

Kai Matsumiya

Maryam Jafri

Independence Day 1934-1975
January 25 – February 24, 2024

Opening Thursday, January 25th, 6-8 pm

Independence Day 1934-1975 (2009-2019) features 57 archival photographs culled from more than 30 archives of the first Independence Day ceremonies of various Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations including Jordan, Kuwait, Indonesia, India, Tunisia, Ghana, Senegal, Syria, Malaysia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Vietnam (South), DR Congo, Burkina Faso and Algeria. The photos are sourced primarily from public archives in their respective countries.

The first Independence Day, leading up to and including the formal ceremony, unfolds as a series of codified rituals and speech acts enacted across public and elite spaces, within the 24-hour twilight period during which a territory transitions into an independent nation-state. Resistance and counter-resistance protest movements, legal proceedings within capital buildings, VIP functions, parades, stadium salutes, and first addresses to the new nation, amongst other episodes and events, are all supervised by the departing colonial powers.

The photographic material is strikingly similar despite disparate geographical and temporal origins as it reveals a political model, the concept of the modern nation-state itself, exported from Europe and in the process of being formally reproduced throughout the world. Who comprises any nation between the necessary condition of finding the "us" while often followed by "them"? What could have historically unfolded here? "Ethnic nationalism," "civic/liberal nationalism," or world communism, are modern concepts that originated in Germany, United States/France, and the Soviet Union, respectively. We may encounter yet another fundamental typology, post-colonial or anti-colonial nationalism, by which these various countries came to identify or imagine themselves.

An identification guide to each photograph's date and country of origin is available as a handout at the center of the installation.

During the course of the exhibition the gallery will host a film screening of "The Battle of Algiers" (1966), directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, and a comparative reading seminar on "The Ethnic Origins of Nations" (1986) by Anthony Smith, "The Nation and Its Fragments" (1993) by Partha Chatterjee, "The Origins of Totalitarianism" (1951) by Hannah Arendt, and "Neither Settler Nor Native" (2020) by Mahmood Mamdani (dates TBA).

Maryam Jafri's multimedia practice integrates video, sculpture, photography, and performance. Recent solo presentations include *No Lithium, No Work* at Kunsthal Aarhus, DK (2023), *Nontstop You* at Kai Matsumiya, New York, NY (2022), *A Broad and Narrow Point*, Blaffer Museum of Art, Houston, TX (2021), *I Drank the Kool-Aid but I didn't Inhale*, ICA Los Angeles, CA (2019), and *The Road to Serfdom, Repaved*, Taxis Palais Kunsthalle Tyrol, AT (2019). Recent biennials and notable group exhibitions include *to see oneself at a distance*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2023), *Blocks*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Palermo, IT (2021), *Front International Triennial*, Cleveland, OH (2018), *Athens Biennial*, GR (2018), *São Paulo Biennale*, BR (2016), and the *Belgian Pavilion*, Venice Biennale, IT (2015).

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