

Online Reviews

Rogers, Rebecca. *A Frenchwoman's Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013. Pp. 267. ISBN: 978-0-8047-8431-3

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This book is a thoroughly engaging contribution to the historical literature on nineteenth-century colonial Algeria. A great deal of the historiography of colonial Algeria has been drawn to the subject of war, be it Algeria's conquest and "pacification" in the nineteenth century or the war of independence as French rule came to an end. Such a focus tends to present colonization as an intrinsically male project, with military figures like General Bugeaud especially prominent. Rebecca Rogers's book is a welcome corrective to this image, demonstrating that French women were not only present, but also participated actively in the making of early colonial Algeria.

The colonial archives are littered with references to women—to this reviewer's knowledge, as yet unstudied in any systematic way—who accompanied their husbands to land concessions in the Algerian countryside and then found themselves widowed and in charge of farms. Widowhood is, in fact, a key element in the story Rogers has to tell, but by contrast her central subject, Eugénie Allix Luce (1804-1882), left her mark on Algeria in an urban setting—indeed, in the quintessential Algerian urban environment of the Casbah in Algiers. Allix Luce comes across in Rogers's account as an idiosyncratic mixture of the earthy and the idealistic, traits that to varying degrees could be found among many of the French men who took advantage of new opportunities overseas around the same time. Born in the department of Loir-et-Cher, the young Eugénie appears to have received little if any formal education. Her father, however, valued learning and began a small school, in which Eugénie was able to gain her first teaching experience. In her early twenties she married a schoolteacher, Jacques Allix. Both Jacques and Eugénie set up schools of their own, and the couple had two children, though one died in infancy. In a dramatic but unfortunately ill-documented decision, Eugénie chose to leave all this behind: her husband, her daughter, and France itself. We encounter her next in Algiers—Rogers believes she arrived in 1832—doing laundry and mending clothes to scrape a living. She also had a new baby, which she registered under her maiden name.

Perhaps she believed she could make an entirely fresh start, but the complexities of Eugénie's personal life would shadow her as she resumed her vocation as an educator on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Inspired by the Saint-Simonian thinker Prosper Enfantin, with whom she corresponded and met (perhaps intimately), Eugénie developed a plan to school indigenous Algerian girls with the lofty aim of "regenerating" local populations toward an eventual "fusion of races" (65). Her objectives received a boost when her abandoned husband Jacques Allix died in 1845 and left her sufficient money to found the first school for Muslim girls in colonial Algeria. A much less welcome consequence of Allix's death, however, was to reveal that the man Eugénie lived with in Algiers, Louis Luce, a musician, was not, in fact, her husband. Becoming Madame Luce in 1846 was not enough to redeem her reputation among some of the most powerful men in the colonial hierarchy. Revelations about her marital history surely helped fan the rumors that spread periodically about the moral character of the girls in her charge, and imperiled her stated goal of effecting "moral conquest" via education.

Yet Allix Luce's school had some influential defenders, too, and it found some success in attracting students: in 1848 the enrollment stood at 120. In a string of locations in the Casbah, girls who

almost always came from poor families took lessons in Arabic and French. They did some basic mathematics and science, learned about health and hygiene, and received some Quranic instruction. Classes in sewing and embroidery, in particular, helped to give the school its public face: some of the girls' work was displayed at the 1855 International Exposition in Paris. But ongoing questions about the merits of schooling indigenous girls severely curtailed Allix Luce's pedagogical ambitions. Framing their opposition in terms of the potential for *déclassement* and moral endangerment, both of individual girls and indigenous family structure, influential French and indigenous male voices helped to ensure that in 1861 the school was reduced to the status of a workshop. Rogers has found embroideries produced by girls at this institution in museums in Paris and London, but Allix Luce's initial aims had extended well beyond the transmission of manual skills. As the assimilationist approach Allix Luce had championed fell out of favor in government circles, education for indigenous Algerian girls failed to take off; in 1907, Rogers notes, barely 0.7 percent attended school (214).

Rogers writes sensitively about Allix Luce's personal struggles while always remaining alert to her tendency to embroider her own life story. (British feminists wintering in Algiers proved to be a particularly receptive audience for her tales.) Part of the value of presenting Allix Luce's career is to offer a rather boldly secular contrast to the nuns whose influence on education in North Africa in this period has been written about by scholars like Sarah Curtis and Julia Clancy-Smith. Drawing on her deep familiarity with education for girls in nineteenth-century France, Rogers efficiently highlights what is "colonial" about this story, though some further external comparison, notably with nineteenth-century India, might have underlined the way that alternating bursts of confidence and caution were a familiar feature of colonial education policies as Europeans weighed their capacity and their will to transform the societies they governed. It may not prove easy for historians of Algeria to recover women's lives as vivid as that of Madame Luce, but Rogers's pursuit of her subject through the archives should serve as inspiration to other researchers hoping to broaden our understanding of the gendered dynamics of French colony-building.

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