine and nation-making in France and Algeria», are left undeveloped by the author.

In general, Gallois brings up a number of problems and topics whose research far exceeds from what a conventional monograph can deal with. There is no space in a volume as concise as this one for so many complex questions: a general claim for the study of ethics within history and in particular within medical history; a revision of the critical historiography on French colonization of Algeria from Franz Fanon onwards; an exploration of the «relation between war, politics, State, modernity, medicine and health» and of the essential identity of French colonialism in Algeria between 1830 and 1962. It could also be affirmed that Gallois' historiographical and theoretical perspectives are often confusing and unsystematic. For example, it seems difficult to sustain the lack of significant variations in French colonial and medical intervention in Algeria for more than 130 years. In this sense, the tragic itinerary of the small number of Arab doctors trained in the School of Medicine of Algiers (opened in 1859 and not in the 1870s as the author claims) cannot be properly understood without taking into account the changes in French colonial policy from the Second Empire to the Third Republic. The decree of 1862 which approved grants for the training of Algerian doctors and «health officers» in Algiers and even in Paris made sense within Napoleon III's project of *Royaume Arabe*; in contrast, neither the training of local doctors, nor their work for the Algerian health administration were congruent with the new Republican mission *civilisatrice* in which access to higher scientific and technical knowledge should only be available to Europeans.

From a theoretical point of view, Gallois' arguments on the relation between medicine/charity, famines, massacres and genocide reveal the persistence of Parsons-style functionalist analyses. Certainly, the author's research is not framed within a restrictive «history of medicine» but in a wider «history of health» that intends to pay so much attention to «questions of dying and quality of

life» as to those of medical care and that «extends its cast beyond medical professionals to look at the ways in which the actions of groups such as soldiers and administrators impacted on the well-being of Algerians». This approach fails, however, to move beyond a functionalist analysis of French colonialism in which the administration and the army assume and deploy the functions of social control and repression while medicine is uncritically associated with positive functions related to care and health. In this way, the harsh critics of Gallois are not directed towards French medicine as such, but towards its complicity in hiding or morally justifying military and administrative actions that caused massacres and famines. Emphasis is thus made on the lack of «innocence» of French physicians while the «good intentions» of medical humanitarianism are contrasted against the terrible realities of Algerians' lives. Gallois fails then to consider French medicine as essentially colonialist; its perversion within the colonial system is the only object of his critique, as it was of Fanon's according to Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998). Gallois' «externalism» may help explain why he fails to develop his own constructionist insights, for example his claim that Algeria would have been medicalised «as a sick body on which it was legitimate for France to experiment with various social and political cures». It would also help explain his concise reflections on racial discourse and the racialization of medicine in colonial Algeria.

Paradoxically, Gallois' theoretical frame combines some superseded functionalist elements with that intellectual trend —so frequent in present-day research, as pointed out by Mark Jenner and Bertrand Thaité in the *Companion to medicine in the twentieth century* (2003) —in which «everything solid melts into the mist of discourse». Despite his vindication of the agency of Algeria and the Algerians, he depicts them in a blurred, imprecise manner, due to the lack of enough chronologic, historical, geographic or cultural data which would help solidly root them in their specific historical period and social environment. At the same time, the author tends to systematically assume as realities those discourses formulated by a limited number of actors in a limited scope of publications, without the combined study of the institutional, material, administrative or legislative networks that conditioned the actual hegemony of those discourses in colonial society —or their marginality.

Finally, Gallois regrets that postcolonial approaches to medical history remain essentially confined to the study of the Indian subcontinent and sub-Saharan Africa, leaving aside areas such as the north of Africa and, particularly, the Maghreb. Gallois claims that an extension of post-colonial and Foucaultian analyses to questions of the history of medicine in the Maghreb is badly

needed. However, even if Gallois realises that the 19th century Maghreb was not seen as «the islands of the Pacific [which] could be romantically conceived as utopian spaces on which to begin history», his research fails to realise that the complexity and relative development achieved by Islamic states such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and to a lesser extent Algeria led to particular —more belated, less comprehensive, more costly —forms of European domination whose understanding requires particular conceptual tools. The automatic extrapolation of a fixed set of postcolonial tools to explain historical events in every geographical setting would only lead to a global standardization of colonial history that would ignore differences between the various European colonial projects, the various colonised communities and the interactions among the former and the latter, as Waltraud Ernst recently affirmed (*Social History of Medicine*; 2007: 3). The unquestionable need for comparative research should not lead to identical, interchangeable analyses modelled only on the historical experience and the intellectual tradition of Anglo-Saxon countries and, more modestly, France, through the uncritical importation or use of concepts and perspectives.

In conclusion, the book of William Gallois must be praised by the author's claim that the study of ethical questions could and should be closely linked to medical history research. Besides, Gallois has made a fruitful effort at reconstructing the biography and ideology of a number of 19th century Algerian Arab doctors in order to insert them with due dignity in the history of medicine of colonial Algeria, thus making the latter a more complex/real narrative. Gallois also reconstructs several aspects (administrative, ideological) of colonial public health in 19th century Algeria and provides a comprehensive bibliographic synthesis on the topic. However, the main hypotheses of his book seem to be unconvincing due to the general lack of sources and to the inconsistency of the theoretical and historiographical bases of his research. ■

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