

Foreign News in Colonial Algeria, 1881-1940

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at how news shaped people's relationship to the world in Algeria under French rule. This territory operated under an uncertain legal status that made it both a part of France and a colony, and within it lived a society divided between European settlers and Muslim natives. Accounts of recent events helped Algerians determine what was domestic and what was foreign in a place where those two notions were highly contested. Colonialism did not close Algeria off from the world or open it up, instead it created a particular geography.

In a series of case-studies taken from across Algeria, this thesis investigates a wide range of types of news: manuscripts, rumours, wire dispatches, newspapers, illustrations, songs, newsreels, and radio broadcasts. It focuses on the period in which Algeria's legal status as part of France was most certain, from the end of the conquest and the consolidation of Republican rule in the 1880s to the outbreak of the Second World War. In this period, authorities thought the influence of outside events on Algeria was a bigger threat than disturbances within. Because of this, state surveillance produced reports to monitor foreign news, and these form the backbone of this study. But state attempts to manage the flow of news had unintended effects. Instead of establishing effective censorship, authorities ended up spreading news and making it more politically sensitive. Settlers, supposedly the state's allies, proved highly disruptive to state attempts to control the flow of information.

Through a social history of information in a settler colonial society, this research reconsiders the relationship between changes in media and people's sense of community. From the telegraph to the radio, new technologies worked to divide colonial society rather than tying it together, and the same medium could lead to divergent senses of community.

LONG ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at how news shaped people's relationship to the world in Algeria under French rule. This was a territory that was legally both part of France and a colony. Within it lived a society heavily divided between European settlers and Muslim natives. Accounts of recent events helped Algerians determine what was domestic and what was foreign, in a place where those two notions were highly contested. In colonial Algeria, what was 'domestic' and 'foreign' was wholly different depending on perspective. For Europeans in Algeria, events in Paris were domestic news. News coverage for them primarily reflected French metropolitan and European diplomatic politics, whilst completely ignoring incidents affecting Muslims living in the same city. By contrast, for many Muslims in Algeria reports of developments in Cairo or Istanbul seemed very close whilst local European politics in their region remained of distant interest.

By nature, news offers accounts of events that are foreign to the receiver yet relevant at the same time. The specificity of French Algeria makes it a particularly useful place to examine the relationship between news and distance. In this territory with an uncertain institutional status, the production, transmission and interpretation of news were deeply political processes.

The thesis focuses on the period where Algeria's legal status as part of France was most certain, from the end of the conquest and the consolidation of Republican rule in the 1880s to the outbreak of the Second World War. Existing scholarship assumes that Algeria's peculiar institutional status cut it off from the rest of the world in this period. Instead, the thesis argues that colonialism did not close Algeria off from the world or open it up but created a particular geography. Since authorities thought that the influence

of outside events on Algeria was a bigger threat than disturbances within, news of developments outside Algeria became especially sensitive in this period.

State surveillance produced reports to monitor the influence of foreign news. These state attempts to manage the flow of news had unintended effects. Instead of establishing effective censorship, authorities ended up spreading news and making it more politically sensitive. The intelligence apparatus was an important network of news circulation, so the thesis makes use of state surveillance archives to write a social history of information.

To make this process visible, it draws on multiple levels of correspondence between different levels of the colonial administration, as well correspondence between officials in Algeria and their counterparts in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs who expressed concern about Algerians' relations to the world beyond France. Along with these state sources, it makes use of a variety of sources from libraries and archival collections in Algeria, France, Italy, Britain, and Tunisia to investigate a wide range of different types of news: manuscripts, rumours, wire dispatches, newspapers, illustrations, songs, newsreels and radio broadcasts.

Structured in six chapters, the thesis depicts changes in the media system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It begins in 1881, when two laws passed by the French Parliament created an environment of great press freedom for French citizens and heavy censorship for Algerian Muslims, for whom public speaking, assembling and even movement were heavily restricted, let alone printing. The result was a boom in newspapers intended for European Algerians and a dearth of publications intended for Muslim Algerians. The first chapter charts the development of newspapers across the colonial period, with the laws of 1881 at its core. It examines the belief that newspapers were central to colonial order and to controlling information. Authorities and elites attempted to control news through the printing press, either by printing themselves or by

establishing legal restrictions as to who could print. Despite these attempts, news circulated well beyond intended audiences. The newspaper became a familiar though unusable object to many illiterate Algerians, and interacted with other forms of media both old and new.

The second chapter takes this further, looking at the unexpected impact of the introduction of the telegraph. New technologies, though they primarily benefited the settler minority, ended up spreading news among Muslims as well. Settlers, supposedly the state's allies, often proved highly disruptive to state attempts to control the flow of information. The chapter uses a local incident in 1897 to show how telegraphic news reconfigured Algerians' relationship to global Islam. In particular, it argues that the intensification of news circulation reinforced local tensions between Europeans and Muslims in Algeria rather than diminishing them. In Algeria, the same medium could create divergent senses of community, and new technologies further divided colonial society rather than tying it together.

Chapter 3 builds on the second chapter's examination of the relationship between news and space by considering the relationship between news and time. It looks at various forms of news dealing with the outbreak of war in 1914, showing how news could move between different sectors of colonial society to create a shared event. People in colonial Algeria had trouble believing that they all lived in the same place at the same time, but the circulation of news suggests that people's sense of temporality was not as different as is often thought.

The next three chapters turn to the relationship between news and political claims. The fourth chapter takes two case studies to examine how Algerians used news about other European powers to locate themselves relative to the French government. The first case study deals with settlers' uses of news of war with Britain in the 1890s, while the second deals with Muslim uses of news of Italy's imperial ambitions from 1911

to 1939. Together, these case studies show how foreign news allowed political actors to stress their loyalty to France.

Whilst chapter 4 looks at Algerians' political relationship to France, the fifth chapter turns to partisan political relations within Algeria. Focussing on a series of activists in the interwar period and their relationship to the Spanish Civil War and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, it demonstrates how observing events abroad generated political mobilisation in Algeria. Whilst most existing literature stresses the importance of migration and contact between activists in the elaboration of Algerian nationalism, this chapter lays the foundation for an alternative understanding, based on the circulation of news and the importance of distance. It argues that Algerians' desire for nationhood partly came out of their ability to imagine other nations beyond their own, and this occurred regardless of whether they had actually been abroad.

The final chapter builds on preceding ones by examining the relationship between the movement of people and movement of information. To do so, it goes back to the beginning of the study in 1881, examining the uses of news by a single man to advance his position with respect to the state administration. Messaoud Djebari used news available in newspapers and his knowledge of the state administration to create convincing fictional accounts that grabbed authorities' attention, first during the conquest of Tunisia in 1881 and later in the invasion of West Africa in 1895. By taking a microhistorical approach, this chapter ties together previous threads to reconsider the relationship between news and intelligence.

The thesis thus makes a contribution to several fields of knowledge. For historians of colonial Algeria, it offers two conjoined insights. Firstly, it demonstrates the importance of outside events even at the climax of colonial rule. Second, it depicts the circulation of information across different sectors of colonial society, something that has hitherto been little studied. For historians of other colonial situations, the distinctive role

of European settlers in the circulation of information in French Algeria can offer important comparative insights. Finally, through a social history of information in a settler colonial society, this research reconsiders more broadly the relationship between changes in media and people's sense of community. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, many studies assume a relationship between print and the nation. By contrast, this thesis shows that when people intentionally tried to create a community through launching a new medium, their efforts often failed to have the desired effect. Moreover, people consuming the same media could end up with drastically different imaginations. Interrogating the relationship between print and the nation, this study calls for a broader examination of the relationship between news and power.

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Note on translation and transcription

All translations are my own unless specified. To ease reading, transcription from Arabic uses a simplified norm, indicating ‘ayn (ʿ) and hamza (ʾ), but with no diacritics to indicate long vowels or emphatic consonants.

Any work of North African history has to struggle between different spelling norms. For consistency, I have generally used the contemporary French spelling of towns, people and administrative concepts while indicating the alternative name in brackets when they are first mentioned (eg Bône [Annaba]). The exception is concepts, places and people which are more familiar to English-speaking audiences in their Arabic spelling, like *qaʾid*, *ulama*, and Zaghul Pasha (rather than *caïd*, *ouléma* and Zaghoul Pacha).

Publications raise special difficulties: periodicals in Arabic are named using Arabic spelling (*Al-Shihab* rather than *Ech-Chibeb*), but those published in French with Arabic titles are named by their more famous French spelling for consistency with other works (eg *El Hack* and not *Al-Haqq*).

Transcription from Berber languages into the Latin alphabet follows the norms of Mouloud Mammeri. For sources in Algerian Arabic, for which there is no accepted norm, I adapted the French-style spelling to harmonise with transcriptions into Modern Standard Arabic while respecting the distinctive pronunciation as best as possible.

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Abbreviations

ANA – Archives Nationales Algériennes, Birkhadem, Algiers

ANOM – Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence

ASMAI – Archivio Storico Ministero dell’Africa Italiana

CM – *commune mixte*

CPE – *commune de plein exercice*

DC – Département de Constantine

DO – Département d’Oran

FO – Foreign Office

GGA – Gouvernement-Général de l’Algérie

GG – Gouverneur-Général de l’Algérie

MAE – Ministère des Affaires Étrangères

MMSH – Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme, Aix-en-Provence

PA – Préfet d’Alger

PC – Préfet de Constantine

PO – Préfet d’Oran

SHD – Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes

WA – Archives of the Wilaya of Algiers

WO – Archives of the Wilaya of Oran

Introduction

‘You have instructed me to write a weekly report on the moral and political situation of the natives and the repercussion that news concerning military events in Tripolitania may have upon their state of mind.’¹

So begins a report by the local French administrator of El Milia to his superiors in 1911. There is nothing special about El Milia, a rural, mountainous region in Eastern Algeria. Nor is there anything special about this report. It was standard practice for administrators to report on foreign news. In the Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer (ANOM) in Aix-en-Provence, where most of the paperwork produced by the French state’s 132-year rule over Algeria now lies, there are entire boxes of reports like these, boxes with titles like ‘Influence of the events of the East’ or ‘Consequences in Algeria of...’.

These reports are remarkably consistent over a long period of time. The request by the administration is always the same: what is the impact of the news of foreign events on the local population? In 1911, the administrator in El Milia was reporting on the impact of news of the recent Italian invasion of Libya (specifically the Western province of Tripolitania). Depending on the period, reports were concerned with

¹ ‘Vous avez bien voulu me prescrire de fournir un rapport hebdomadaire sur la situation morale et politique des indigènes et la répercussion que pourront [sic] avoir sur leur état d’âme les nouvelles se rattachant aux faits militaires tripolitains’, Administrator of Commune mixte [CM] of El Milia to Préfet de Constantine [PC], 15 November 1911, Aix-en-Provence, Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer [ANOM]/Département de Constantine [DC]/B³182.

different places. Sometimes it was events in Belgium or Istanbul, at others it was events in Russia or Spain.

The existence of these reports is strange in a period where on the surface everything was calm. 1911 in Algeria was just another year in the long period between the war of conquest and the war of independence. Starting in 1830, the French invasion had created three North African provinces, Oran in the West, Algiers in the centre, and Constantine in the East, all three of which became part of French territory in 1848. By 1911, therefore, the last echoes of the conquest were long gone. In El Milia, part of the Eastern *département* of Constantine, the last major insurrection had taken place in 1871, some forty years before. It would be another forty years or so before the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) would launch an armed revolt in 1954, which would lead to Algeria's independence in 1962. If ever there was a time when colonial rule was 'normal', this was it.

Yet Eastern Algeria was hardly placid in 1911. Below the surface, tension simmered. In September 1911, Italy had declared war on the Ottoman Empire to seize control of the North African provinces of Tripoli and Cyrenaica. The Italo-Turkish war intersected with a tense political atmosphere within Algeria as French politicians debated reforms to grant Muslim Algerians civil rights.² Even though these events did not involve France, Algerians even in remote regions were 'quivering' [*frémissements*] with news of the conflict.³ Riots erupted between patriotic Italians and their Muslim neighbours who felt sympathy for Tripolitarians under attack.

For the *préfet* in Constantine, the precise cause of this tension sweeping the region had to be determined, and he ordered local administrators to investigate. Report after report, French officials tracked something rather elusive, what the administrator in El

² On these debates around 1911 see Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France 1871-1919* (Algiers, 2010 [1968]), vol. 2, pp.1025-1138.

³ CM Collo to PC, ANOM/DC/B³182.

Milia called the *répercussion des nouvelles sur l'état d'âme*, literally the repercussions of the news on the state of the soul. The most common phrase used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was *répercussion des nouvelles sur l'état d'esprit*, a phrase akin to 'repercussion of the news on the state of mind'.⁴ Later, in the 1920s, a fashionable language of 'psychology' would come in, leading to some administrators noting the impact of news on 'native psychology' (*psychologie indigène*). The underlying concern remained the same: events, somewhere outside the state's authority, might cause trouble here in the innermost psychic states of Algerians, trouble that had to be carefully monitored.

These reports reveal a concern that is not readily classifiable as either domestic or foreign affairs. The colonial administration was not worried that another state was directly meddling in El Milia, for instance by sending spies, which would have made this into a diplomatic or international problem. Nor was the concern about some internal political or social disturbance, an expression of the grievances of the Algerian population. The concern was one with connection, with transformation: something explicitly defined as *elsewhere* might become a problem *here*.

The historian encountering this type of document might try to use it to write either a local or a global history. The first approach would be to read the document as evidence for a local problem, for instance, in order to write a social history of El Milia. The administrator's concern with events in Libya, in this reading, often becomes a kind of delusion. He is deflecting some real, local problem, by blaming foreign news. Ideally, one would then find some material grievance around El Milia, like a new law or a famine, that would explain everything. Indeed, there were many such problems at the time, from widespread land dispossession to fears that Muslims would soon be conscripted in the

⁴ On this phrase and French administrative practices of reporting on opinion, see Pierre Karila-Cohen, *L'Etat des esprits. L'invention de l'enquête politique en France (1814-1848)* (Rennes, 2008).

French army. Incapable of acknowledging these tensions, the administrator is avoiding the real problem by projecting it outside, and his false consciousness can then be easily brushed off: he is avoiding the real problem by projecting it outside – important things have local roots, and that is what the hard business of social explanation of the past is about. Real, here, means local.⁵

The second approach is to gaze on high to write international history, starting from the Italian invasion of Libya or some other grand event, usually involving men with moustaches in a room. From this epicentre, events then radiate outwards to other places like shockwaves. In this reading, it is these global events that matter, so such a report can only be read as evidence for ‘impact’ or ‘reception’ of something that has already happened elsewhere. The most interesting aspect of this document would be to prove that Algerians were aware of the important things happening in the wider world. This would then be used to prove that Algerians too were important, cosmopolitan and sophisticated. The degree of their exposure to important international events then becomes a yardstick to establish them as historical actors. Real, here, means global.⁶

By focusing either on a local or a global scale, neither of these approaches gets at the central concern of these reports: the possibility of events switching from one scale to another, from here to there. Underlying them is the risky possibility of a metamorphosis. The big, macro, distant event could, through some mysterious process, come to affect the most intimate thoughts of Algerians, their very states of mind, their *états d’âme*.

Instead of taking either the local or global scale for granted, I use these reports to trace the construction of scales as a process essential to state power and to attempts to resist it. This is not just saying that the global and the local shaped each other, a phrase

⁵ On the localist assumptions of social sciences, and especially anthropological approaches, see James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge MA, 1997).

⁶ On the problem of studying North Africa from either a local or global approach see James McDougall and Robert Parks, ‘Locating social analysis in the Maghrib’, *Journal of North African Studies*, 2013, 18:5, pp.631-638.

which has become somewhat cliché. Rather, it points to how contemporaries themselves worried about the consequences of global connection on local political relations.

This is a study of how news shaped people's relation to the world in Algeria under French rule. Through a social history of information in a heavily divided society, it argues that people managed what was foreign and what was familiar through sharing accounts of recent events. It examines the role of news within a particular state, the state that produced reports like the one in El Milia in 1911. In this territory with an uncertain institutional status, the production, transmission and interpretation of news was a deeply political process.

By focusing on the role of foreign news in a settler colonial society, this study makes a contribution to the historiography of information, on colonial Algeria's links to the outside world, and on the nature of social relations within colonial societies. In the following I locate this study within these different historiographies, before briefly giving an account of the use of sources and structure of the thesis.

News and the history of information

Though it is concerned with international events, this study is not an international history as it does not deal primarily with the relations between distinct states.⁷ Instead, it builds upon a strand of global history that looks at how people in the past understood the world they lived in.⁸ Global historians have successfully challenged

⁷ On the difference between international relations and globalisation see Anthony G Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, (London, 2004), p.16.

⁸ This kind of work has been particularly important in the study of early modern globalization, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*, (Delhi, 2004). Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation*, (Paris, 2004) and *What Time is it there? America and Islam at the dawn of modern times*, (Cambridge, 2010). For a case focusing specifically on the Islamic world see Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, (Oxford, 2010).

the predominance of the national scale by tracing flows and connections through time. In doing so, they have often seen their work as an emancipatory project, freeing historical actors from the confines of the nation-state. Yet, as one of the pioneers of global history Christopher Bayly warned, ‘one problem with a history which charts global interconnections (...) is that it may find it difficult to deal with power.’⁹ ‘Connections’, to take up a language that has become highly popular in the ‘global turn’, suggest a kind of flat landscape, in which the pursuit of the historian is to draw exciting lines across a map through a series of exotic locales from Buenos Aires to Bombay. Yet people, ideas and goods did not move without risk, under the watchful eyes of states that controlled mobility. Here, I focus on news to tell a story of friction rather than flows, and of mediation rather than connections.¹⁰

Events in Libya themselves did not have an impact in Algeria, only accounts of them. News, or, ‘stories about what happened’, to use Robert Darnton’s phrase, circulated in a variety of forms, oral and written, formal and informal.¹¹ The use of the English word ‘news’ is very much my own heuristic device, as people in Algeria were concerned and wrote about the news, but to do so they used a variety of words in French and Arabic.¹² News, which I define as any account of recent events, is an indirect form of knowledge. It is a report of an event to a person who has not seen it but will find it

⁹ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons*, (Oxford, 2004), p.475.

¹⁰ For the anthropological literature on this issue see first on ‘flows’ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis, 1996) and then Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, (Princeton, 2005) for ‘friction’. A useful critique of recent works that challenge this flat world narrative in Middle Eastern history is Aaron Jakes, ‘A New Materialism? Globalization and Technology in the Age of Empire’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47, 2015, pp.369-381.

¹¹ Robert Darnton, ‘An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris’, *American Historical Review*, 105:1, 2000, p.1.

¹² In French, while the word *nouvelle* is an exact equivalent of the English news, other words like *actualité* or *informations* were in more common usage. In Arabic, the words *akbbar*, *anba*’ and *bushra* all had different connotations, whose subtleties are explored in more detail in chapter 3, pp.156-7.

interesting. In order to be news, the event described has to be unknown but relevant – news, therefore, inherently contains a problem of distance.¹³

This study examines the politics of news in a single territory, where the politics of distance were especially tricky: Algeria under French rule. News does not follow national boundaries, so this is no national history, but it is concerned with a specific place. Moreover, at the time, several communities of people inhabited this territory and they did not recognise each other as forming part of a single nation. Few thought that Muslim Algerians (who formed the majority of the population) and incoming European settlers could form a single political community. The law of the land enshrined these distinctions by separating people between native subjects and French citizens. Indeed, the state administering this territory saw itself as a small branch of a larger entity, the French state, which ruled both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

As a sharply divided settler colony that was also an integral part of a European state, the specificity of French Algeria makes it a particularly useful place to examine the relationship between news and distance. Much scholarship in media studies takes the nation-state for granted, identifying ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ news as self-evident categories.¹⁴ In colonial Algeria, what was ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ was wholly different depending on perspective, thus rendering the title of this thesis voluntarily ambiguous. Because this was such a divided society, no unified audience can be taken for granted. For Europeans in Algeria, events in Paris were domestic news, and news coverage primarily reflected French metropolitan and European diplomatic politics, whilst

¹³ Michael Schudson, who draws attention to news as a historically specific concept, describes news as ‘public knowledge’ but this ties news to the difficult notion of a public/private boundary, see *The Power of News*, (Cambridge, MA, 1996). Some studies acknowledge the problematic link between news and distance, though they often assume that this is only a recent problem, see Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁴ The classic and still often-cited study is Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:1, 1965, pp.64-91. For studies building on Galtung and Ruge see for instance Sophia Peterson, ‘International News Selection by the Elite Press: A Case Study’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45:2, 1981, 145-163 and more recently Tony Harcup, and Deirdre O’Neill, ‘What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited’, *Journalism Studies*, 2001, 2:2, pp.261-280.

completely ignoring incidents affecting Muslims living in the same city. By contrast, many Muslims in Algeria found local political struggles between Frenchmen in their own city to be wholly mysterious, whilst reports of developments in Cairo or Istanbul seemed very close.

Moreover, in a colonial society, different communities did not just consume alternative forms of the same media (like different newspapers), but whole different *kinds* of media. In Algeria, news operated through a whole range of media, ranging from the informal to the highly structured: discussions in cafés and markets, songs and poetry, manuscripts and postcards, newspapers, newsreels and radio reports, all of them in interaction.

The nineteenth century saw a revolution in technologies of communication, leading to the rise of a standardised global news system.¹⁵ Yet this revolution did not create an equidistant world: new technologies of information were also part of the new world of high imperialism.¹⁶ The imposition of these technologies was not neutral, linked as they were to ideas of progress and Western superiority.¹⁷ Few places make this as visible as Algeria under French rule. Most of the technology infrastructure there, from the printing press to the telegraph, the telephone, the cinema and the radio, was set up for the benefit of European settlers, disregarding the majority of inhabitants of Algeria. Depending on whether a person was European or Muslim, print was either a completely dominant or completely marginal way of acquiring news. Nor was this division confined

¹⁵ Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (eds.), *The Globalization of News*, London: Sage, 1998. Terhi Rantanen, 'The globalization of electronic news in the 19th century', *Media Culture Society*, 1997, 19:4, pp.605-620. Roland Wenzlhuemer, 'The dematerialization of telecommunication: communication centres and peripheries in Europe and the world, 1850-1920', *Journal of Global History*, 2:3, 2007, pp.345-372. James Brennan, 'International News in the Age of Empire', in Richard John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (eds.), *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet*, OUP, 2015, pp.107-127.

¹⁶ Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics 1851-1945*, (Oxford, 1991).

¹⁷ Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*, (Durham, NC, 2008). Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, (Berkeley, 2002). On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, (Berkeley, 2013).

to newspapers: widespread poverty among Muslims meant that they were rarely able to afford a radio until the days of cheaper transistor radio in the 1960s.¹⁸

Yet, somehow, all these people lived together at the same time in the same place. Though this fact might seem disarmingly simple, this synchronicity has proved difficult for many social scientists. Modernisation theory has often found places like Algeria confusing, because it seemed like completely different stages of historical development were present at once.¹⁹ In particular, the presence of multiple media systems in a single territory disturbs many assumptions about the role of media in provoking historical change. Since Marshall McLuhan's highly influential work in the 1960s, media studies often assumes that media evolve sequentially and each new medium created a new 'age' of its own. Each age then leads to a corresponding change of consciousness, and thus to a new kind of man.²⁰ A new medium has repercussions on our state of mind, to use French administrative phraseology.

Against this view, historians of information have shown that the relationship between people and media is considerably more complex. Multiple kinds of media coexist in any given society and power relations shape people's relations to the flow of news.²¹ Historians of the early modern period have shown how the development of print news interacted with other media in a predominantly illiterate society with uncontrollable

¹⁸ Even after independence, inequalities in access to media were extremely strong within Algerian society, for a study conducted in the 1970s see François Chevaldonné, *La communication inégale. L'accès aux médias dans les campagnes algériennes*, (Paris, 1981).

¹⁹ Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, (Oxford, 2002). On the way in which colonialism renders differences temporally see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, 2007). For a classic modernization theory focusing on media in the Middle East see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, (Glencoe, 1958).

²⁰ Marshall McLuhan's most explicit attempt at history is *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, (Toronto, 1962). For a critical perspective on these theories in Middle Eastern studies see Walter Armbrust, 'A History of New Media in the Arab Middle East', *Journal of Cultural Research*, 16:2-3, pp.155-174. On the notion of technologies producing their own 'age' see Gabrielle Hecht, 'Rupture Talk in the Nuclear Age: Conjugating Colonial Power in Africa', *Social Studies of Science* 32:5-6, 2002, pp.691-728.

²¹ Edwards et al., 'AHR Conversations: Historical Perspectives on the Circulation of Information', *American Historical Review*, 116:5, 2011, pp.1393-1435. Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about itself*, (London, 2014).

effects.²² Historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have regrettably not been as keen on these issues: the age of the telegraph and electronic news seems to be a much flatter landscape of uniform news, calling for different methodologies to study mass media.

It is in the study of colonial contexts that studies have shown how the control of different information systems was central to the modern period. In North Africa, Julia Clancy-Smith's *Rebel and Saint* showed the importance of information as a 'commodity to be fought over and negotiated over' in the French takeover of the Algerian-Tunisian border region.²³ Christopher Bayly's *Empire and Information* on British India used the concept of an 'information order' to describe the sum total of practices of information-gathering, exposing a dialectic between a range of social information practices and the state intelligence apparatus.²⁴ Martin Thomas' work has taken these insights to the study to the Middle East and North Africa in the interwar years, showing the centrality of intelligence practices to colonial rule.²⁵

By focusing on the dynamics of imperial rule, however, these studies have risked leaving out Europeans. One of the principal characteristics of the information order in colonial Algeria was the presence of a large settler minority, something which has not been examined in previous studies of empire and information. Clancy-Smith's study,

²² For France, see Darnton, 'Early Modern Information Society' and his *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, (Cambridge, MA, 2011) along with Roger Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime*, (Paris, 1989). For other case-studies see Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, (Oxford, 2007). John Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull*, (Oxford, 2013). Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*, (Berkeley, 2006). Will Slauter, 'Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*, 81, 2009, pp.759-792 and his unpublished dissertation 'News and Diplomacy in the Age of the American Revolution', PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 2007.

²³ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint. Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley, 1994).

²⁴ Christopher Bayly, *Empire & Information: Intelligence Gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870*, (Cambridge, 1996). For other cases, see Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763*, (Montreal, 2002) and recently Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage: The Communications Frontier in Early New England*, (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

²⁵ Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914*, (Berkeley, 2008). For another case in the French empire see Kathleen A. Keller, 'Colonial suspects: suspicious persons and police surveillance in French West Africa, 1914-1945', PhD Thesis, Rutgers University, 2007.

whilst set in Algeria, takes place in a place and time (a borderland region during the conquest) where settlers were non-existent, so they are not central to that study, while Thomas', looking at a broad swathe of the Middle East under British and French rule, does not pause to consider the specifics of Algerian colonial society. Bayly speculated that settlers in Algeria operated as intelligence agents facilitating the work of empire, while the British in India had no such allies.²⁶ By contrast, this study shows that in practice the presence of settlers often proved highly disruptive to the state's control of the orderly flow of news.

Recent scholarship has emphasised the distinctiveness of settler colonial societies, though sometimes at the risk of making them sound completely different from other situations across the world.²⁷ By contrast, I aim to portray Algeria not as exceptional but as a useful window into the problems of news in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across the world, by examining how distinctively modern technologies worked out among two very different sets of people in the same territory. I do not aim to offer a comprehensive picture of the information order over sixty years in French Algeria. Instead, I build on this scholarship to do something narrower: within this information order, how did people use news to position themselves within the world?

Algeria and the world

Algeria has rarely been the site for these kinds of question because its historiography is particularly isolated. Much like in the historiography on South Africa, the presence of settlers makes for a rather inward-looking exceptionalist historiography

²⁶ Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.8.

²⁷ There has been a resurgence of interest in settler colonialism in recent years, in particular around the creation of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*. For an overview see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler colonialism: a theoretical overview*, (Basingstoke, 2010). For a more historically specific approach see Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (eds.), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices and Legacies*, (New York, 2005).

that do not consider Algeria's presence in its wider world. The historiography traditionally focused on events in metropolitan France, obscuring Algerians' links with other places.²⁸ Because of Algeria's unique legal status as a part of France, it has played a hugely important role in metropolitan politics from the collapse of Charles X in 1830 to that of the Fourth Republic in 1958, and this is in itself a rich topic.²⁹ To take up James McDougall's critique, "The history of colonial Algeria is, first (...) primarily French history, and then the history of France-and-Algeria".³⁰ While colonial historiography emphasised Algeria's ties to France, Algerian nationalist historiography reversed this by insisting on Algeria's Arab identity and its connections to the Middle East. Both of these mirror images, by assuming that Algeria was always already fundamentally French or Arab, tended to diminish the politics involved in making it one or the other.

This thesis has benefited from and aims to participate in an increasingly rich body of scholarship in French and in English that re-inscribes Algerian history in its wider Maghrebi, Mediterranean, African, Islamic, as well as French imperial contexts.³¹ Rather than assuming that Algeria was either part of France or of the Arab world, I look at how Algeria's place within the world was uncertain even at the apex of colonial rule.

²⁸ The classic is Charles-Robert Ageron's *Les algériens musulmans et la France 1871-1919*, (Paris, 1968).

²⁹ See the two rich studies, on either end of the colonial period, on the impact of Algeria in France, in Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria*, (Ithaca, 2011) and on independence Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, (Ithaca, 2006). On the necessity of studying the formation of nation-states and colonial empires as simultaneous and mutually reinforcing processes see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (Berkeley, 1997).

³⁰ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria*, (Cambridge, 2006), p.31.

³¹ See the comprehensive new history by Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, (Paris/Algiers, 2012). On the issue of Algeria in its wider contexts more specifically see the upcoming special issue of the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* edited by Hélène Blais, Claire Fredj and Sylvie Thénault (2016). On Algeria and the Middle East see McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism* and Augustin Jomier, 'Un réformisme islamique dans l'Algérie coloniale. Oulémas ibadites et société du Mzab (c.1880-c.1970)', doctoral thesis, Université du Maine, 2015. For Algeria within the wider history of the French empire see David Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870', *Past and Present*, 210, 2011, pp.155-186. On the African dimension see James McDougall and Judith Scheele (eds.) *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, (Bloomington, 2012) and Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa*, (Cambridge, 2009).

The period studied roughly corresponds to the French Third Republic (1870-1940), a time when few contested that Algeria was legally a part of France. To be more precise, it begins at the very end of the conquest in the 1880s and finishes at the outbreak of the Second World War. Before 1881 and after 1940, Algeria's sovereignty was debated in international law. During the early conquest in the 1830s and 1840s, Algeria was very much an international issue, involving competing claims not only by the French government but also the Moroccan and Ottoman sultans, the Tunisian *bey*, and several local rulers, a struggle in which other European powers participated.³² By the late nineteenth century, however, French supremacy was rarely questioned by other powers.

A useful contrast here is with neighbouring Tunisia, which came under French control in 1881 as well, but under the very different legal regime of the Protectorate, where Mary Dewhurst Lewis has shown how issues of 'divided sovereignty' between the British, the Italians, the Tunisians and the French continued under colonial rule.³³

In the existing scholarship, only with decolonisation, it seems, does Algeria assume an international presence again. Matthew Connelly's *A Diplomatic Revolution* showed the central role of diplomatic pressure in shaping the War of Algerian Independence, tying Algeria's international prominence to the end of French rule there.³⁴

This study intentionally focuses on the period where colonialism was at its most banal, rather than on the overt warfare of the war of independence (or Algerian War, 1954-1962) which has focused the attention of many scholars. The considerably longer colonial period itself has been less studied, though by no means neglected. Increasingly,

³² Amira Bennison *Jihad and its Interpretations in pre-Colonial Morocco: State-society relations during the French conquest of Algeria*, (London, 2002). Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*. Abdeljelil Temimi, *Le Beylik de Constantine et Hadj Ahmed Bey (1830-1837)* (Tunis, 1978) and 'Réflexions sur les relations d'Abdelkader avec la Sublime Porte et l'Angleterre en 1840-41', *Atti della settimana maghribina, Cagliari*, 22-25 maggio 1969, (Milan, 1970), Raphaël Danziger, 'Abd al-Qadir's first overtures to the British and the Americans (1835-6)', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 18, 1974, pp.45-63.

³³ Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Sovereignty: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*, (Berkeley:, 2014).

³⁴ Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*. See also Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism*, (Philadelphia, 2015) and Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, (Oxford, 2016).

scholarship has rejected the war as a paradigm for the entire colonial period, insisting on the complexity of the ‘ordinary violence’ of everyday colonialism, to use Sylvie Thénault’s expression.³⁵

Because it was a part of France, it might seem like Algeria dropped off the map, and the historiography has barely dealt with Algeria’s connections with the wider world in this period. In this study, I argue that this institutional status did not cut Algeria off from the rest of the world but instead gave rise to a peculiar politics that made foreign influence extremely sensitive.

Surveillance reports reveal a persistent concern about foreign influence undermining French rule, starting with the reports of the *bureaux arabes* set up by the military during the conquest in the early nineteenth century.³⁶ This study focuses on a specific period within these reports, after the shift from military to civilian rule. Following a major insurrection in 1871, the early 1880s were a time when collective insurgency ceased, and the administration of the colony stabilised under civilian rule. This strengthened the contrast between an assertive European settler population, and a Muslim majority administered as a conquered people for whom exceptional military measures were still required.

As Isabelle Merle has noted about New Caledonia, the years 1880-1940 are ones of ‘normalisation’ in many areas of the French Empire.³⁷ The Republic claimed to exert absolute control over Algeria, employing as a method of government a rigid distinction between citizens who shared in this rule and subjects who could only endure it.³⁸

³⁵ Sylvie Thénault, *Violence ordinaire dans l’Algérie coloniale. Camps, Internements, Assignations à résidence*, (Paris,, 2012). Another important study of the normality and excess of colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century is Didier Guignard, *L’abus de pouvoir dans l’Algérie coloniale*, (Nanterre, 2010).

³⁶ Jacques Frémeaux, *Les bureaux arabes dans l’Algérie de la conquête*, (Paris, 1993).

³⁷ Isabelle Merle, ‘De la “légalisation” de la violence en contexte colonial. Le régime de l’indigénat en question’, *Politix*, 17:66, 2004. pp.137-162.

³⁸ For a history of the early years of the Third Republic see Odile Rudelle, *La République absolue 1870-1889. Aux origines de l’instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine*, (Paris, 1982). On the expansion of metropolitan peasants into citizenship under the Third Republic see the classic Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914*, (London, 1979), and the more recent Chloé

In 1881, the French Parliament passed two iconic laws that solidified the Republican-colonial regime in Algeria: together they give their starting date to this study. First, the law on the *indigénat* durably placed Algerian Muslims outside the regime of Republican law, allowing them to be ruled under a state of permanent exception which severely restricted their liberties, one of which was freedom of expression.³⁹ Second, the law on freedom of the press, still enforced in France today, created one of the most liberal regimes for those who enjoyed French citizenship. Both the *indigénat* and the *liberté de la presse*, whose interaction will be explored more fully in chapter 1, were symbolic of a settler colonial Republic which increasingly tied French citizens in Algeria to the metropolitan fold while aggressively rejecting Algerian Muslims and all the natives of the Empire to a pale beyond the rule of law. Here as elsewhere, metropolitan citizenship and colonial repression emerged conjointly: the more inclusive the Republic became towards its citizens, the more formidable its powers of containment towards its subjects.⁴⁰

French Algeria was not wholly peaceful after 1881. Conquest continued in the South and parts of the Saharan desert would only come under French control during the First World War, and even then only tenuously.⁴¹ In the North, periodic and localised bouts of violence erupted, like the events of Margueritte in 1901 or the insurrections of the Beni Chougran and the Aurès during the First World War, all of which will be dealt with in greater detail in later chapters. The First World War in particular marked an

Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens. Les républicains français face au bonapartisme rural (1848-1880)*, (Paris, 2010). On the 1880s as a turning-point in Algeria see Sylvie Thénault, in Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l'Algérie*, pp.159-160.

³⁹ Gregory Mann, 'What was the *indigénat*? The "empire of law" in French West Africa' *Journal of African History*, 50:03, 2009, pp.331-353, p.331. Olivier Lecour-Grandmaison, *De l'Indigénat. Anatomie d'un "monstre" juridique : le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l'empire français*, (Paris, 2010) and its critique by Isabelle Merle online in *Genèses*, 14 September 2011, <http://geneses.hypotheses.org/114>.

⁴⁰ Cooper and Stoler (eds.) *Tensions of Empire*. For some particularly salient examples of this in the French context see Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation and Citizenship in the French Colonies*, (Chicago, 2012). Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, and Pierre Singaravélou, *Professer l'Empire: les "sciences coloniales" en France sous la III^e République*, (Paris, 2011).

⁴¹ In the South, most of the Sahara remained free of French control well up to the turn of the twentieth century, and violent conquest was a much more protracted process there. This is in some ways a separate story: a decree in 1902 definitively separated the 'Southern Territories' under military rule from the three Northern *départements* of Oran, Algiers and Constantine. Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902*, (New York, 2009).

important caesura of mass military mobilisation and suspension of civil liberties even for Europeans. Combat in Algeria, however, was far more limited than in France, making the war once more a kind of distant conflict. In general, in this period the influence of outside events on Algeria was the biggest threat to public peace for authorities rather than disturbances within Algeria.

The end date of this study is more ambiguous. I have chosen 1940 as the most representative date, but the whole period from 1936 onwards is best seen as a gradual collapse of a certain Republican colonial model which had been stabilised in the 1880s. Algeria underwent a transformational political crisis from 1936 onwards that saw mass mobilisation around the Front Populaire government of Léon Blum, as we will see in chapter 5. Political agitation and diplomatic tension in the long build-up to the Second World War saw many of the laws characteristic of the unequal liberties of the Third Republic gradually suspended in 1938-9.⁴² Finally, in 1940, the Republican régime itself collapsed under German invasion, ushering in a brief period of Vichy rule. In 1942, Algeria was invaded by Anglo-American forces, ending a century of nearly unquestioned French military dominance over that territory.

The period chosen, therefore, is the one in which powers outside France exerted the least influence on Algerian territory. Algeria ceased to be an international issue, that is an issue between sovereign states. Instead, the primary dividing line was within Algeria, between a growing European population and an impoverished Muslim population which shared the same space.

⁴² On this joint European and colonial crisis in the late 1930s see Martin Thomas, 'European Crisis, Colonial Crisis? Signs of Fracture in the French Empire from Munich to the Outbreak of the War', *International History Review*, 32:3, 2010, pp.389-413.

This study deals with foreign news in that it focuses on how accounts of events that originated outside Algeria circulated within it. In colonial Algeria, however, it is not clear who the foreigners were. Different groups within Algeria were ‘foreign’ to each other, making the internal and external boundaries of that society unclear. Or, to be more precise, they were strangers to each other. A stranger, as defined by the sociologist Georg Simmel, is not the same as somebody about which there is no knowledge at all (in French, an *inconnu*). Rather the stranger is ‘an element of the group itself’, only one that is recognisably distinct, a character both ‘near and far at the same time’.⁴³ In French, the words for foreigner and stranger are one and the same: *étranger* dances uneasily between diplomatic and intimate relations, from the official-sounding *affaires étrangères* to the psychological alienation of Camus’ *L’étranger*.⁴⁴ This study looks at the blurry relationship between foreigners and colonial strangers. By focusing on the uncertain geography of outside events, it offers a fresh perspective on social relations within colonial society.

There is no consensus among scholars of Algeria as to how to designate different populations living in that territory. Under colonial rule, the law recognised different types of people in Algeria. The first were French citizens, who were either born in metropolitan France, Europeans who had acquired French citizenship in Algeria, or Algerian Jews. There were also European foreigners (*étrangers*), most frequently Spanish, Italian or Maltese, who whilst not citizens enjoyed certain privileges, and tended to acquire French citizenship from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, thus forming

⁴³ Georg Simmel, ‘The Stranger’, in Kurt Wolff (transl.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, (New York, 1950), pp.402-408.

⁴⁴ Arabic has many different equivalents of the word ‘foreigner’. Some words focus on specific characteristics such as people who are not Arabic-speakers (*‘ajami*) or, especially in North Africa, of Christian/European origin (*rumi*). One of the most common and generic words, is *barrani*, literally outsider, which is also used in some Berber languages. The closest equivalent to ‘foreigner’ in the sense used in this thesis, is probably *gharib*, which carries the same connotations of being an outsider and of being strange.

an increasingly uniform ‘European’ community. Facing this minority, which formed 10-15% of the total population throughout the period of this study, was a majority of people variously referred to as *indigènes* (natives), *musulmans* (Muslims) or *sujets* (subjects), that is people who did not enjoy the privileges of French citizenship. It is important to note that ‘Muslim’ in Algeria is a technical term that does not necessarily mean that a person actively practised Islam. Rather, as Laure Blévis has shown, ‘Muslim’ was a racial category: for instance, legal ‘Muslims’ could convert to Catholicism but they would still not enjoy the privileges of citizenship.⁴⁵ Algerian Jews, finally, though recognised as ‘native’ (*indigène*) were naturalised as French in 1870. In the period of this study, therefore, they were a peculiar subset of French citizens with strong social and cultural links to their Muslim neighbours.⁴⁶

Colonial attempts to categorise populations are still fresh, and some of the categories used at the time, like *indigène* (native) are still offensive. Others, like *algérien* (Algerian) changed meaning across the period studied: in the late nineteenth century, an ‘Algerian’ was a European settler (along the model of ‘American’ and ‘Australian’), while by the mid-twentieth century it usually meant a Muslim, making it difficult to use the same words as the sources. No choice of terminology is perfect.

This study uses the term ‘Algerian’ to refer to all people living on Algerian territory, regardless of their legal status. ‘European’ refers to a person of French, Spanish, Italian or other European descent who came to live in Algeria under colonial rule, whilst ‘Muslim’ refers to the majority-colonised population, a term that was used consistently throughout this period for people to describe themselves. At times, people will

⁴⁵ Kamel Kateb, *Européens, “indigènes” et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962)*, (Paris, 2001). Laure Blévis, ‘La citoyenneté française au miroir de la colonisation: étude des demandes de naturalisation des “sujets français” en Algérie coloniale’, *Genèses*, 53, 2003, pp.25-47. Alexis Spire, ‘Semblables et pourtant différents. La citoyenneté paradoxale des “Français musulmans d’Algérie” en métropole’, *Genèses*, 53, 2003, pp.48-68. Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, (London/New York, 1995). Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*.

⁴⁶ This was not the case for Jews living in the Southern territories of the Mزاب that remained legally ‘natives’, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Sabaran Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*, (Chicago, 2014).

specifically be referred to as citizens and subjects when emphasising differential access to civil rights, and I have also used occasionally the language of ‘settler’ and ‘native’ (*colon/indigène*) to emphasise this dynamic when paraphrasing texts which employ this worldview. Use of such terms, of course, does not imply their endorsement – in other historiographies, like the historiography of South Africa, scholars use colonial- and apartheid-era categories like ‘black’, ‘African’ and ‘coloured’, their use only acknowledging that these categories had legal and social meaning.

With this terminology, this study makes an attempt to examine the full range of complex interactions across colonial society in Algeria. This is a history written with sources in French and Arabic but also in Italian, Spanish and English. Most Algerians neither spoke nor read French nor formal Arabic, instead speaking either a vernacular, unwritten dialect of Arabic or one of several Berber languages, and when possible I have made use of the few documents recorded in those primarily spoken languages as well.

New research on colonial Algeria has broadened the field of inquiry to various aspects of social history, and puzzled as to how to put together previously separate histories of Europeans and Muslims in the same territory. Whilst Charles-Robert Ageron’s still classic *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine* (1979) separated developments in the European and Muslim spheres in entirely separate chapters, recent work has attempted to show the extent and limits of interactions, for instance in terms of shared political practices.⁴⁷ Studying the ‘colonial situation’ in Algeria, to use George Balandier’s 1951 expression, involves putting together two very different bodies of sources, chronologies

⁴⁷ Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine vol. 2*, Paris, (1979). See the special issue of *Le Mouvement social* on the “monde du contact” in colonial Algeria in, edited by Emmanuel Blanchard and Sylvie Thénault, 236:3, 2011, and Jan C. Jansen, ‘Celebrating the “Nation” in a Colonial Context: “Bastille Day” and the Contested Public Space in Algeria, 1880-1939’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 85:1, 2013, pp.36-68. For some attempts to write social histories of a range of actors in colonial Algeria see Christelle Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale. Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc (1830-1962)*, (Paris, 2003) and Hannah-Louise Clark, ‘Doctoring the Bled: Medical auxiliaries and the administration of rural life in colonial Algeria, 1904-1954’, PhD, Princeton University, 2014. On Europeans see David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 and more recently Hugo Vermeren, ‘Des “hermaphrodites de nationalité”? Colonisation maritime en Algérie et naturalisation des marins-pêcheurs italiens de Bône (Annaba) des années 1860 à 1914’, *REMM*, 137, 2015, pp.135-154.

and questions used to study two populations.⁴⁸ As such, the problem is frequently one of optics: when one zooms in to understand the subtleties of settler society, the majority of Algerians recede in a blurry background, while the opposite is also true. Holding the two in sharp focus is a tricky act, and one that can also run the risk of creating a false sense of balance between the two.⁴⁹ Some of the most effective attempts to do this have been at the microhistorical level, especially in the work of Fanny Colonna that shows the subtleties of everyday social interactions between people who knew each other well but were nonetheless split apart by huge structural forces.⁵⁰ This study draws heavily from these approaches, adding to them a focus on the circulation of information, a topic on which the Algerian historiography is scarce.⁵¹

In this study, the opposite of ‘foreign’ is not ‘national’, for nobody was a national in this place: citizens in Algeria were nationals of France, while subjects enjoyed no political participation in any national at all. From this starting-point, we can begin to reconsider assumptions between people’s sense of community and changes in media

⁴⁸ Georges Balandier, ‘La situation coloniale: approche théorique’, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. 11, 1951, pp.44-79. Gregory Mann, ‘Anti-Colonialism and Social Science: Georges Balandier, Madeira Keita, and the “Colonial Situation” in French Africa’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2013, 55:1, pp.92-119.

⁴⁹ This study does not attempt to write a kind of ‘symmetrical’ history giving both sides equal weight, which can result in reinforcing an impression of separate sides. For a methodological defence of this approach for the different context of early modern Indonesia see Romain Bertrand, *L’Histoire à parts égales. Récits d’une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*, (Paris, 2011).

⁵⁰ Fanny Colonna, *Le Meunier, les moines et le bandit. Des vies quotidiennes dans l’Aurès (Algérie) du XXe siècle*, (Paris, 2010) and *La Vie Ailleurs. Des “Arabes” en Corse à la fin du XIXe siècle*, (Paris, 2015). For other cases see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c.1800-1900*, (Berkeley, 2012). Edmund Burke III, ‘The Mediterranean before colonialism. Fragments from the life of ‘Ali bin ‘Uthman al-Hammi in the 18th and 19th centuries’, in Julia Clancy-Smith (ed.), *North Africa, Islam and the Mediterranean world* (London, 2001). Jessica Marglin, ‘Mediterranean Modernity through Jewish Eyes: the Transimperial life of Abraham Ankawa’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 20:2, 2014, pp.34-68.

⁵¹ Clancy-Smith’s *Rebel and Saint* is possibly the only work that looks at a range of means of information, though that is not its primary preoccupation. Scholarship on journalism specifically will be addressed in chapter 1. Beyond the press, there is the fascinating study of the social role of the café Omar Carlier ‘Le café maure. Sociabilité masculine et effervescence citoyenne (Algérie XVIIe-XXe siècles)’, *Annales*, 45 :4, 1990, 975-1003. Annick Lacroix’s recent thesis on the postal system provides a comprehensive examination of the development of communications infrastructure within Algeria, see ‘Une histoire sociale et spatiale de l’Etat dans l’Algérie colonisée. L’administration des postes, télégraphes et téléphones du milieu du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale’, Thèse de Doctorat, ENS Cachan, 2014. Guignard’s *Abus de pouvoir* delves into the shape of the information order at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, Rebecca Scales offers an insightful examination of the beginnings of the radio in ‘Subversive Sound: Transnational Radio, Arabic Recordings, and the Dangers of Listening in French Colonial Algeria, 1934-1939’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:2, 2010, 384-417.

which have been essential to the study of nationalism. In *Imagined Communities*, whose title has become a catch-phrase for nationalism, Benedict Anderson made the argument that the most important and widespread modern form of political organisation, the nation, emerged because of ‘print-capitalism’, that is the way in which the printing press, starting in the sixteenth century, creates unified markets of readers for its consumption, readers that could imagine themselves being connected by the invisible experience of reading the same text altogether at the same time.⁵² This claim was hardly novel, indeed McLuhan himself noted some twenty years before, that ‘there cannot be nationalism where there has not first been an experience of vernacular in printed form.’⁵³ Many people have latched onto this idea of nation as an ‘imagined community’, but fewer have come to terms with Anderson’s central claim, that the rise of print-capitalism led to the nation overtaking other forms of imagined communities.⁵⁴ There are, after all, many other types of imagined communities, some rooted in more local understandings, others, especially religious ones, far wider than nations. In fact, Anderson himself expressed dissatisfaction with his argument in later years.⁵⁵

As we shall see in the coming chapters, print news did not follow national boundaries. The international news system that emerged in the nineteenth century generated standardised telegraphic dispatches available as commercial products across the world. In Algeria, furthermore, we must struggle to understand how nationalism arose in a society where most people read no newspapers at all, and those that did read publications from Paris and Cairo as much as from Algiers.

⁵² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London, [1983] 2006).

⁵³ McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 261.

⁵⁴ See the debate between Charles D. Smith on the one side and Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29, 1997, pp.607-622 and *ibid*, 31, 1999, pp.81-102. For an example of the limits of the usefulness of focusing only on print-capitalism in North Africa, Jonathan Wyrzten ‘Colonial State-Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43, 2011, pp.227-249.

⁵⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the anti-colonial imagination*, (London, 2005).

By assuming that print caused new communities into existence, Anderson assumed that processes of mediation came first and imaginations came later. In the process he bypassed two problems which lie at the core of this study: one, that people intentionally tried to create a community through launching a new medium (like a newspaper), and that this process often failed to have the desired effect. Second, different people consuming the same media could end up with drastically different imaginations. Rather than assuming a relationship between print and the nation, this study looks at the broader relationship between news and power in a given place.

Archives and Structure

Taking the whole range of colonial society, there were many ways of consuming news in colonial Algeria, ranging from the informal to the institutionalised. The least organised were discussions of men in cafés, markets, and in gatherings like festivals. In rural areas, men would go to the nearest market-town not just to sell their goods, but to collect and share news. There, they might encounter a slightly more formal genre of news through the *meddah*, a public poet who sang of important events. Beyond the realm of speech and song lay the world of written news accessible to the literate minority. Through postcards, letters and manuscripts, Algerians shared written news with varying degrees of privacy. Far more public and formalised was the newspaper, predominantly in French, but also in Arabic, Spanish, Italian, and Judeo-Arabic. Illustrations, sometimes included in newspapers, sometimes separate as posters or postcards, also offered a different genre of visual news. The early 1900s saw first the development of newsreels in cinemas, which became an important mode of news consumption in urban areas, and later, oral news became more organised in turn with the rise of the recording industry

and especially the radio in the 1930s. Access to these forms of news depended on regional and geographical factors as well as on one's social and legal status.

In the eyes of contemporaries, those who had access to news were the powerful: Europeans, male, urban, rich (these categories did not always overlap). The best example of this is that news was heavily gendered. In the legitimate ordering of society, it was men, especially in Muslim but also in European circles, who went out into the world and sought its news, while women stayed at home. The domestic space was gendered female, while men went outside and encountered foreigners.⁵⁶ State authorities participated in this patriarchal order and ruled through men: authorities feared women's contact with the outside so little that Muslim women did not even need passports, as it was assumed that they would only move under the authority of a male passport-bearer.⁵⁷ Spaces of sociability, like the café, were closed off to women, and news often came indirectly through husbands and male relatives. Forms of access to news shifted through the period concerned: for European women, mass literacy at the turning of the twentieth century allowed access to printed news. For Muslim women, the irruption of the radio in people's homes in the 1930s changed access to news. Yet sources are virtually silent on their involvement, and gender norms conspired to make it difficult to know what their relationship to news was. This is not to say that women had no access to news, but that they were not seen to have any.

Because news was linked to power, the most abundant sources come from the state, which this study relies on. While there are many potential ways of writing a history of news, I do not just use state sources as a means to uncover something else, but take their very existence as evidence of the political importance of news. This is not an

⁵⁶ On the gendering of the inside/outside divide see Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, (Paris, 1998). Though Bourdieu's work was based on an ethnographic study in Algeria he conducted in the 1960s, it is best taken for its theoretical value than as a description of Algerian society.

⁵⁷ Jules Cambon *Instruction sur la surveillance politique et administrative des indigènes algériens et des musulmans étrangers*, (Algiers, 1895).

attempt to read against the grain of the colonial state and uncover a hidden world of cosmopolitan Algerians free from the constraining influences of colonialism. Indeed, as we shall see, even those Algerians who did move abroad still had deep links with the French state.⁵⁸ Instead of seeing the state as a troublesome obstacle to be surmounted to find an underlying social reality, I see archives as ‘condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed or biased sources’, following on from Ann Laura Stoler’s work on the Dutch East Indies.⁵⁹

Surveillance reports like the one described in the opening make up the core of this study. They reveal an official concern with the opinions of people who were not entitled to have any. Work on earlier periods of French history has shown that state authorities were heavily concerned with the subversive opinions of subjects who had no political power.⁶⁰ In Algeria, the presence of a large subject Muslim population with no civil rights saw some of these older administrative traditions reworked.

Surveillance reports therefore display a sensitivity to news as it worked for a cross-section of people living in Algeria. Newspapers, paradoxically, are difficult sources to use for a history of news. The volume of newspapers read in Algeria over a sixty-year period, which include those printed locally as well as newspapers printed in France and throughout the Mediterranean, is far too abundant to be read in its entirety. Moreover, different newspapers did not necessarily carry different news. Newspapers have been consulted selectively to delve into individual case-studies, using collections contained in

⁵⁸ This is a danger of the approach followed by Allan Christelow, *Algerians Without Borders: The Making of a Global Frontier Society*, (Gainesville, FL, 2012). On Algerians abroad who remained linked to the French state see Noureddine Amara, ‘Les nationalités d’Amina Hanim, une pétition d’hérédité à la France (1896-1930), *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 137, 2015, pp.49-72 and Luc Chantre, ‘Se rendre à la Mecque sous la IIIème République: Contrôle et organisation des déplacements des pèlerins du Maghreb et du Levant entre 1880 et 1939’, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 78, 2009, pp. 202-227. For an analogous case in South Asia see Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire*, (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

⁵⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton, 2009), p.20. By contrast, see James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, 1990). Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (Durham, NC, 1999).

⁶⁰ For the eighteenth century see Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in 18th century France*, (Philadelphia, 1995). On the nineteenth century see François Ploux, *De bouche à oreille. Naissance et propagation des rumeurs dans la France du XIX^e siècle*, (Paris, 2003) and Karila-Cohen, *L’Etat des esprits*.

the French and Algerian National Libraries as well as in local *wilaya* archives in Algeria. When they have been used, it is with an eye to form, to how individual publications were constructed and their broad coverage, and only rarely for specific coverage of an event.

By contrast, surveillance reports provide a much more comprehensive view of news circulation which scanning through an individual medium (like newspapers) does not allow. In surveillance reports we find out about songs, riots, and a whole panorama of news-consumption of which newspapers are only one part in a society which was largely illiterate. Unlike other types of state archives, surveillance archives contain documents that are not produced by the administration itself, acting like a fishing net that captured random bits of paper produced by a number of actors: manuscripts, private letters, and newspaper clippings. This study very much comes out of the thrills of the archives and its unexpected encounters with people who never intended to be trapped in paper.⁶¹

In particular, this project is based on two archival backbones which provide continuous accounts throughout the sixty years of the period studied: archives from the Government-General of Algeria and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most of the surveillance reports come from the archives of the *Bureau des Affaires indigènes*, the Native Affairs Bureau of the Government-General of Algeria (GGA) in Algiers. This was the office in charge of determining policy on the administration of Muslim Algerians, and it collected information from administrators across the territory. Though the *Affaires indigènes* series theoretically only deals with Muslims, it in fact contains a great deal of accidental information on Europeans and Jews as well.

For the 1880s and 1890s, these documents are usefully complemented by the *Fonds Ministériel*, the highest-level correspondence between the Governor-General in Algiers and his superiors in the Ministry of Interior in Paris, which offers a more

⁶¹ Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive*, (Paris, 1989).

comprehensive view of political events in Algeria, including those affecting Europeans. For the 1930s, files coming from the Governor-General's Cabinet allow for a similar panoramic view.⁶² All of these are housed in the ANOM in Aix-en-Provence, although a slightly random division of documents at independence means that some of them have been consulted in the Algerian National Archive (ANA) in Birkhadem, Algiers, as well as in the archives of the *wilayat* of Algiers, Oran and Constantine. Difficulties of archival access in Algeria meant that I have used those sources less than expected, though they were useful for specific points of interest like local associational life.

Second, essential to this project has been correspondence between the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GGA, housed in the diplomatic archives of La Courneuve. The GGA reported back to the Interior Ministry, but diplomatic officials at the MAE corresponded with their counterparts in Algiers regularly to keep track of how diplomatic tensions might affect Algeria and also how Algerians living abroad might affect France's diplomatic relations. An extremely rich source for Algerian connections with the outside world and the French state's attempt to manage them, this correspondence has been very little used by historians. Diplomatic reports from other French consular posts, also in La Courneuve, have fleshed out particular cases.

For specific case-studies, British and Italian diplomatic archives, respectively at Kew in London and the Farnesina in Rome, have been explored to provide an alternative perspective when these European powers were involved in Algeria. The National Archives of Tunisia also provided invaluable material on the print industry in Tunis, which was important to news circulation in Algeria.

⁶² Sources at either end of the period are richer than in the middle, as there is a significant gap in coverage between c.1907 and c.1930. The archives of the Fonds Ministériel in the Interior Ministry between 1907 to 1945 have disappeared. For the 1930s, these are complemented by the cabinet files of Governor-Generals. Governors-General before Jules Carde (1930-1935) and Georges Le Beau (1935-1940) appear, like many other Third Republic civil servants, to have taken their papers with them when they left office.

Because all documents removed from Algeria at independence in 1962 were placed together in the ANOM, it has also been possible to delve deeper into local levels of administration, occasionally using the archives of the lower-level *préfectures* of Algiers, Oran and Constantine, or even of individual communes, which I have done to construct the case-studies which make up individual chapters. Finally, some surveillance documents from metropolitan services in the interwar period are to be found in the Service Historique de la Défense in Vincennes, especially in the ‘Fonds Moscou’, though these were not used thoroughly.

On top of these state archives, I have used a range of other sources for selected case-studies, including memoirs, published collections of oral poetry, and private papers, especially those of the amateur ethnographer Joseph Desparmet at the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme in Aix-en-Provence.

The thesis is structured in six chapters [**Figure 1**]. The first chapter examines the relationship between news and the printing press, charting the development of newspapers across the colonial period. It shows that newspapers were central to colonial modernity, examining legal attempts to limit the printing of newspapers to French citizens as well as the limitations of trying to control news through newspapers. Chapter 2 then delves deeper into the unintended consequences of this spread of newspapers. It takes a local incident in 1897 to show how telegraphic news reconfigured Algerians’ relationship to global Islam. In particular, it argues that the intensification of news circulation reinforced local tensions between Europeans and Muslims in Algeria rather than diminishing them. Whilst chapter 2 delves into how news reconfigured space, the next one deals with how news reconfigured time. Chapter 3 looks at different news announcing the same event, the outbreak of war in 1914, to see how news could move between different senses of time across colonial society, forging a shared sense of an event. The next three chapters then look at how actors used news to locate themselves

politically. Chapter 4 takes two case-studies to examine how Algerians used news of other European powers to make demands on the French government. By looking at one case-study about Britain in the 1890s, and another to do with Italy from 1911 to 1939, it traces the political possibilities of using foreign news to stress loyalty to the French Republic. Chapter 5 moves in closer, looking at the relationship of political parties within Algeria rather than their relationship to Paris. It also moves forward in time, focusing on a series of activists in the interwar period. By focusing on partisan political mobilisation, it shows that the observation of foreign events was essential to formulating political positions within Algeria. Finally, chapter 6 narrows in further still. Looping back to the start in 1881, it takes a microhistorical approach, focusing on a single individual and his creative uses of foreign news to gain social advancement, tying previous threads together to reconsider the relationship between news and the power of the state.

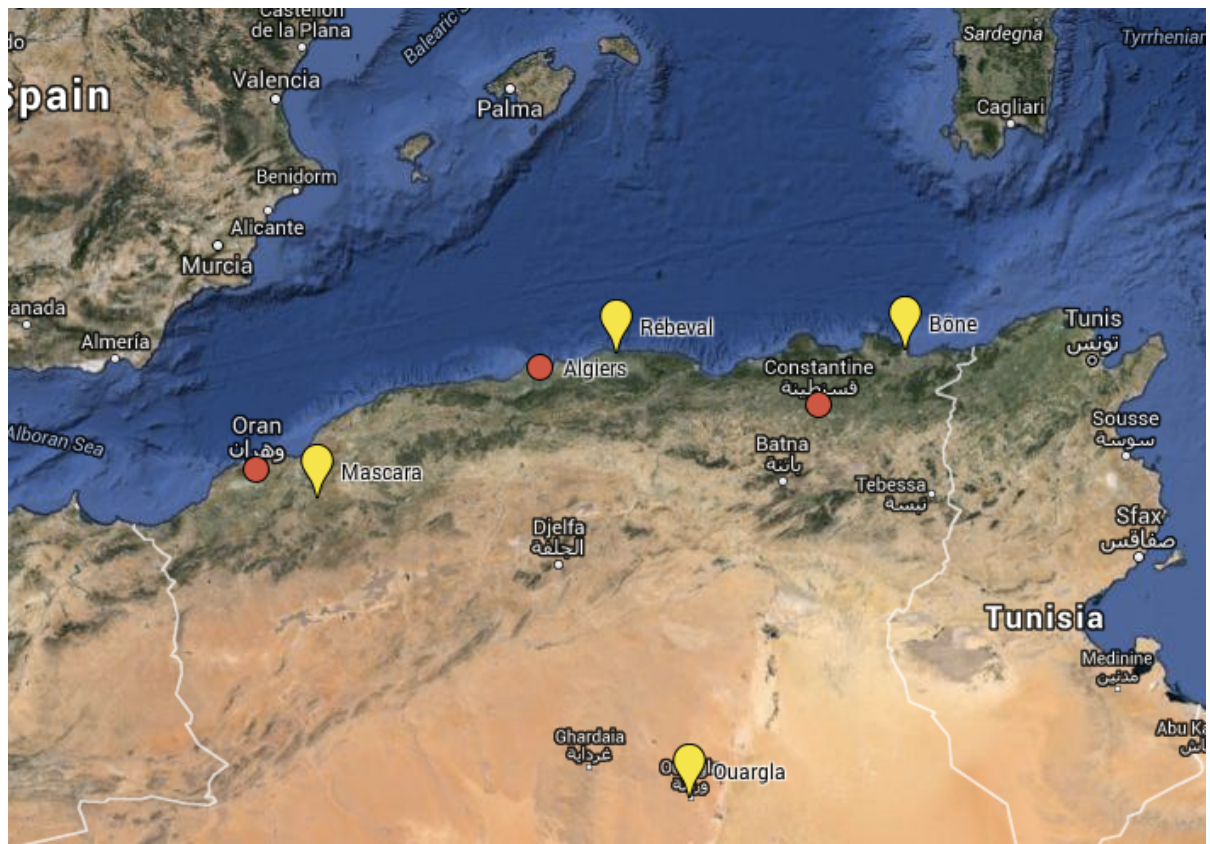


Figure 1 Map indicating the administrative centres of Algeria under French rule (red), as well as the locations of the principal case-studies (yellow). Made by author using Google Maps.

1. Magical Printing: Newspapers and Citizenship



Figure 2 *Algiers, Place du Gouvernement, facing the Jama' al-jadid*, c.1890-99, ANOM 8Fi443/95.

Algiers, May 1881. On the Place du Gouvernement [**figure 2**], the heart of the city connecting the heights of the Casbah to the harbour, little kiosks sell the local newspapers: *L'Akhbar*, *La Vigie algérienne* or perhaps *Le Petit colon algérien*, prized for its illustrated supplement. A shoal of raggamuffin street kids, the *yaouleds* (from *ya awlad!* 'hey kids!'), shout out the day's headlines in between two shoe-polishing jobs.¹

¹ On the *yaouled* and their marginal position in Algerian colonial society see Christelle Taraud, 'Les *yaouleds*: entre marginalisation sociale et sédition politique', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irrégulière"*, 10, 2008, pp.59-74. For a romanticised description of Algiers cafés in the late nineteenth-century, see Louis Bertrand's retrospective panorama of arriving in Algiers in 1891 in *Alger*, (Paris, 1938).

In the cafés under the arcades, European men drink cheap anisette and comment on the French army's success in neighbouring Tunisia, where the treaty initiating the French Protectorate has just been signed. In the harbour just below, boats offload passengers from Marseille, along with a few newspapers from the metropole.

The police scour packages looking for more explosive Arabic prints. The city is bustling, as Muslims flock in from the countryside 'eager for news concerning these events'.¹ Their movements are watched and their packages systematically searched: the head of the Algiers police, Étienne Delignac, has been tasked with a 'special surveillance (...) as to what Algerian Muslims might say or do on the occasion of events happening at the Tunisian border.'² Rising numbers of private letters in Arabic are captured in the mail, and two trunks full of scripture, brought back by a Moroccan traveller returning from Mecca, are seized by anxious policemen who cannot read their contents.³ In the *cafés maures*, where Muslim men meet to drink coffee and chatter, in the bath-houses, in the *fondouks* where merchants barter and sleep, all the 'places where Muslims gather', the police watches over potential subversive activity.⁴ In the house of a certain Mustaphaould el Malitim, Muslim notables and *marabouts* assemble to read the newspapers and comment the latest news far from prying ears. Crowds form in the streets around a blind man nicknamed Adoul, who sings the praise of former heroes of Islam, and announces the imminent defeat of the Christians at the hands of the Turkish boats that rush, already, he promises, towards Tunis. The *meddab*, or public bard, singing in an elegant variant of the Algerian dialect of Arabic, is promptly arrested, like many others.⁵ A family of Italian ambulant musicians, resentful that their home nation is losing out to its rightful

¹ 'Rapport spécial du commissariat central de police d'Alger', 2 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

² *idem*, 26 April 1881.

³ *idem*, 23 May 1881.

⁴ *idem*, 27 April 1881.

⁵ Traditionally paid by men of power to extol their virtues (*maddaba* literally means to praise or extol), the *meddab* were often regarded with suspicion by French authorities. Equivalents of the *meddab* existed for languages other than Arabic. In Berber-speaking areas, *amusnaw* (plural *imusnawen*) were wandering wise men who spread their lore and news.

claim to Tunisia as a colony, is deported back to the region of Naples, though what seditious music they played is not recorded.⁶ News is read, news is spoken, news is sung, and though Tunis is some five hundred kilometers away, Algiers is buzzing.

Delignac's reports allow us a peek into a rich world of news, encompassing written and oral media, print and manuscript, serious and rowdy, public and private, in formal Arabic, Algerian dialect, Italian, and French. There are conversations in cafés (typically segregated between European and Muslim cafés), newspapers, manuscript correspondence, professional singers (in Italian and Arabic) and personal conversations. The final ingredient is Delignac's report itself, part of that great apparatus of news circulation that is the surveillance state.

Delignac was more concerned about some kinds of news than others. On a good day he could cheerfully report 'no news other than that already mentioned in the papers has arrived directly or indirectly to the public.'⁷ This was the standard administrative phrasing: legitimate news was in the newspapers, illegitimate news came from anywhere else. From the police's perspective, the ecosystem of news in Algiers was cleft in two. On one side lay the legitimate dealings of the newspapers, an industry dominated by Frenchmen, on the other was everything else, a nebulous illegitimate world of Muslim gossip and Italian vagabonds. Delignac compared the news outside the newspapers to gunpowder, both items of contraband likely to detonate a volatile social situation.⁸ Among all the news circulating in Algiers in 1881, newspapers were the most official, authoritative and prestigious medium.

Newspapers dominated the news system of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries so powerfully that stories and the medium that carried them became conflated:

⁶ 'Rapport spécial du commissariat central de police d'Alger', 1 May 1881.

⁷ *idem*, 1 May 1881.

⁸ *idem*, 4 May 1881.

it became difficult to think of news not taking the form of headlines.⁹ It is a characteristic of information media that people often think they change society so deeply as to create an 'age': people in colonial Algeria thought they were living in the age of the newspaper.¹⁰ Though newspapers were only one of many forms of news circulation, they had a uniquely powerful aura.

For the Frenchmen that conquered Algeria, the printing press was a symbol of civilisation. The object itself and its periodical product were usually designated through a single word, *la presse*. The newspaper was 'both tool and manifestation of modernization'.¹¹ *La presse* was not just one medium among many, its existence spread reason and progress. The two, the newspaper and its myth of progress, were inseparable in the eyes of contemporaries and many of the historians who have followed them.

Print and progress were linked, but it was not clear how exactly one led to the other. Once a printing press appeared, it seemed modernisation would just follow somehow. It mattered little how the newspaper itself, a rather flimsy object of paper, would circulate and change the lives of people on the streets of Algiers - only that there were people printing. As the appropriately-named *La Presse*, one of the great dailies of mid-nineteenth century France, noted in 1852, the impact of the press on people's thinking was important but mysterious: 'The press (...) is no more known or defined in its uses than electricity: the press is electricity applied to the matters of thought.'¹² As the causal relationship between the object and its social effect were poorly understood, the belief in the power of the press can be described as a form of magical thinking.

⁹ On the enduring difficulty of conceptualising news beyond the newspaper see John Maxwell Hamilton and Heidi Tworek, 'The natural history of the news: an epigenetic study', *Journalism*, 2016, pp.1-17.

¹⁰ For new technologies creating their 'age' see Hecht, 'Rupture Talk in the Nuclear Age'. For a critique of this on the scholarship on media in the Middle East see Armbrust, 'A History of New Media'.

¹¹ Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912*, Harvard University Press, 2004, p.10.

¹² Paulin Limayrac in *La Presse*, 5 January 1852. The definition then found itself into the *Grand dictionnaire du XIXe siècle* and became commonplace, see Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China*.

In actuality, the power of print to spread news depended as much on those reading it as on those printing it. Printing in and of itself did not bring about social transformation. In Algeria, this was eminently visible because despite the flood of newspapers, most people could not read: while European men and women were overwhelmingly literate by the late nineteenth-century, by the end of our period in 1936, only 2.1% of Muslim men could read French.¹³

The printing press came to Algeria with the French army, which launched the first newspapers on Algerian soil. Its development was then shaped by the peculiarities of settler rule and Algeria's legal status as a part of France. The newspaper industry is one of the most telling examples of the extreme inequalities of settler colonialism. Europeans in colonial Algeria published and read a proliferation of papers. Per capita, they published even more than equivalents in metropolitan France. By contrast, Muslim Algerians, 85-90% of the population depending on the period, had an underdeveloped press industry. No daily newspaper intended for Muslims was published until independence (with one brief exception which will be discussed in this chapter), and it was not for lack of trying. In a place where the vast majority of the population remained illiterate until well after independence in 1962, newspapers were only ever one of many ways of getting news. Unlike in metropolitan France or in many places in Europe at the time, newspapers in Algeria were dominant, but not hegemonic.¹⁴

Throughout the colonial period, the right to publish newspapers freely was inseparable from citizenship, and thus, from political power. Only adult male French citizens were thought to be endowed with the kind of rationality that allowed them to print and vote. Shortly after the invasion of Tunisia, in the summer of 1881, the French Parliament passed two laws that instituted a division between those who could publish

¹³ Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens, 1883-1939*, (Algiers, 1975). p.16.

¹⁴ The phrase is adapted from Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India*, (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

and those who could not: the 29 July 1881 law on the freedom of the press, and the 28 June 1881 law on the *indigénat*. Seemingly unconnected, the combination of these two laws would shape the information order within Algeria for over fifty years. They led to a world in which the state allowed French citizens to publish freely, while it prevented Muslims not only from publishing, but even speaking, assembling and moving around Algeria.

Algeria's legal integration as a part of France made this inequality even sharper than in other French possessions. Unlike in other colonies, in Algeria the Government-General was incapable of controlling settler publications. In the same year of 1881, the French army invaded neighbouring Tunisia, setting up the less extreme rule of the Protectorate. Under this regime, Tunisia developed both a more regulated European newspaper industry, and a more flourishing Muslim newspaper industry, despite having a smaller population than Algeria. In Algeria, printing like citizenship seemed absolute: either one was a full citizen of the Republic or one had no rights.

Muslim élites in Algeria bought into the belief in magical printing. They too conflated the printing press with the political power to be free, modern men. They campaigned to have their own publications, believing that newspapers were the key to citizenship. If colonial rule was the rule of the printing upon the unprinting, only by publication could one resist it.

The law only focused on who published newspapers, not who read them. It assumed that those who read were merely receiving a message. However, newspapers never behaved in the way they were supposed to. Once printed, the newspaper-object had a life of its own, circulating to unexpected aims. Sometimes, those reading it would interpret its news differently from those who had printed it. The space in between the newspaper as it should work, as a symbol of orderly information, and the real newspaper

that always seemed to end up in the wrong hands, open to unorthodox interpretations, was a source of great official anxiety.

This chapter examines the belief that newspapers were the best way for those in power to control news, and the consequences this had on a messy environment of news circulation. As such, this chapter is not a history of the press. Histories of the press, which describe the life and death of newspapers, run into a significant methodological problem. They risk confusing what is left as source (the newspaper) with the world around it, which led both to the production of the newspaper and its eventual reading. The newspaper, even at its zenith, was only ever one link in the chain of news circulation.

Most disturbingly, historians have taken up wholesale the belief in magical printing, that is that the printing press gave its users absolute power to transform society. They have written histories of the press focusing exclusively on those who printed, chasing obsessively the first newspaper as the mark of the entry of a country into modernity. Historians of print in the Middle East and North Africa, instead of questioning the relationship between print technology and social change in Europe, have taken up wholesale the narrative that print led to the Reformation and hunted for an equivalent social transformation brought on by print in the Islamic world.¹⁵ In Algeria, this is particularly absurd as Algerians read newspapers well before they published their own, and the majority of Algerians never read any newspapers before they gained independence in 1962.

Some studies have traced the development of the Algerian Muslim press, or less frequently, which is ironic given it was much more numerous, examined the European

¹⁵ The main work, which largely leaves out North Africa, is Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: a History*, (Oxford, 1995). For a recent example of this approach see Nile Green, 'Journeymen, Middlemen: Travel, Transculture, and Technology in the Origins of Muslim Printing', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41, 2009, pp.203-224.

press, but always separately, as if the two existed in different worlds.¹⁶ Whether they discuss the European or Muslim press, in these studies the social context and impact of the press is unimportant.¹⁷ Like the administration before them, historians have focused on who published newspapers and their opinions, treating newspapers as transparent mouthpieces for what ‘really’ matters: political competition between various leaders and groups. Due to a tendency to divide between the European and Muslim press, it has been impossible to write a history of print as a whole. And yet, as Zahir Ihaddaden’s rich work on the rise of the ‘native’ press in Algeria has made clear, it is not very helpful to distinguish which publications were authentically ‘native’ and which were not, given that many of the early ‘Muslim’ newspapers were published by sympathetic Europeans, sometimes impersonating Muslims.¹⁸ Most importantly, many Muslims read newspapers intended for European audiences.

In 1959, Frantz Fanon, the Martinican psychiatrist who had joined the insurrection of the FLN, wrote that Algeria gave the ‘impression of a closed and privileged world of colonialist information.’¹⁹ Writing of the radio, he observed that the messages of settler media ‘are received only by the representatives of power in Algeria

¹⁶ The exception is Christiane Souriau-Hoebrechets, *La presse maghrébine*, (Paris, 1969). For the European press there is a brief study which covers the late nineteenth century 1870-1900, Germaine Sers-Gal ‘La presse algérienne de 1870 à 1900’, *Revue africaine*, 103, 1959, pp.92-112. Louis-Pierre Montoy’s monumental thesis on the press in the Constantine *département* is extensive but bore no equivalents for the other two *départements*, and it does not go beyond the First World War :Louis Pierre Montoy, ‘La presse dans le département de Constantine (1870-1918)’ doctoral thesis, Aix-en-Provence, 1982.. A recent study in English only uses the press as a text to look at settler colonialism without delving into its development, Charlotte Ann Legg, ‘Imagining *le peuple nouveau*: medicine and the press in French Algeria, 1870-1914’, PhD thesis, NYU, 2013. The history of the European press in the interwar period is yet to be written.

¹⁷ For the Muslim press see Ali Merad, ‘La formation de la presse musulmane en Algérie (1919-1939)’, *Revue de l’institut des Belles Lettres Arabes à Tunis*, 27, 1964, pp.9-29. Mohammed Nasser, *Al-subuf al-‘arabiyya al-jaza’iriyya min al 1847 ila 1940* [Algerian Arab Newspapers from 1847 to 1940], Algiers: Al-sharika al-wataniyya li al-nashr wa al-tawzi’, 1980 and especially Zahir Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène en Algérie des origines jusqu’en 1930*, (Algiers, 2003). There are also a number of works on Algerian intellectual history which deal with the context around which the press developed like Rachid Bencheneb, ‘Le mouvement intellectuel et littéraire algérien à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle’, *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, 70:258-9, 1983, p.11-24. For a later period, Fatima-Zohra Guechi, *La presse algérienne de langue arabe 1946-1954*, (Algiers, 2009).

¹⁸ Zahir Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène*.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, “‘Ici la voix de l’Algérie...’”, pp.51-82 in *L’An V de la révolution algérienne*, (Paris, 2011 [1959]), p.57.

(...) and *magically seem to avoid* the members of “native” society.²⁰ This impression was the one French authorities sought to project. Fanon’s analysis, however, remained on the level of this magical impression. To him, under colonialism:

‘radio technique, the press, (...) the messages, the transmitters of signs exist in a colonial society according to a perfectly differentiated status. Algerian society, dominated society, never participates in this world of signs.’²¹

This was never the case: Muslims pilfered European newspapers from the very beginning of colonial rule, and later they would eavesdrop on European radio. Colonial authorities liked to believe that they could magically contain the effects of their means of communication, but news always leaked.

The aim of this chapter is not to disenchant printing, to show it to be merely a story of ink, paper, and typography unrelated to the various beliefs that people invested in it. Instead, ‘the ideology of print culture was as much part of the technology as paper and ink.’²² The newspaper object was inseparable from the idea that it carried rationalisation, secularisation and modernisation. The magic surrounding printing was important, but so were its limits. By examining both the material and ideological aspects of print technology, the chapter shows how people thought that political power could determine the circulation of news, even though news found ways to circulate beyond its intended audiences. To do so, the chapter moves in four parts: first it looks at the relationship between newspapers published by the French government and Algerian readers, then at the link between the right to print and citizenship and at the limits of legal enforcement of news, before finally showing that newspapers played a much more complex role in the ways in which most Algerians consumed their news.

²⁰ Emphasis mine. Fanon, ‘Ici la voix...’, p.57.

²¹ *ibidem*

²² Brian Larkin in Edwards et al., ‘AHR Conversation: Historical Perspectives on the Circulation of Information’, p.1402. For a wider consideration of the relationship between technology and ideology in a colonial context, see Larkin, *Signal and Noise*.

Readers before printers: Official newspapers and their audience

'In [the gazette] you will find the news from Paris and the rest of the land of the French; from all the lands of the Christians; from the lands of the East and the West; in fact, from everywhere. Some copies even travel to other countries.'²³

Muhammad Al-Saffar, Moroccan ambassador to Paris, 1845-6

The printing press came to North Africa with the French army. Print, however, had already been there for a while. Unlike some other colonial encounters, the arrival of the French in 1830 in Algiers was a meeting in which the protagonists had already met several times before.²⁴ When the conquest began, the French government thought it could control news in Algeria by printing its own newspapers. However, it repeatedly ran into the problem that Algerian readers kept acquiring their news from a variety of sources and were not every interested in official publications.

Early modern North Africans were print-aware even if they did not print themselves.²⁵ The existence of the printing press was known to at least some people across the Mediterranean and its products consumed there by a select few. This awareness was probably limited to those whose professional occupations involved the other side of the sea: merchants, interpreters, diplomats, rulers of the coastal cities. To keep abreast of the latest diplomatic news likely to affect business, for instance, people in Ottoman Algiers would read the European gazettes, or in many cases, have them read to them by people with the necessary specialised linguistic skills, including the large

²³ Muhammad As-Saffar, (ed. Susan Gilson Miller), *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France 1845-1846*, (Berkeley, 1992) p.150.

²⁴ See Jocelyne Dakhlia, 'Une altérité à revoir', pp.53-59 in Thierry Fabre (ed.) *Colonialisme et postcolonialisme en Méditerranée*, (Marseille, 2004).

²⁵ Thus calquing Christopher Bayly's remark that India was a 'literacy-aware' if not majority literate society, Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.36.

Christian captive population. When Abd al-Qadir, leader of Algerian resistance, had French newspapers read to him to plan his next move during the conquest wars in the 1830s, he was probably keeping up well-established traditions in early modern Algeria.²⁶ It was, after all, canny knowledge of European diplomatic developments that had led Algerine merchants to loan money to France during the Napoleonic Wars. This debt by the French state would become the *casus belli* for the invasion of Algiers in 1830. In brief, there were Algerian readers well before there were Algerian printers.

Some North Africans would even cross the sea to print their own works. Jewish communities in Algeria had long published in Arabic, though they took boats to do so. Rabbis in the eighteenth century would get books in Judeo-Arabic printed in Amsterdam, or closer to home, in Livorno, where many had family ties.²⁷ These works were printed in the Hebrew script, and thus inaccessible to Muslim readers. Even though the spoken language, Arabic, was effectively the same across Muslim and Jewish communities, print established a division of audiences.

Muslim travellers to Europe, on the other hand, described the printing press as a foreign object. Their travel narratives rarely failed to mention among the strange innovations of the unbelievers the printing press, and its product, the gazette. This became a kind of trope of perpetual renewed surprise, always to be rediscovered in heathen lands. For instance, the seventeenth century Moroccan ambassador to Spain, al-Ghassani, noted with some wonder the *ghaẓīta* (*gazetas*), newspapers containing the latest news printed on many presses.²⁸ A century and a half later, when another Moroccan ambassador travelled to France in 1845-6, this time as his country was embroiled in warfare over France's conquest of neighbouring Algeria, Al-Saffar too expressed surprise

²⁶ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 8. For another example of the integration of Algerians in European diplomatic news before 1830 see Edmund Burke III, 'The Mediterranean before colonialism'.

²⁷ Jessica Marglin, 'Mediterranean Modernity through Jewish Eyes'. Yosef Tobi and Tsivia Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic literature in Tunisia, 1850-1950*, (Detroit, 2014).

²⁸ As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters*, 150. For the text of al-Ghassani see Nabil Matar, *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the 17th Century*, (New York, 2003).

at the existence of these *ghazita*, their popularity and the extent of their coverage. Al-Saffar was relying on another, more famous travel narrative (*rihla*), that of the Egyptian imam Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1834) which had already lauded the wonders of the printing press. And yet, though it was hardly the first time North Africans encountered printing, Al-Saffar used the word *astanba* to describe the print-shop, from the Spanish *estampa*, rather than the Arabic word *matba'a* or *dar al tiba'a*, which had already been used in Egypt, emphasising the object's foreign origin.²⁹

For Muslim travellers, the newspaper was the innovation that organised social life in Europe. Al-Saffar observed how in Paris, people read newspapers in cafés, 'when someone enters a café, first the waiter brings him a newspaper so he may learn what is new, and then he serves him his coffee.' The newspaper was so essential to the French that 'one of them would do without food or drink sooner than do without reading the newspaper'.³⁰

Al-Saffar was describing French society at the nineteenth century dawn of the 'civilisation of the newspaper', a world where the newspaper and the practices around it were central to the very fabric of society.³¹ In France, it was under the July Monarchy (1830-1848), when Al-Saffar was visiting, that print media became a true mass phenomenon with the help of popular illustrations. The same regime in which the periodical press became consubstantial with political life was the one that waged most of the Algerian conquest. Indeed, as Jennifer Sessions has pointed out, the pressures that

²⁹ I thank Peter Hill for confirming this philological point. As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters*, pp.205-6 on printing press and p.56 on borrowing from Tahtawi. For Tahtawi's famous *rihla* see Rifa'a Tahtawi, *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis bariẓ aw al-Diwan al-nafis bi-ivan baris* (1834) translated as *An Imam in Paris*, Daniel L. Newman (ed.), (London, 2004).

³⁰ As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters*, 152.

³¹ Dominique Kalifa et al., *La civilisation du journal. Histoire culturelle et littéraire de la presse française au XIXe siècle*, (Paris, 2011). See also Guillaume Pinson, *L'imaginaire médiatique: histoire et fiction du journal au XIXe siècle*, (Paris, 2012).

this new popular media culture put on political power stimulated the very conquest itself.³²

Contemporaries were convinced that newspapers were revolutionising society, making information ever more abundant and accurate, and contributing to the spread of reason. Those engaging in journalism believed they were reordering society for the greater good, scientific pioneers relentlessly tooting their own horn. The newspaper, like many other forms of media, promoted its own novelty relentlessly.³³ On both sides of the Mediterranean, the daily newspaper (in French, *journal*) became an object of almost mystical significance, a condensation of the differences between the modern West, full of constantly-renewing news and the static East.

Muslim travellers believed that the printing press was the harbinger of a new era as much as their European contemporaries did. In many corners of the Islamic world, these travellers to Europe were those who introduced printing technology back home, usually in tight association with reforming rulers who wanted to draw on European technologies to strengthen the state.³⁴ There too, the press came to acquire a totemic significance beyond its material powers, a symbol of the new, orderly progress of the West.

In Algeria, the particular development of colonial rule meant print became an especially foreign and hostile technology. Rather than being brought in by travellers and ambitious rulers, the printing press came as a weapon of conquest and differentiation, part of the particularly aggressive onslaught of modernity of the French conquest. Unlike, for instance, India, where local reticence to print broke down early in the nineteenth century under British rule, the continuation of conquest warfare and the

³² Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*.

³³ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*.

³⁴ Nile Green, 'Journeymen, Middlemen: Travel, Transculture, and Technology in the Origins of Muslim Printing', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41, 2009, pp.203-224. For Muhammad Ali in Egypt see Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, p.16.

printing press's tight association with the army in Algeria made printing a hostile activity for some time.³⁵

The first item printed on Algerian soil was the *Estafette d'Alger*, published by the French expeditionary corps over two weeks from 25 June to 5 July 1830. The first irruption of the newspaper was not meant for the local population, it was only a means of keeping the French army informed of its own internal developments. The printing press established as the *Presse du Marabout* in Sidi-Ferruch, where the expeditionary corps landed, had come on the boats with other weapons.

Shortly after the seizure of Algiers in 1830, the French government began using newspapers to reach the native population, some of the earliest attempts at periodical publication in Arabic anywhere in the world. Thus began a pattern of publishing in both Arabic and French aimed at Algerian Muslims, with the explicit purpose of enlightening them and facilitating the spread of French civilisation. Muslims, however, would not be allowed to print themselves. The result was a continuous, largely unsuccessful series of attempts to create a newspaper in Arabic that would sway Muslim opinion whilst being controlled by French authors.

Two years after the *Estafette d'Alger*, in 1832, Baron Pichon, the civilian intendant for Algiers, launched the *Moniteur algérien* to notify the population of government decisions.³⁶ Published in both French and Arabic, the *Moniteur* used an Arabic printing press left over from Napoleon's Egyptian expedition. Even though it is usually left out of histories of the Arab press, it was the second attempt at a periodical in the Arab world, following from the equally governmental and equally shoddy Egyptian *Al-Waqa'i al-Misri* (1828). As Pichon made clear, a newspaper in the native language was essential to liberal,

³⁵ Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.238.

³⁶ Hermann Fiori, *Bibliographie des ouvrages imprimés à Alger de 1830 à 1850*, (Algiers, 1938).

enlightening colonial rule, 'England has newspapers, printing presses in native languages in Calcutta, and elsewhere in India.'³⁷

That same year, 1832, Victor Hugo wrote one of the most famous expressions of the belief in magical printing. In a long digression of his novel set in medieval Paris, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, he wrote a panegyric to the transformational power of print that killed medieval superstition and ushered in an age of reason and modernity. Entitled 'Ceci tuera cela', it was a succinct encapsulation of the belief that the press had the power to kill the Church, and all backwardness with it.³⁸ It was these beliefs that led authorities to Algeria to print for Muslims in the belief that this would transform them, rid them of their fanaticism and facilitate colonial rule.

This project, however, was not just a colonial one, as it was part of a broader effort across the Mediterranean to use printing in Arabic to facilitate the expansion of state power. The *Moniteur's* more famous successor, *Le Mobacher* [*Al-Mubasshir*], founded in 1847 as the first newspaper aimed specifically at Muslim audiences in Algeria, made this connection clear. *Le Mobacher* explicitly aimed to enlighten the natives through the printed press. In this task, it did not see itself as working alone. Its first edition on 15 September 1847 made it clear that newspapers were not simply used by 'kings of Christian nations' to make their decisions known, but 'the Sultan of Constantinople and the Pasha of Egypt have followed this example and their subjects are all the better off for it.'³⁹ *Le Mobacher* was referring to the Egyptian *Al-Waqa'i al-masri* (1828) and the Ottoman *Taqvim-e Veqayi* (first in Turkish then also in Arabic from 1839), both official publications intended to standardise the diffusion of information within the administration.⁴⁰

³⁷ Louis-André Pichon, *Alger sous la domination française*, (Paris, 1833), pp.122-5.

³⁸ On Victor Hugo's imagination of the medieval era and how it related to the context of the July Monarchy see Christophe Charle, *La discordance des temps: une brève histoire de la modernité*, (Paris, 2011), p.43.

³⁹ Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, pp.16-22.

⁴⁰ Yvonne Turin, 'L'instruction sans l'école? Les débuts du Mobacher d'après une correspondance inédite d'Ismaël Urbain', *Revue de l'occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 15, 1973, pp.367-374.

Initially, the *Mobacher* reflected the ambiguous position of its founder, Ismaël Urbain. A mixed-race man from Guyana who adopted Saint-Simonianism and learnt Arabic in Egypt, Urbain moved to Algeria as an interpreter in the wake of the first wave of conquest in 1837 and rose to play an essential role in French policy in Algeria. As an ‘arabophile’ to use the terminology of the times, Urbain advocated the civilisational unity of French and Muslim cultures, showing the example by marrying an Algerian woman. He was, nevertheless, an employee of the French government: the aim was for *Le Mobacher* to be a key tool in the ‘moral conquest’ of the Algerian natives, by circulating the government’s actions and contributing to the enlightenment of the Arab population.⁴¹ Aside from announcing government decisions, the *Mobacher* was meant to educate Algerian Muslims in the progress of agriculture, trade and science to facilitate their entry into European civilisation.⁴²

Though the *Mobacher* endured until 1928, these original ambitions did not survive. By the 1870s, it had become merely a dry compendium of new administrative decisions intended for Muslim employees of the government. In 1875 subscription was made compulsory for all employees of the state Islamic justice system and Muslim state employees, and yet by 1891 still half of the *adjoints indigènes* had not subscribed.⁴³ Reports suggested that even those who did subscribe did so out of fear of losing their jobs but did not in fact read it. Its name had become a kind of joke.⁴⁴ By this stage, it ran at 1,000 copies in French and 2,000 copies in Arabic, hardly a popular success.

Around this time, the Gouvernement-Général (GGA) considered updating the *Mobacher*’s format to make it more popular among Muslim Algerians and thus increase its

⁴¹ Yvonne Turin, ‘L’instruction sans l’école?’. On Saint-Simonians in Algeria see Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria*, (Palo Alto, 2010).

⁴² Alain Messaoudi, ‘Savants, conseillers, médiateurs: les arabisants et la France coloniale (vers 1830-vers 1930)’, doctoral thesis, (Paris, 2008), pp. 240-245.

⁴³ ‘Note du service du *Mobacher* au GGA’, 10 April 1875, ANOM/15H6. PO to GGA, 2 October 1891, ANOM/15H6.

⁴⁴ Arnaud, Principal interpreter for the *Mobacher*, ‘Projet de modifications au régime du *Mobacher*’, 27 February 1894, ANOM/GGA/15H6.

effectiveness. By 1891, the head of the GGA's interpretation service made it clear that the *Mobacher's* glory days were in the past. At present, it was 'too administrative', though it had 'had its moment of success, it had numerous readers in Algeria, people spoke of it in East; the papers in Constantinople, in Syria and in Egypt reproduced its articles with praise, the [French] Algerian press awaited its printing with impatience'.⁴⁵ The tone of the more liberal-minded government interpreters in their report was sharply critical of the publication in its current state: 'the native, who only ever hears [*Le Mobacher*] talking about measures to attack his society (...) has always considered it as an enemy'.⁴⁶ The report suggested that the only way to remedy this would be by incorporating more interesting material, such as copying articles from Arabic newspapers from Egypt and Syria, or serialising novels (*feuilletons*), perhaps publishing Rifa'ah Tahtawi's famous narrative of his trip to Europe 'that all speak of and that few have read'.⁴⁷ They recommended that the writers of the Arabic version, two *khodja* or native secretaries should be paid more because good Arabic style would be essential to reaching a Muslim audience, as 'Muslims love an ornate, flowery, rhythmic style [*le style travaillé, imagé, cadencé*]; alliterations, assonances have indescribable charms for them'.⁴⁸ These ideas were never put into practice, and the *Mobacher* remained a purely administrative tool, ubiquitous but ignored in the hands of minor Muslim bureaucrats: it lost its readership. The reports show that some men within the French government attempted to think seriously about the needs of a Muslim audience and how an official publication could please them, but they were ignored.

Le Mobacher, once a pioneer, had now become dated in a world of booming Arabic printing throughout the Mediterranean. This was a cosmopolitan enterprise, where print-shop employees and authors hopped from city to city depending on tolerant

⁴⁵ Colonel Lerude, 'Note sur le *Mobacher*', 1892, ANOM/15H6.

⁴⁶ Lerude, 'Note sur le *Mobacher*', ANOM/GGA/15H6.

⁴⁷ Idem. Tahtawi, *Takhlīs al-ibriz fī talkhīs bariz*.

⁴⁸ Lerude, 'Note sur le *Mobacher*'.

legal frameworks and official subsidies. To take one famous example, Faris al-Shidyaq, born in Lebanon, edited the official *Waqā'i al-Misri* in Cairo in the 1830s, then later moved to Tunisia in 1860 to launch the first official newspaper there, *Al Ra'id al Tunsī*, before leaving for Istanbul in 1861 to found *Al-Jawā'ib*, subsidised by the Ottoman sultan.⁴⁹

Lebanese and Syrian Christians, having honed their skills at missionary printing presses in Beirut, moved to Egypt under the economic boom of the reign of Isma'īl Pasha, whose encouragement led Egypt to become a centre for publishing in Arabic. Egyptian newspapers were sold in Algiers from at least the late 1870s, as evidenced by the presence of an 'Egyptian bookshop' in Algiers, rue de la Lyre in the lower Casbah.⁵⁰ In 1875, the Lebanese Takla brothers founded *Al-Abram*, which became daily in 1881, and would become a stylistic model for subsequent Arabic publications.⁵¹ Wandering Lebanese brothers would continue to play an important role in the North African print industry for some time: two of them started the influential *Al-Hadira* in Tunis, before moving on to launch Morocco's first private paper *Lisan al-Maghrib* in 1907.⁵²

For French authorities, the rise of Arabic printing outside Algeria posed a challenge, for they increasingly had to compete with the influence of these new publications on Algerian readers. They reacted in two ways. First, through diplomatic channels they developed close links with Arabic publications outside of Algeria, especially in Egypt, 'capital of the Arab press' from the late nineteenth century, often funding their activities. *Al-Abram*, for instance, was for a long time a pro-French

⁴⁹ This topic will be revisited in more detail in chapter 6, p.290. On the beginnings of the Tunisian print industry see Kmar Bendana, 'Généralisations d'imprimeurs et figures d'éditeurs à Tunis entre 1850 et 1950' in Jacques Michon and Jean-Yves Mollier (eds.), *Les mutations du livre et de l'édition dans le monde du XVIII^e siècle à l'an 2000*, (Québec, 2001), pp.349-358.

⁵⁰ Native Affairs to MAE, 23 August 1881, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

⁵¹ Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, pp.41-42.

⁵² Souriau, *La presse maghrébine*, p.40.

newspaper opposed to the British protectorate there, opposed to the pro-British *Al-Muqattam*.⁵³

This was a tricky exercise, however, and one that Algerian authorities were often suspicious of. From their perspective, it was safer to have one's own newspaper in Arabic to exert direct power over the natives. In Paris and Algiers, plans were hatched to 'counterbalance, with an Arab publication, the propagation of ideas hostile to our influence that are spread by several papers from the Far East [sic]'.⁵⁴ The first of these substitutes for *Le Mubasher* was probably *Le Sâda*, a bilingual publication founded in 1876 in Paris by Florian Pharaon, whose family had served as interpreters for the French military since the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.⁵⁵ Despite being printed in Paris, its target audience was clearly in Algeria: it was funded solely by the Interior Ministry and when funding ran scarce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to subsidise it. The MAE conceded that the newspaper might be useful to defend French interests in Algeria, but 'from a purely diplomatic perspective, *le Sâda*, far from of any use, is more of an embarrassment for our policy'.⁵⁶ It appeared the *le Sâda*'s pro-Muslim stance was an embarrassment to France's longstanding stance as protector of Eastern Christians in Syria. In 1877, the government subsidy dried up and *Le Sâda* shut down.

This pattern proved to be quite consistent. Regularly, the French administration encouraged publications aimed at Algerian Muslims, but only those that were under tight European control. The GGA would bemoan the absence of news provision for Algerian Muslims and the influence of other Arabic newspapers. It would then fund an ostensibly independent but in fact tightly controlled publication, usually run by members of the

⁵³ Ayalon, *Press in the Arab Middle East*, pp.55-56. Ziad Fahmy, 'Francophone Egyptian Nationalists, anti-British Discourse, and European Public Opinion, 1885-1910: The Case of Mustafa Kamil and Ya'qub Sannu', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28:1, 2008, pp.170-183.

⁵⁴ GGA to Interior, 9 June 1877, ANOM/F⁸⁰1730.

⁵⁵ On Florian Pharaon see Messaoudi, 'Savants', Annexe, pp.597-598 and on his father Joanny Pharaon 593-594. For a fuller account of this social and intellectual milieu see Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798-1831*, (Berkeley, 2010).

⁵⁶ MAE to Interior, 15 June 1877, ANOM/F⁸⁰1730.

French administration themselves. Yet the funding would always be rather pitiful and the publication would shut down fast, proving that despite the hand-wringing, providing news to Muslims was not a priority for the French government.

In 1881, *El Bassir* followed the same career as *Le Sâda*, and by this point the GG, Albert Grévy, was already jaded: ‘several initiatives of this type have already failed (...) it is difficult to interest the natives other than by appealing to their religious prejudices’. Intriguingly, Grévy noted that recently, ‘native notables who had tried to start an independent newspaper in Algiers while following a political line likely to be tolerated by the French government, have had to give up.’⁵⁷ It is precisely the impossibility of finding a political space independent enough to appeal to a Muslim readership yet unthreatening to colonial authorities that appears to have killed off private publications before they even started.

These repeated failures certainly did not stop well-meaning, patriotic and enterprising Frenchmen from taking it upon themselves to provide information to the natives. *Le Sâda* and *El Bassir*, sinking without a trace, were followed by *L’Astre d’Orient* [*Kawkab al Mashriq*], from 1882 to 1883. As its director Poydenot explained to the GGA, *L’Astre d’Orient* ‘must stay independent, and especially, what is most important is that it appears so to the eyes of native readers’ but ‘it is and must be absolutely French.’

Poydenot seems to have been inured to his own contradictions, as his manifesto claimed that *L’Astre d’Orient* would be an ‘independent platform where all Arabs (...) could engage in the loyal discussion of their interests’, also noting that the Arabic translation would be subject to ‘tight control’ to avoid potential seditious articles that might pass readers of the French version unaware.⁵⁸ Caught up between being ‘independent’ and ‘loyal’, *L’Astre d’Orient* rapidly collapsed. In October 1899, Edouard Gasselin, another

⁵⁷ GGA to MAE, 10 May 1881, MAE/CP/Ancienne Série/Algérie/8.

⁵⁸ ‘Mémoire présenté à Monsieur le Ministre de l’Intérieur au sujet de l’organisation et du but de la publication franco-arabe *L’Astre d’Orient*’, 1 December 1882, ANOM/F⁸⁰1729.

military interpreter, launched *En Nacib* [*Al-Nasib*], which changed names repeatedly before shutting definitively in 1902.⁵⁹ Though *Al-Nasib* was written in the Algerian dialect to reach a broader audience, it does not seem to have proved any more successful.⁶⁰

European-controlled publications were stuck in a bind: if they appeared inauthentic, they would not attract an audience compared to foreign competitors in Arabic. Entertainment value and literary qualities were essential to capturing a fickle Arabic reading public, though all this had to be done ideally without resorting to untrustworthy Muslim writers. Official interpreters seriously assessed the literary quality of *El Bassir*, for instance, as this would impact its success, but found it wanting compared to the competition: ‘the writing quality of *El Bassir* is inferior to the *Djaounaib* [*al-Jawa’ib*]’ founded in Istanbul by Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq. Crucially, *El Bassir*, ‘does not dissimulate its foreign origins well enough (...) its ideas, having not been thought originally [*primitivement*] in Arabic, betray at every moment their origin.’⁶¹ Successive attempts failed to find a readership, tainted by appalling literary style and fawning French loyalism. Muslim readers, the evidence suggests, did not trust them.

This succession of short-lived failed attempts was a concern. In 1901, the deputy Albin Rozet raised a complaint about a lack of an Arabic newspaper: ‘all powers that have natives under their domination have newspapers written in the language of their subjects.’⁶² The same complaint had been raised by Pichon seventy years earlier, yet little progress had been made. Despite a long series of attempts, printing was not having the anticipated magical effects. Muslims were quite simply not very interested in reading the

⁵⁹ Following Gasselin’s death, it switched to the title *Faridat al-hajj*, directed by Jules Louis Sicard to accompany Algerian pilgrims to Mecca, and then to *Al Muntakhab fi akhbar al ‘arab*, ‘A Selection of Arab News’, before shutting down in 1902.

⁶⁰ On Gasselin, see Messaoudi, ‘Savants’, p.573 and on Sicard, pp.651-652.

⁶¹ Note on *El Bassir*, 10 May 1881, MAE/CP/Algérie/8.

⁶² Albin Rozet, speech to the Chamber of Deputies, 31 May 1901, ANOM/F⁸⁰1691.

dry publications the GGA produced for them. One could not just print and expect change to follow when readers kept switching off.

All these men wanted to use printing in one direction only, to enlighten Muslims without having them print back, but the newspapers did not produce the passive audience the government desired. One of the remedies would have been to allow Muslims to print themselves. The more liberal-minded officials who suggested this were repeatedly side-lined because giving Muslims the right to print would have been tantamount to recognising them as capable of citizenship. For in Algeria, as the development of the settler-owned press shows, the right to print was inseparable from participation in the political affairs of the Republic.

Printing citizens: The unequal 1881 law

Initially, private newspapers owned by Europeans were not free to publish what they wanted, as Algeria was under military rule. A free press became one of the main bones of contention in the struggle between military authorities and civilian settlers for political control of the colony that endured until the 1880s. In nineteenth century France, freedom of the press (*la liberté de la presse*) was both necessary to and a marker of a Republican régime. The degree of censorship was and is still often used as a barometer of successive regimes' progressiveness: harsh under the Restoration (1815-1830), milder under the July Monarchy (1830-1848), a brief but triumphant blossoming of freedom under the Second Republic (1848-1852), followed by a tightening which then eased up

again under the Second Empire (1852-1870), and finally, the apotheosis of the 1881 press law under the Third Republic.⁶³

Private newspapers by Frenchmen in Algeria followed shortly after the conquest: the oldest private newspaper, *L'Akbbar*, was started in 1839 in Algiers. Despite its Arabic title meaning 'the news', it only published in French.⁶⁴ Newspapers followed patterns of European settlement, starting with the main coastal cities. After *L'Akbbar* (1839) in Algiers and *L'Echo d'Oran* (1844) in Oran, *La Seybouse* in Bône completed the trio in the east in 1844. Then, smaller European centres developed local newspapers in the 1850s and 1860s like Philippeville [Skikda] with *Le Zéramna* in 1851 or Blida with *Le Tell* in 1854.

In the midst of a war of conquest, the existence of these publications was conditional on good relationships with military authorities. For instance, *L'Echo d'Oran*, the longest-lasting and at one point the most widely-read newspaper in North Africa, was founded in 1844 by express authorisation of the residing general, on the condition that it not report any movement of troops, or any military news that might alarm the population.⁶⁵

Before 1881, authorities swung between periods of relative tolerance of the press and harsher censorship in Algeria, depending on the military and political situation. As one préfet noted, 'in the presence of a conquered people, there must not be freedom of the press'.⁶⁶ Even in the 1870s, the still-fragile Republican government, remained wary and attempted to police the spread of newspapers in Algeria far more than in France.⁶⁷

⁶³ Bellanger, et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. 2 and 3, (Paris, 1969). Christophe Charle, *Le siècle de la presse 1830-1939*, (Paris, 2004).

⁶⁴ After disappearing for a while, the title was bought up by Victor Barrucand in 1902, effectively a new publication with a more liberal, pro-native editorial line that occasionally published in Arabic, a format which endured until its demise in 1934.

⁶⁵ On *L'Echo* and the Perrier family, which would run the paper for four generations until its demise in 1963, see Yves Marthot, 'Histoire de la presse en Algérie: L'Echo d'Oran' on <http://www.cdha.fr/histoire-de-la-presse-en-algerie-lecho-doran>, accessed 30 December 2015.

⁶⁶ PC to GGA, 18 July 1874, quoted in Montoy, 'La presse dans le département de Constantine', p.33.

⁶⁷ Sers-Gal, 'La presse algérienne', p.96.

The army continued to fear that unruly settlers would undermine French domination by revealing movements of troops and undermining the prestige of the army: in 1877, the owners of four newspapers were taken to court (*La vigie algérienne*, *Le Zéramna*, *L'Atlas* and *Le Courrier de Mostaganem*) for spreading false news about movements of troops.⁶⁸ The dangers of a restless native audience justified the persistence of censorship in Algeria more than they did in metropolitan France.

It was the 1881 law that would become iconic of the link between Republican citizenship and freedom of the press. The *loi sur la liberté de la presse* of 29 July 1881 overturned the previous system of authorisations, whereby prospective publishers had to obtain administrative approval before launching a newspaper. Now, publishers simply sent a declaration to the *préfecture* notifying authorities of a new publication, thus giving France one of the most permissive press laws in the world.⁶⁹

Article 69 specified the law's immediate application to Algeria, which created a unique situation. As the law protected French citizens, but not foreigners or subjects, it privileged a small minority free to publish whatever it wanted against a vast majority of Algerian Muslims. Newspapers owned by non-citizens, be they foreigners or subjects, could be shut down by the Government General under approval of the Interior Ministry under article 14.⁷⁰

Worse, the same Parliament that passed the *loi sur la liberté de la presse*, had, a few weeks before, voted a law that would severely restrict the civil liberties of Algerian Muslims through the *indigénat*. The *indigénat*, first developed in the laboratory of the conquest of Algeria and then exported to Indochina, New Caledonia, West and

⁶⁸ GGA to Interior, 26 May 1877, ANOM/F⁸⁰1683.

⁶⁹ 'Loi du 29 juillet 1881 sur la liberté de la presse' Christophe Charle, *Le Siècle de la presse*, p.135.

⁷⁰ Article 69 'La présente loi est applicable à l'Algérie et aux Colonies', Article 6 'Le gérant devra être Français, majeur, avoir la jouissance de ses droits civils', Article 14, 'La circulation en France des journaux ou écrits périodiques publiés à l'étranger ne pourra être interdite que par une décision spéciale délibérée en conseil des ministres'. See Claude Collot, 'Le régime juridique de la presse musulmane algérienne (1881-1962)', *Revue algérienne des sciences juridiques économiques et politiques*, 6:2, 1969, p.343-405.

Equatorial Africa and Madagascar, has become one of the more infamous aspects of the French colonial empire.⁷¹ The law of 28 June 1881, often known as the *loi sur l'indigénat*, was iconic of a whole system of administration which was to become the 'obscure core of the French colonial state', to use Gregory Mann's phrase on West Africa.⁷² The June 1881 law completed the administrative reorganisation of Algeria by giving local civilian administrators the power to enforce the *indigénat*, consecrating the triumph of civilian settlers over the military. A 'juridical monster', the *indigénat* defies simple description.⁷³ Often dubbed the *code de l'indigénat*, it was not in fact a 'code' at all, as the specific offences changed quite regularly.⁷⁴ Intended to be a temporary measure for seven years to deal with the exceptional needs for expedient justice of a recently-conquered territory, it ended up being renewed more or less regularly until the Second World War.⁷⁵ It is best described as a system which allowed colonial administrators to bypass regular French justice and directly repress 'natives' for a determined series of offences.

For our purposes here, it is most important to note that under most incarnations, the *indigénat* criminalised 'speech held in public in order to weaken the respect due to authority' (*propos tenus en public dans le but d'affaiblir le respect dû à l'autorité*). Administrators often used this particular article to suppress any form of political speech in public. Natives were also forbidden from assembling without prior authorisation, or from making 'disrespectful acts or offensive speech towards a representative or agent of authority [...] even when this act or speech would not meet the characteristics required to constitute a crime (*délit*) or a slander offence (*contravention d'injure*).' Hence the *indigénat*

⁷¹ See in particular Lecour-Grandmaison, *De l'Indigénat* and its critique by Isabelle Merle, in *Genèses*, 14 September 2011, <http://geneses.hypotheses.org/114>. The *indigénat* is partly famous now because it was already considered to be scandalous at the time, see Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*.

⁷² 'Loi du 28 juin 1881 qui confère aux administrateurs des communes mixtes en territoire civil la répression, par voie disciplinaire, des infractions spéciales à l'indigénat'. Gregory Mann, 'What was the *indigénat*?'.
⁷³ Lecour-Grandmaison, *De l'Indigénat*.

⁷⁴ Merle, 'De la "légalisation" de la violence', p.142.

⁷⁵ See article 3 of the original 1881 law.

specifically criminalised speech that did not constitute slander if it was spoken by a French citizen in the regular legal system.⁷⁶

Together, the two laws established a legal framework that sharply divided settlers and natives under the Third Republic. The settler minority in Algeria was largely free to print whatever it wanted. Even in the case of a trial, the newspaper would face a jury of settler peers, and would usually be acquitted. Administrators already complained in the 1870s that it had become impossible to prosecute newspapers in court as settler juries would necessarily find them innocent to spite the government, and this only got worse after 1881.⁷⁷ By contrast, the *indigènes* were subject to censorship, not only in what they wrote but even in their speech. Infractions to the indigénat would be inflicted directly by local settlers themselves: depending on the particular territory, it was either mayors elected by the European minority or an administrator who was most often a local settler who was in charge. By 1881, settlers monopolised political power and they monopolised print, and the two worked together.

By the time of the 1881 freedom of the press law, the French press in Algeria was already well established with over thirty publications across the three *départements*.⁷⁸ After the 1881 law, print news flooded Algeria [Figure 3]. More than the actual effect of the law of 1881 was its spirit, as the Republican government refrained from prosecuting newspapers, even those that violently criticised specific members of the administration. Freedom of the press became sacrosanct: even during heights of political agitation, when the GGA acknowledged that French newspapers raised huge problems, they did not ban newspapers owned by French citizens, as this would have required calling into question

⁷⁶ Article 6 of the original 'Code matraque' enforced by the Préfecture d'Alger on 9 February 1875, found in different versions in subsequent decrees, Lecour-Grandmaison, *De l'Indigénat*.

⁷⁷ Procureur d'Alger to GGA, 12 February 1875, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1859.

⁷⁸ Sers-Gal, 'La presse algérienne de 1870 à 1900'..

the Republic's integration of Algeria into France.⁷⁹ Along with the assertion of settler rule and settler free speech came many more Frenchmen to write and read newspapers: heavily encouraged by government programs of *colonisation officielle*, or official settlement, and labour migration the European population doubled from 244,600 in 1872 to 482,000 in 1891, split in roughly equal numbers between French citizens and European foreigners.⁸⁰ The result was a huge boom in publications, from 38 newspapers in 1883 to 134 in 1897. In the Constantine *département* alone 89 newspapers were launched between 1881 and 1888, most of them short-lived.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Even in the midst of riots and institutional turmoil in 1898, for instance, the Prime Minister would offer the Governor-General stern reminders that the 1881 law had to be enforced in Algeria, Président du Conseil to GGA, 13 December 1898, F⁸⁰1689.

⁸⁰ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, p.119.

⁸¹ Montoy, 'La presse dans le département de Constantine', 181.

City	Number of newspapers in 1871	Number of newspapers in 1880	Number of political newspapers in 1904
Algiers	6	9	13
Oran	3	4	7
Constantine	1	3	5
Philippeville [Skikda]	2	2	3
Bône [Annaba]	3	2	3
Sétif	1	1	4
Tlemcen	1	1	4
Blida	1	1	1
Mostaganem	1	2	3
Médéa		1	2
Bougie [Béjaïa]		1	3
Orléansville [Chlef]			1
Tizi-Ouzou			1
Batna			1
Guelma			2
Souk-Ahras			2
Djidjelli [Jijel]			1
Aïn-Temouchent			1
Sidi bel-Abbès			3
Mascara			3
Tébessa			1

Figure 3 Table showing newspapers by city in Algeria from 1871 to 1904, based on official newspaper counts in ANOM F⁸⁰1729 and F⁸⁰1859. The government sometimes maintained an old Second Empire distinction between 'political' and 'non-political' newspapers (which used to be subject to different legal regimes and taxation) but at other times all publications were collected together. Figures skip past the peak of newspaper publication in Algeria during the anti-Jewish crisis of 1897-1901 which is dealt with in chapter 4.

Counting the number of newspapers is only mildly indicative, as many of these newspapers had rather brutish and short existences, yet print runs increased as well. Based on the popular success of *Le Petit Journal* in metropolitan France, *Le Petit Colon*, using a smaller format and cheaper price to reach a broader audience became the highest-selling newspaper in Algeria in 1886 with 9,000 copies per day. Didier Guignard has even noted that the French Algerian newspaper market expanded faster than its metropolitan counterpart. In metropolitan France, newspapers only reached market saturation by the eve of World War I with 10 million daily copies sold for an adult population of 20 million people.⁸² On the other side of the Mediterranean, in 1897 already 134 titles combined to sell a total of 170,000 copies per day to an estimated French readership of 500,000, or a figure of one newspaper for every three potential readers in 1897.⁸³ Counting all publications, Zahir Ihaddaden arrived at a jaw-dropping average of one periodical publication for every 2,000 French citizens in Algeria.⁸⁴

This large number is reflective of two trends: first, the importance of newspapers in a settler colonial society, and second, the political fragmentation of European Algerians. In Algeria as elsewhere, newspapers were essential to the creation and functioning of settler colonialism. The relationship was symbiotic: newspaper ads 'boosted' potential emigrants to make the big move, in turn sprouting new settlements with enterprising men who started newspapers to attract immigrants.⁸⁵ On remote farms, settlers clung on to newspapers as signs of a connection with the outside world, the magical binding link to European civilisation.⁸⁶

⁸² Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, p.27.

⁸³ Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, p.311.

⁸⁴ This figure is only indicative as it includes many trade periodicals like the Bulletin of the Chamber of Commerce of Algiers, Zahir Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène*.

⁸⁵ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld*, (Oxford, 2009). Legg, 'Imagining le peuple nouveau'.

⁸⁶ The same would later be true of the radio, see Fanon, 'Ici la voix', pp.52-56.

The number of separate publications is also a reflection of the viciousness of European Algerian politics under the Third Republic. As we will see in more detail in chapter 4, newspapers for European Algerians were tools to unify and control networks of local patronage and municipal corruption. Even towns with tiny French populations developed at least two newspapers during this period, one each for radical and opportunist Republicans which fought mercilessly.⁸⁷ On a local level too, printing was equivalent to political power.

Gaining citizenship through print

‘Why should we be suppressed? In all countries where natives are under the submission of a dominant race, they have newspapers, including in the United States.’

‘Mise au point’, *El Hack* [Annaba], 15 October 1893.

Muslim élites shared the belief that citizenship and print were inextricably linked. For this reason, they used the latter to gain the former, publishing newspapers calling for greater civil rights to be given to Muslims. After 1881, a number of newspapers had the sole aim of campaigning for Muslim civil rights. This was a difficult task: though Algeria’s Muslim population reached 3.7 million inhabitants in the last decades of the nineteenth century and was rapidly increasing, no private newspaper aimed at Muslims lasted more than a few months until the 1910s.⁸⁸

Even when Muslim-owned printing presses started emerging around the turn of the twentieth century, they avoided publishing newspapers so as to avoid the government’s ire. In 1896, the Rudusi brothers opened a print-shop in Algiers, *Al*

⁸⁷ Sers-Gal, ‘La presse algérienne’, p.92.

⁸⁸ Nasser, *Al-suhuf*, p.8.

Matba'at al-Thalibiyya, after having travelled several times to Egypt and the Levant and having made connections with book-sellers there.⁸⁹ Instead of publishing riskier periodicals, they restricted themselves to commercially safer classical works. When, in 1907, Si Ahmad ben Murad Turki announced the opening of an Arabic print-shop in Algiers employing only natives, he solicited the benevolence and subsidies of the GGA in this enterprise to spread civilisation among his coreligionists.⁹⁰ Ravaged by land seizures in a country where land was by far the most valuable economic asset, even the Muslim elite typically did not have the means to invest in a risky venture like a newspaper, especially one liable to be shut down at any time by the government.⁹¹

Because it was risky, publishing newspapers usually happened in collaboration with Europeans. In April 1882, not very long after the 1881 law, came *El Mountakheb* [*Al Muntakhab*] or 'The Elector' a bilingual publication launched in Constantine. As the name suggests, *El Mountakheb* advocated electoral rights and parliamentary representation for Algerian Muslims through total assimilation in the French Republic. This daring programme provoked outrage among the European press in Algeria.⁹² Initially *El Mountakheb* claimed to be owned by Muslims, but on 2 July 1882, its editor, Paul Etienne confessed that 'the instigators of *El Mountakheb* are French by race [*français de race*]'.⁹³ Just because a newspaper expressed a controversial opinion was not necessarily an indication of its 'native' owners, it may simply mean that it was controlled by Frenchmen who happened to dislike the government.⁹⁴ Despite its French owners, *El Mountakheb* shut down in July 1883 following intense official and non-official pressure. The settler press

⁸⁹ Rachid Bencheneb, 'Le mouvement intellectuel et littéraire algérien à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 70:258-9, 1983, p.13.

⁹⁰ Turki to GGA, 27 May 1907, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

⁹¹ See *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, 174-6.

⁹² See for instance *La Seybouse* 21 June 1882, *Le républicain de Constantine*, 5 July 1882 or *Le Courrier de Bône*, 12 July 1882.

⁹³ *El Mountakheb*, 2 July 1882. See also F⁸⁰1730 and F⁸⁰1684.

⁹⁴ There may have been a first attempt at an anti-governmental newspaper for Muslims in 1877 in Constantine, but it was probably no more than an electoral pamphlet that sank without a trace. Allan Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts and the French Colonial State in Algeria*, (Princeton, 1985), p.231.

launched a concerted attack against its existence, Governor-General Louis Tirman forbade subscriptions and took its Arabic translators to court, and finally an angry European mob raided the headquarters.⁹⁵ Despite the protection of the 1881 law therefore, some opinions were simply too dangerous to be spread to natives.

El Mountakheb was linked to the creation in Paris of a *Société française de protection des indigènes des colonies* and the birth of a persistent liberal current in French politics known as the *indigénophiles*. Under their auspices, several publications were launched in Algeria before the First World War. This is true of publications like *El Maghreb* [*Al Maghrib*] launched in Algiers in 1904, or *El Ihya* [*Al Ihya*], launched in 1907. *L'Akhbar*, Algeria's oldest private publication, came under the ownership of *indigénophile* Victor Barrucand's from 1902, and the paper's contacts with Muslim notables aroused the suspicion of colonial authorities.

Due to a side-effect of the 1881 law, it is not always easy to establish whether the owners of newspapers were Muslim. As the law protected newspapers managed by French citizens, a newspaper could in theory escape the GGA's censorship if it had a French manager (*gérant*) as a legal cover. It is equally difficult, if not futile, to identify Muslim writers. European publications aimed at Muslims privileged the authenticity of Muslim voices while attempting to control their opinions. The result was a recurrent tendency by European journalists to ventriloquize Muslims using far-fetched pseudonyms.

While the historiography has devoted considerable energy to establishing whether publications were owned by Muslims or not, in practice this distinction did not make much of a difference. Whatever their owners or authors, these publications shared a common goal: by their very existence, newspapers for Muslims would propel them towards equal citizenship.

⁹⁵ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, p.426. Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, p.305.

Both governmental and non-governmental papers provided limited but significant training opportunities for Muslim journalists, a narrow contact space that was significant for the political and intellectual history of the Muslim élite.⁹⁶ Writers for the *Mobacher*, for instance, even though their work mainly involved translating government announcements verbatim from French to Arabic, went on to being pioneers of private journalism in Arabic.⁹⁷ The *Mountakheb*, similarly, though owned by a European, featured significant Muslim writers.⁹⁸

The GGA controlled some publications in more subtle ways through subsidies. In 1907, Ben al Hajj Kahul launched *Kawkab Ifriqiya*, which gained respect for its excellent Arabic style. Given its success, some historians have been somewhat confused in dubbing it ‘the first independent publication in Algeria’, as the *Kawkab* was heavily subsidised by the GGA.⁹⁹ The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs even sent it to other Arab countries for the purposes of pro-French propaganda.¹⁰⁰

Following on from the *Kawkab*’s success, a wave of newspapers advocating for Muslim rights started in the years preceding the First World War: Sadek Denden, who would remain active in journalism until the Second World War, launched *L’Islam* in Bône in 1909, while Hadj-Ammar launched *Le Rachidi* in Djidjelli in 1910. A new phase of political activism just before the outbreak of the First World War brought a number of publications in Arabic like *Al-Faruq*, *Dhu-al-Fiqar* and *Al Barid al Jaza’iri*. The outbreak of the First World War dealt a blow to this emerging newspaper industry when all Muslim newspapers were shut down by the Government-General in the summer of 1914.

⁹⁶ Abdelkader Djeghloul, ‘La formation des intellectuels algériens modernes 1880-1930’, *Revue algérienne des sciences juridiques, économiques et politiques*, 22 :4, 1985, pp. 639-661. Philipp Zessin, ‘Presse et journalistes “indigènes” en Algérie coloniale (1890-1950)’ in *Le Mouvement Social*, 236, 2011, pp.35-46.

⁹⁷ Bencheneb, ‘Le mouvement intellectuel et littéraire algérien’. Zessin, ‘Presse et journalistes “indigènes”’, 37-38.

⁹⁸ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, pp.237-9.

⁹⁹ Mufdi Zakaria, composer of the Algerian national anthem, thought *Kawkab Ifriqiya* marked the dawn of the Arab press in Algeria, see Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène*, p.18. See also Christiane Souriau-Hoebrechts, *La presse maghrébine*, Paris: CNRS, 1969, 73.

¹⁰⁰ Consuls, however, like the one in Djeddah, were skeptical of its local influence, Djeddah to MAE, 18 May 1909, MAE/CP/NS/432.

After 1919, however, activist journalism returned with a vengeance, and it is in this period that Muslim publications flourished both in French and in Arabic, though their existence was still precarious. Commercially, these newspapers were all failures, their existence dependent on the funds of their owners, and they all carried impassioned pleas for subscriptions to shore up their financial base.

This activist Muslim press diverged from contemporary developments in the European press. During the interwar years, the European press in Algeria, like its metropolitan counterparts, was undergoing commercial consolidation. At its peak in 1899, an astonishing 149 newspapers of varying periodicities served Europeans in Algeria. By 1936 this had diminished considerably, with thirteen daily newspapers and a smaller number of weekly and bi-weekly local publications, still large considering the size of the European population. *L'Echo d'Oran*, the newspaper with the largest print run in interwar Algeria and in all of North Africa, ran at 80,000 copies. By contrast, the largest Muslim newspaper, *Al Najah*, reached a peak of 6,000 daily copies, and that was only for a brief period.¹⁰¹

The Muslim press escaped the professionalisation of the European press, and the profession of journalist and activist were largely conflated.¹⁰² To publish a newspaper was, in itself, to make the point that Muslims were ready for citizenship. All the significant Muslim political leaders were also journalists, with 'their' newspaper: émir Khaled and the khalédistes had *L'Ikdam* (1919), Ibn Badis and the ulama *Al-Shibab* (1925) and later *El Bassair* (1936), Messali Hadj and the ENA had *El Ouma* (1930), Ferhat Abbas and the Fédération des élus *L'Entente* (1935), and so on. To be a journalist was to be an activist. For this reason much of the historiography has focused on the various

¹⁰¹ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, pp.376-8.

¹⁰² Zessin, 'Presse et journalistes "indigènes"'.

political arguments between these newspapers, bypassing the fact that they shared a common agenda, to enlighten Muslims through print.

This was the case even for less explicitly political newspapers. *Al-Najah*, founded in Constantine in 1919 by Smaïl Mami and Abdelhafidh ben El-Hachemi, worked as a kind of successor to *Kawkab Ifriqiya*: a ‘non-political’ newspaper in Arabic that avoided confrontation with the government and focused on news distribution, especially international news. *Al-Najah* was by far the most stable and the most read newspaper in Arabic in Algeria, with the higher estimates of its print run at 12,000 copies (more realistic ones place it at 5,000 copies per issue in the 1930s). For one year, in 1930, it managed to publish daily and to pay for a direct subscription to the Havas wire service, thus operating on a comparable level to European publications. *Al-Najah* often enjoyed good relations with the government, which found it useful for there to be a reliable source of information for the natives that did not engage in political polemic.¹⁰³ French authorities themselves described *Al-Najah* as *pro-gouvernemental*.¹⁰⁴ Yet when the newspaper briefly went daily in 1930, this was seen as ‘one of the greatest achievements of the Arab press’ by a wide cross-section of Muslim newspapers, including less government-friendly ones.¹⁰⁵

Though Muslim journalists railed against censorship, lack of legal protection was not the only reason for the failures of the Muslim press. In a context where the reading public was small and poor, publications failed to attract stable financial resources. Given this context, legal intervention to shut down Muslim newspapers, though possible after the 1881 law, was not always necessary. In 1894, for instance, the GGA considered the newspaper *El Hack* in Annaba (not to be confused with the later *El Hack* started in 1911 in Oran), threatening. The Interior Ministry, however, noted that legal action was

¹⁰³ Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène*, pp.86-7.

¹⁰⁴ Monthly report, December 1935, ANOM/GGA/11H48. *Al-Najah*’s good relations with the government got tighter in the later 1930s, CIE Constantine, 11-18 September 1939, ANOM/GGA/15H31.

¹⁰⁵ McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*, p.69.

unnecessary, as *El Hack* was going to disappear anyway because it was running out of funds after a few months.¹⁰⁶

The pioneers of Muslim journalism in Algeria were modernists who shared the same beliefs in the civilisational power of the newspaper as *Le Mobacher* had in the 1840s. To them too, the press was a magical tool to spread the light: 'the newspaper is a lighthouse to the people' (*inna al-sahafa li-l-shu'ub manara*), said one elegy to the power of the press in *Al Maghrib* in 1930.¹⁰⁷ Journalists were the enlightened (*mutanawwirin*) spreading reason among the people, fighting superstition.¹⁰⁸ The Muslim press was intimately linked with Islamic reformists, who saw it as their tool to eradicate backward practices. The press was, to them, a 'miracle of modern times' to practice *tabligh*, the transmission of the prophetic message.¹⁰⁹ The association between printing and the new group of Islamic reformists was strong. At a local level in the Mزاب for instance, Augustin Jomier has shown that local conservative ulama banned reading newspapers in the 1920s which they associated with their reformist enemies. Fierce polemics opposed partisans and opponents of the press.¹¹⁰

The existence of a Muslim press was more important than whatever news it happened to carry. Indeed, apart from *Al-Najah*, Muslim newspapers did not have the means to compete with European ones in terms of access to news: they were less frequent (usually weekly while most Europeans were dailies), and unable to afford expensive subscriptions to wire services. Most of them wrote commentaries on news that they assumed the reader already knew. They did not describe events so much as ponder their significance or rail against their inadequate coverage.¹¹¹ For politician-journalists,

¹⁰⁶ Interior to GGA, 17 March 1894, ANOM/F⁸⁰1684.

¹⁰⁷ *Al Maghrib*, 3 June 1930, clipping found in the MMSH, Fonds Desparmet, VII/7.

¹⁰⁸ On newspapers as fighting superstition, see Taïeb El Okbi to GGA, 12 May 1928, ANOM/GGA/15H26.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Augustin Jomier, 'Un réformisme islamique', p. 260.

¹¹⁰ Augustin Jomier, 'Un réformisme islamique', pp.226-239.

¹¹¹ Ihaddaden, *Histoire de la presse indigène*.

freedom of the press in Algeria was a central political demand in the 1930s, conflated with freedom of speech in general (*liberté de la presse* being a more common expression than *liberté d'expression*). More than a means to spread news, for Muslim politicians newspapers were tools to show that they were worthy political actors.

The limits of the 1881 law: proxies and transnational printing

In Algeria, the 1881 law expressed the belief that printing and political citizenship should be one and the same, but in practice this was not always the case. Non-citizens found ways to print, and sometimes the government found ways to ban publications by citizens, especially if they were in Arabic. Despite this, the belief in magical printing had important consequences. In Algeria, unlike in other territories in the French Empire, the conflation of printing and citizenship meant that it was very difficult to ban publications in French, as this would have required questioning fundamental civil liberties in metropolitan France.

In practice, non-citizens could bypass the 1881 law. For instance, Spaniards, as foreigners, were not protected by the 1881 law. By 1881, there were 114,320 Spaniards in Algeria for 195,418 Frenchmen, and in the Western region of Oran they outnumbered French citizens.¹¹² Their newspapers were liable to be shut down under article 14 of the 1881 press law. Despite this, before the First World War, eight Spanish publications had been launched in Oran, roughly as many as the number of publications launched for roughly four million Algerian Muslims, and the Spanish ones were far more durable.¹¹³

¹¹² For a general history of the Spanish in Algeria under the colonial period, see Juan Bautista Vilar, *Los españoles en la Argelia francesa (1830-1914)*, (Murcia, 1989) and Jean-Jacques Jordi *Les Espagnols en Oranie 1830-1914*, (Montpellier, 1986).

¹¹³ These were *El correo español*, 1880-1925, *El noticiario* 1896-7, *La voz de España* 1903-9, *El pueblo español*, 1905, *La vida española* 1908-1910, *El eco español* 1911-?, *La colonia española* 1914-15 all in Castilian. See Archives of

Reflecting most Spaniards' origin in the region of Alicante, a short boat ride from Oran, there was even a satirical newspaper in Valencian Catalan, *El Dimoni Coixo*.

The longest-lasting Spanish publication in Algeria was *El correo español*, which published uninterrupted between 1880 and 1925. Its founding editor, Manuel Cañete, was a political refugee without French citizenship, but *El Correo* bypassed the 1881 law by using a French citizen as proxy.¹¹⁴ Muslim newspapers in Algeria would make use of the same technique, using French citizens as proxies to publish their own newspapers. Yet not all non-citizens were the same, and Spaniards were far better off than Muslims. As Laure Blévis has pointed, Algerian Muslims, despite being recognised as French nationals if not citizens, enjoyed far fewer rights under the *indigénat* than foreign citizens, who benefitted from the protection of their home governments.¹¹⁵ *El Correo español* proudly proclaimed on its front page 'Todo por la patria', referring not to France but to Spain as the fatherland: needless to say such an exclamation of nationalism would not have been tolerated coming from Algerian Muslims.

Spaniards, though not French citizens, enjoyed the consular protection of their home government. In 1887, three Spanish journalists in Oran were expelled from Algeria because of 'anti-French speech', but this was only possible because they had also insulted the Spanish consul in Oran. Even then, one of them, Francisco Zavala was eventually allowed to remain in Oran due to political pressure from the Spanish court.¹¹⁶

Overall, the local authorities of the *préfecture* in Oran certainly kept an eye on the *Correo español* and other Spanish publications, yet judging from surviving documents, they rarely had cause to complain. The *Correo* never threatened the domination of the French

the Wilaya of Oran, Press collections. There were also Italian-language publications in the *département* de Constantine but given the smaller Italian population these were less numerous.

¹¹⁴ Oran municipal Sûreté to PO, 22 December 1894, ANOM/DO/3099. *La Patria* (founded 1886), managed by François Legrand and *La Fraternidad* (1887), managed by Alexis Daimé, also used French citizens as proxies. The French government attempted to get the *Correo* shut down before the 1881 law, GGA to MAE, 13 July 1881 in MAE/CP/10.

¹¹⁵ Laure Blévis 'La citoyenneté française' and Spire, 'Semblables et pourtant différents'.

¹¹⁶ Decree (*arrêté*), 12 December 1887, ANOM/F⁸⁰1684.

press in Oran: in 1904, *El Correo* was a biweekly newspaper printing 700 copies per edition. *L'Echo d'Oran*, by contrast, the most widespread local French newspaper, printed 14,000 copies every day.¹¹⁷ Most of the *Correo español's* coverage simply involved republishing articles in the French Algerian press in Spanish. The relative tolerance of the Spanish press, though lesser than that accorded to newspapers in French, suggests that authorities feared publications by foreigners less than they feared publications aimed towards Muslims.

Indeed, the biggest exception to the 1881 law was that after 1925, the government banned publications in Arabic even when they were owned by French citizens. Due to their foreign links, publications in Arabic were always considered more suspicious by colonial authorities, especially as the number of officials in the administration that could read Arabic and thus understand their content was extremely limited. A regular duty of administrators was to report on Arabic publications seized within their area, as well as produce detailed lists of known subscribers to particular publications. Since at least the 1890s, readers were under surveillance. Periodically, this led to the production of detailed lists, with their addresses, family links and political affiliations duly consigned.¹¹⁸

Technically, the 1881 law's discriminating criterion was citizenship: anyone who was a French citizen could publish in whatever language. A good example of this was the Jewish press in Algeria, much of which was in Arabic, though printed in the Hebrew alphabet and thus inaccessible to the Muslim population. Algerian Jews founded their own printing presses with Hebrew type first in Algiers in 1853 and then in Oran in 1856, ending their reliance on publishing houses on the other side of the sea at a time where

¹¹⁷ DO, 'Etat des écrits périodiques mis en cours de circulation pendant le mois mars 1904', ANOM/F⁸⁰1729.

¹¹⁸ Many examples of these suspicious readers will return in subsequent chapters. The first case of a newspaper in Arabic being banned in Algeria I have encountered was in 1880, see chapter 6. Detailed series of lists of readers of subversive newspapers are often to be found at the level of the *département* rather than in the GGA archives, like in Constantine/B³283.

they were still legally *indigènes* just as much as Muslims. However, it was only in 1870, around the time where Algerian Jews were granted citizenship *en masse* through the Décret Crémieux, that the first Jewish newspaper appeared in Algiers. It was published both in French and in Judeo-Arabic, thus the dual title *L'israélite algérien* and *Adziri, jurnal bi-al-yahud wa bi al-fransis*.¹¹⁹

As the 1881 law did not specify anything about the language of publication so long as the manager of the newspaper was a French citizen, Jews were also free to publish in Judaeo-Arabic. In 1886, for instance, a certain Sadia Amar expressed his intention to publish a paper named *Quoll Kattor*. The paper was to be published in a Jewish dialect of Arabic written in Hebrew characters, although French authorities frequently conflated Hebrew script with the Hebrew language which makes the sources rather confusing.¹²⁰ An anxious *préfet* worried about the possibility of subversive articles which he could not monitor being printed in a foreign language and demanded the systematic translation of the paper. The Interior Ministry's response, however, was clear: the 29 July 1881 law protected French citizens irrespective of what language they chose to publish in, citing for instance the case of newspapers published in Brittany in the Breton language, 'no article of law nor case law [*jurisprudence*] in this matter authorise the *préfets* to demand from the managers of newspapers a translation of the written text.'¹²¹ Subsequent Jewish newspapers, even those that did not publish in French, do not appear to have been troubled by authorities, despite overwhelming anti-Semitism and political controversy over Jewish citizenship.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Tobi and Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature*, 15.

¹²⁰ Ihaddaden supposes *Quoll Kattor* was published in the Arabic script. As no copy of the newspaper survives this is impossible to verify. At a similar time, the publication of Mardochée Karsenty's *L'Oranais Lhakanit* in Oran was certainly in Judaeo-Arabic in Hebrew characters, so it is likely that it was the same for *Quoll Kattor*.

¹²¹ Sub-director of press service in Interior Ministry,, note, 24 May 1886, F⁸⁰1729. Newspapers in Breton, primarily Catholic publications, had begun with the 1865 publication of *Feiz ha Breiz*.

¹²² See *L'Oranais Lhakanit* (1886) or *Le Maghib Oranais* (1889), F⁸⁰1730, or *Le Peuple d'Israël* (1892), F⁸⁰1729.

By 1925, following an increase in the number of publications in Arabic in Algeria, the GGA interpreted the legal framework of the 1881 law to censor publications in Arabic but not in French. The original interpretation of the 1881 law deployed in the *Quoll Kattor* case, which protected newspapers published in whatever language as long as they were managed by French citizens, had been modified after 1895. Following incidents in Nice involving Italian-language papers advocating separation from France, the law of 22 July 1895 modified the 1881 law by making it clear that newspapers would be treated as foreign based on their *language* of publication, even if they happened to be run by French citizens. Newspapers published on French territory in foreign languages could therefore be shut down by the Interior Ministry.

The 1895 law, unlike the 1881 press law, was not declared to be immediately applicable to Algeria and the colonies, and I have not found evidence of it being enforced there until much later. In 1925, however, case-law upheld the banning of Arabic newspapers in Algeria based on the 1895 law, which meant that Arabic was considered to be a foreign language in Algeria.¹²³ Now, Arabic newspapers printed by citizens in Algeria could be banned as foreign publications, whether they were printed abroad or in Algeria, and the procedure was used extensively by the GGA. Once banned, newspapers often sprouted back up: the Mzabi *shaykh* Ibrahim Abu al-Yaqdan had eight successive newspapers banned.¹²⁴ Shutting newspapers down made it financially difficult to start publications in Algeria and led to a form of self-censorship, but it did not shut down the Arab press entirely. Often, Algerians tended to print abroad to bypass censorship.

One of the biggest problems for the government was that print did not stop at national boundaries. The 1881 law regulated the press within France better than it could

¹²³ Collot, 'Le régime juridique', p.373.

¹²⁴ Jomier, 'Réformisme islamique', pp.226-239.

control publications abroad. As Muslims in Algeria shared a written language with Arabic-speakers from Morocco to Iraq, the importation of Arabic newspapers posed grave problems. Though the GGA tried, newspaper circulation was poorly contained by state boundaries. Newspapers in Arabic banned in Algeria came more frequently from Tunis (15) and Cairo (11) than from Algiers (8) or Constantine (5) [Figures 4 and 5].¹²⁵

Though the centre of gravity of Arabic publishing was in Cairo and Beirut, Tunis played an especially crucial role for Algerians. Many Algerian journalists like Omar Racim started writing in Tunisian newspapers before they started their own newspapers in Algiers. Tunis was close enough to make French attempts to police the circulation of newspapers by the post nearly futile. When Tunisian newspapers were banned for sale in Algeria, they were not sold publicly but still circulated – as long as they bore no external indication on the packaging they were rarely seized. By the 1930s, the activity appears to have become widespread enough for some men to become specialised as redistributors, who re-expedited banned newspapers, sometimes hidden inside other newspapers for extra safety.¹²⁶

Tunisia, despite its smaller population, had a far more bustling press industry than Algeria, partly due to laxer legal conditions. Depending on the Resident-General and political tensions, newspapers in Tunisia were sometimes subject to an advance *cautionnement* and at others free to publish without authorisation. After *cautionnement* was abolished by Resident-General Pichon in 1904, a publishing boom took place, with 110 new publications between 1904 and 1910. Most newspapers were banned following nationalist riots in 1911 and throughout the First World War. After 1919, newspapers underwent the ups and downs of censorship depending on political tensions.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ 'Etat des publications de langue arabe dont la circulation est interdite en Algérie au 30 mars 1938', ANOM/GGA/15H25. See map below.

¹²⁶ CIE Constantine, 21 July 1939, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

¹²⁷ To be precise, *cautionnement* was required from 1884-1887 and again 1897-1904, while newspapers were free to publish without previous authorisation 1887-1897 and 1904-1912 and then banned altogether under

Journalists in Tunisia were also more organised and had more possibilities for negotiation under the Protectorate. In 1919, they petitioned the French Resident-General for the re-establishment of a free Arab press, arguing that it was in the government's own interest: since 'the government itself is deprived of an organ capable of informing it frankly on the needs of the country, (...) the role of the press is from this perspective undeniable.' There was no possible space for this kind of action in Algeria.¹²⁸ The next year, Tunisian journalists working in Arabic formed their own professional association – a development which never occurred in Algeria.¹²⁹

Algerians, especially in the Eastern regions which had long enjoyed close connections with Tunis, took advantage of the greater institutionalisation of the Tunisian press. After a slew of newspapers in Arabic got shut down in 1925, Algerians turned to printing their newspapers in Tunis, so much so that in 1926 the Residency had to ban Algerians from printing in Tunis.¹³⁰

Indeed, it was not just the papers themselves, but the articles in Arabic that travelled most widely. The GGA was infuriated by a well-worn tactic in which authors in Constantine would get their articles published in Tunis and then those papers would be read out loud in Constantine without their authors risking anything.¹³¹ Newspapers in Algeria reprinted articles wholesale from publications in Cairo, Baghdad or Beirut, sometimes with, sometimes without attribution. Publishers in Algeria were the most avid readers of foreign Arabic newspapers who, in turn, exchanged their own papers with publishers abroad.¹³² *Al Shihab*, Abd al Hamid ibn Badis' monthly magazine published in

the state of emergency 1912-1919. See Note, 19 June 1919, ANT, FPC/MN/5/2. After 1919, newspapers had to obtain a receipt from the Residency-General but with no financial component, see Note 15 February 1922, ANT, FPC/MN/5/2.

¹²⁸ Members of the Arab press to Resident-General, 10 January 1919, FPC/MN/5/2.

¹²⁹ Note, Sûreté publique, 25 June 1920, FPC/MN/5/3.

¹³⁰ Taïeb el Okbi to GGA, 12 May 1928, ANOM/GGA/15H26.

¹³¹ Specifically the connection was between Ben Badis and Tha'albi's *Irada* in Tunis. CIE Constantine, 26 April 1939, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

¹³² Lecture by Charavin, Administrator of the CM of Fort-National, 'Influence de l'Orient sur la presse de langue arabe en Algérie', May 1936. WO/I/1/2260.

Constantine, spread Arabic articles from across the region within Algeria and spread Algerian writing to other corners of the Arab world.

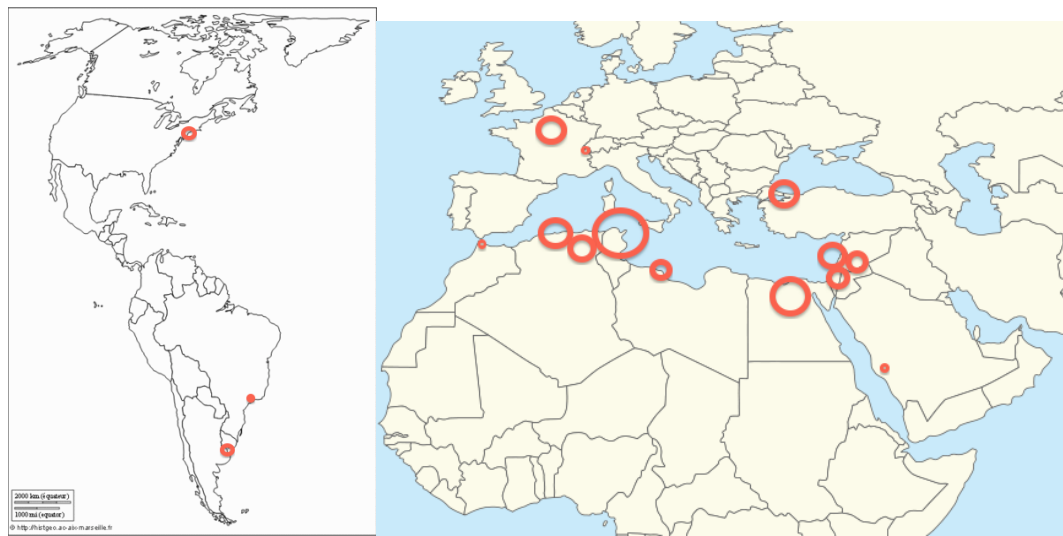


Figure 4 Map of Arabic newspapers banned by the GGA, 1897-1938, size of circle proportional to the number of newspapers banned by city of publication. Newspapers banned sporadically before 1897 are not shown here. Publications in New York, Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires reflect the work of Syrian immigrants to the Americas. Based on information in ANOM/GGA/15H25.

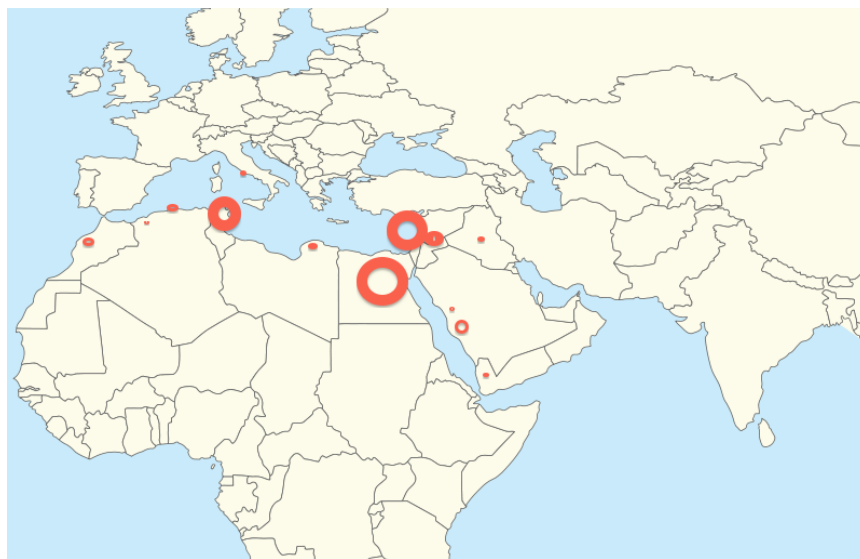


Figure 5 Map of origin of publications in Arabic inspected in the month of December 1939 (legal and illegal), size of circle proportional to number of newspapers by city of publication, based on information in ANOM/GGA/15H25.

The GGA had trouble keeping up with this increase. By 1926, officers in the native affairs were complaining that Arabic newspapers were arriving too late to their offices for efficient surveillance.¹³³ From 1935 onwards, the volume was consistent and politically sensitive enough to involve dedicated teams that put together fortnightly analyses of the Muslim press, including publications both in Algeria and beyond.¹³⁴

While publications in Arabic attracted much official attention, publications in French were equally troublesome but could not be censored. During the interwar period, publications in French were those that gave the GGA the worst headaches. Due to the 1881 law and to the fact that Algeria was an integral part of France, newspapers published in French could not be banned, even if their content was highly subversive. Officials complained that publications, like *El Ouma*, published by Messali el Hadj's *Etoile Nord-Africaine*, that called for Algeria's independence, 'cannot be banned in the current state of the law.'¹³⁵ By contrast, in the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia, which were technically foreign countries, French authorities could ban *any* newspaper, whatever the language or the citizenship of owner. 'Algeria is in this respect in a state of inferiority compared to its Eastern and Western neighbours. While (...) laws in Morocco and (...) in Tunisia allow for the immediate banning of subversive newspapers, even in the French language, these same periodicals can circulate freely in Algeria.'¹³⁶ Because Algeria was a part of France, any attempt at censorship was extremely delicate as it would involve changing metropolitan civil liberties as well. By the second half of the 1930s, with an increasingly turbulent Muslim press in both French and Arabic, authorities were finding the existing legal framework inadequate.

In reality, the rise of the Muslim press in the 1930s only made visible a problem that had existed since 1881. The free press had never been magically contained to

¹³³ Affaires Indigènes to GGA, 27 February 1926, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

¹³⁴ Periodic reports, ANOM/GGA/15H1-4.

¹³⁵ Circulaire 'Au sujet de la presse tendancieuse en Algérie', 2 May 1934, GGA/3R20.

¹³⁶ Note, undated c.1935, 'Régime de la presse', ANOM/GGA/15H25.

citizens, because some non-citizens could still read even when they did not print. This was not the end of the spell, rather newspapers had never had the magical ability to control the flow of news. Already, since 1881, the proliferation of an uncensored settler press raised the problem that settler publications (and not foreign ones which could be banned) might prove the most subversive, especially if they ended up in the wrong hands. This, in turn, requires looking at how newspapers circulated in Algerian society. Journalists and government officials, both European and Muslim, assumed that those who had the power to print would be able to guide the people under their opinions. It is unclear, however, that newspapers had ever done this [**Figure 6**].

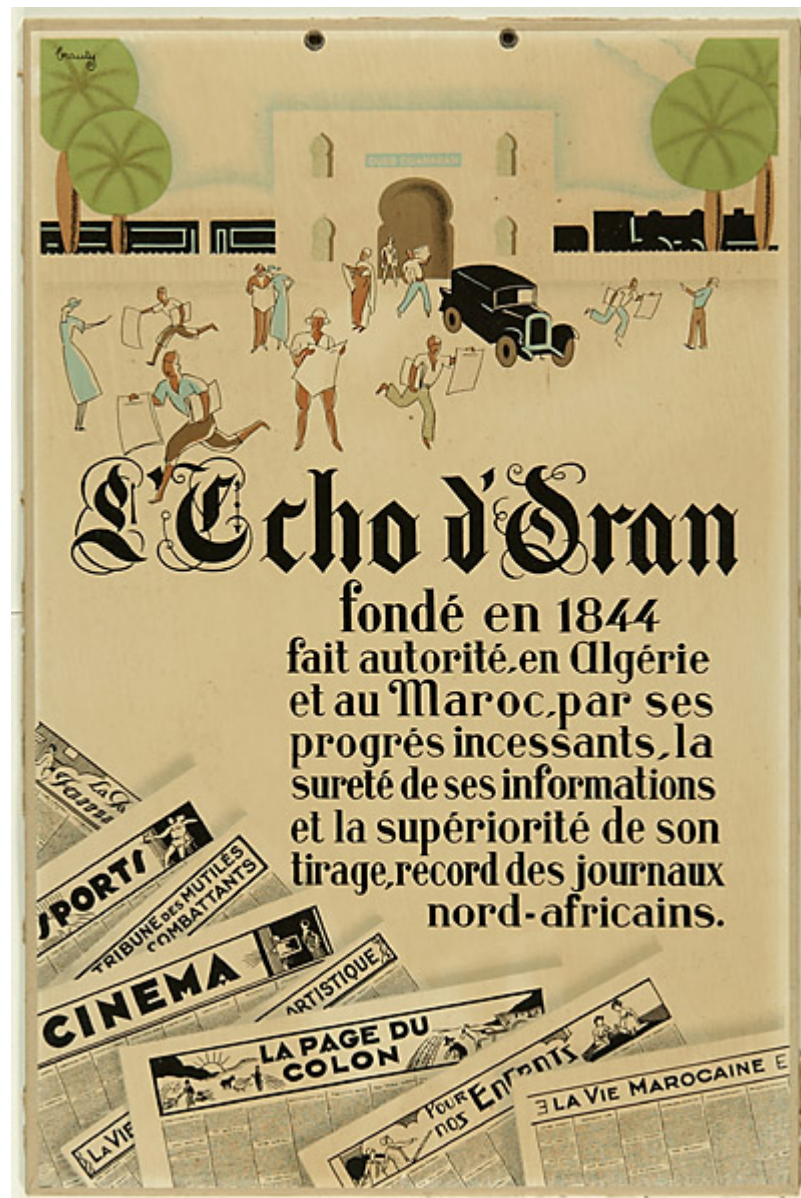


Figure 6 This advertisement for L'Echo d'Oran by Charles Brouty (1930) made good on the fact that L'Echo was the most distributed newspaper across all of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia at the time. The arrangement of the characters is illustrative of how newspapers were meant to circulate: the people shown reading the newspaper are identifiably European (whether by the woman's dress, the suit or most evidently the white colon's hat), or Muslim élites, as suggested by the lone identifiably Muslim man in a burnous. The men running forth selling the paper are ambiguous – their clothes are not distinctive but this is unimportant as they are not reading the paper, ANOM 9Fi599.

Eavesdropping: Newspapers in the broader news ecosystem

Most Algerians had a peculiar relationship to newspapers, objects that were seen and heard but not read. Literacy rates remained very low throughout the colonial period, and sharply divided between Europeans and Muslims, so for most Algerians, the newspaper was a familiar but inaccessible object. People in even the smallest urban centres would have seen Europeans reading the paper, and in larger cities they heard the criers announcing the day's headlines.

For Europeans, primary education, already rising throughout nineteenth-century France, also benefited from the ambitions of the new Republican regime. Another law of summer 1881, the Ferry law, was applied to Algeria in 1883, making primary education compulsory and free. By 1901, 84% of European children were in school, and though illiteracy rates among the European population remained higher than in metropolitan France, they were certainly comparable.¹³⁷ The development of primary education also pushed the mixed European Algerian population towards reading in French: initially, most Spanish migrants to Algeria came from lower socio-economic backgrounds and were illiterate, especially in Castilian Spanish.¹³⁸ Unlike Muslim children however, most children of Spanish immigrants ended up in French primary schools after the 1883 Ferry law on public education and the 1889 naturalisation law, thus reducing illiteracy but also pushing them into the market for French-language publications.

By contrast, provision of public education for Muslims had a 'derisory impact', in the words of Fanny Colonna.¹³⁹ The Ferry law did lead to a period of modest increases. In 1882, only 3,200 Muslim students attended French schools. By 1901, Republican

¹³⁷ Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens, 1883-1939*, Alger: Office des publications universitaires, 1975, 49. See also Yvonne Turin, *Affrontements culturels dans l'Algérie coloniale. Ecoles, médecines, religion, 1830-1880*, Paris: Maspéro, 1970.

¹³⁸ Jordi, *Les espagnols*, 155.

¹³⁹ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*, 49.

policies had increased this to 25,300 students, and by 1930 to 100,000 students. Yet broadly speaking, Europeans tended to become overwhelmingly literate in French, while Muslims did not. By 1936, only 2.1% of Muslim men could read French.¹⁴⁰

Meanwhile, government seizure of land held by religious trusts (*habus*) deprived traditional educational institutions of their financial means and literacy in Arabic plummeted. Obsessed with the danger of Sufi brotherhoods, French officials blamed Sufi *zawiyas* for insurrections and shut down what were in many rural areas the only educational institutions.¹⁴¹ Literacy rates in Arabic are difficult to estimate as the French government did not collect this information. While primary education in Quranic schools (*kuttab*) declined, it certainly remained by far the most common type of education for Muslim men in Algeria until the very end of the colonial period, when the French government dramatically expanded public education during the independence war. Even so, literacy in Arabic must be heavily qualified: rote learning from the Qur'an did not necessarily allow adult men to read a newspaper in the renewed Modern Standard Arabic. Experiments to teach Muslim women remained minuscule. If anything, after an initial hopeful phase during the conquest, they may have contracted.¹⁴²

Excluded from electoral politics, Muslims provided no constituency for the bitter quarrels of the settler press which largely ignored them. As one newspaper noted in 1923, 'It will surprise our descendants that, in a country where there are five million natives, no French daily newspaper deals with Muslim questions.'¹⁴³ While the content of

¹⁴⁰ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*, p.16.

¹⁴¹ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*, 30-32, who mentions that before the conquest perhaps 40% of adult men could read, though these figures must be taken carefully. On the French administration's understanding of Sufi brotherhoods as subversive threats see George R. Trumbull IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 and Jean-Louis Triaud, *La légende noire de la Sanûsiyya. Une confrérie saharienne sous le regard français (1840-1930)*, Paris: MSH, 1995, pp.9-20.

¹⁴² Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman's Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Souriau-Hoebrechts, *La presse maghrébine*, p.75.

these newspapers virtually never addressed Muslim readers, the occasional presence of ads in Arabic suggests that commercial interests may have been more shrewd.¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, newspapers played an important role in the lives of Algerians, even those who could not read. Muslims consistently eavesdropped on news meant for European audiences. Those who could read proved themselves to be voracious consumers of French news not intended for them, and the newspapers ended up in the wrong hands. As we will see in the next chapter, authorities consistently complained that news made available for French citizens could not be prevented from reaching native ears.¹⁴⁵ The circulation figures for newspapers in Algeria look high only if we assume that French citizens were its only readers, but they spilled far beyond their intended audience. It is telling that in many sources in the contemporary Algerian dialect, newspapers are known as *al-jurnal* or *al-jurnan*, using the French word, rather than the Arabic literary terms *sahifa* or *jarida*.¹⁴⁶

Newspapers were important objects of news circulation even for the illiterate. In cafés, newspapers were read out loud, a phenomenon which will be investigated further in the next chapter. Images from illustrated newspapers, displayed on kiosks, could have far more of an impact than a well-written article. Without textual explanation, the meaning of images became loose and could be interpreted in many ways by interested onlookers, and authorities worried about the unstable meaning of images. Even for those with limited reading skills, illustrated newspapers were easier. In the 1930s, at a time when the availability of newspapers in Arabic had increased a lot, illustrated magazines

¹⁴⁴ See for instance *Le Courrier de Tlemcen*, though this may have been due to Tlemcen's unusually large population literate in Arabic.

¹⁴⁵ See Mayor of Blida to préfet of Algiers, 18 February 1899, ANOM/1H86. Or Commissariat de police de Koléa, 1 March 1899, ANOM/1H86.

¹⁴⁶ On these sources, see chapter 3, pp.190-1.

from Egypt like *Kul Shai'* [Everything] or *Al-Musanwar* [The Illustrated] were more commonly sold in kiosks than high-brow newspapers featuring heavy text.¹⁴⁷

To give one example, images from illustrated satirical Italian newspapers like *Il Papagallo* or *La Rana*, printed in Bologna, had a life of their own among Muslims who could not read Italian. Their best illustrations were sometimes put up in cafés for the delight of customers. During the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, *La Rana* featured an illustration with a rather complex diplomatic joke [Figure 7]. It is not clear how many people in Constantine, where the illustration was found, would have read the lengthy text at the bottom of the illustration. However, the representation of France in the illustration was dressed promiscuously. This would have been enough for men in cafés to make dirty jokes, and *La Rana* was banned.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Charavin, 'Influence de l'Orient sur la presse de langue arabe en Algérie', May 1936, WO/I/1/2260.

¹⁴⁸ GGA to Interior, 8 June 1897, ANOM/F⁸⁰1729. Constantine police report, 25 May 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.



Figure 7 *Cartoon of the Turkish-Greek War by La Rana, 1897. ‘The three emperors and their suite conquering peace’. Turkey (with sword) and Greece (with gun) are left, with the League of Three Emperors right (Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia). The emperors are compelling a murderous Turkey to make peace with Greece, followed by their ‘suite’, their allies Britain, Italy and France, represented as women. The dog of Revolution is barking at Russia’s feet. France, bottom-right, is wearing a rather revealing dress and red shoes.*

Most of the time, authorities displayed little interest in using these kinds of practices to their own advantage. Only during the First World War did French authorities attempt to use these aspects for their own purposes to ensure the loyalty of the Muslim population. The GGA printed a special newspaper, the *Akhbar al-harb* [News of the War], written by the team of the *Mobacher*. To appeal to its chosen readership, the *Akhbar al-harb* was originally printed in a form resembling manuscript in the elegant Maghrebi script. It also featured an illustration on the first page to attract the illiterate [Figure 8]. In 1916, the format was improved to include a photograph on the front page, with typographic characters, the manuscript style only being used for titles. In 1916, the MAE

published another publication in Arabic, *Tasawwir* [*Taçaouir*, 'The Illustrated'] which also received the compliments of the GGA.¹⁴⁹

Most characteristic are the instructions that were given along with the distribution of the *Akbbar al-harb*: local native administrators were enjoined to read it out to their surroundings, and 'owners of *cafés maures* have been encouraged to read these newspapers to their customers.'¹⁵⁰ Other means of propaganda towards the natives, less costly and acknowledged to be effective, were also being attempted: the GGA printed songs for people to sing in *cafés maures*, and especially, started paying for wandering teams of film projectors to go through the Algerian countryside projecting uplifting images.

Yet a good newspaper was considered the most effective means of propaganda: the *Akbbar al-harb* took up the majority of the budget for propaganda towards natives, even though its maximum impact was necessarily limited.¹⁵¹ Printed in Algiers, the *Akbbar al-harb* was sent to other colonies and to British allies, yet the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reluctant to subsidise it because 'the writing adopted for this newspaper – very appropriate undoubtedly for the situation of Algerian natives – has not allowed it to have, outside our colonies, a great impact.'¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Mobacher* service to préfets, 21 June 1916, ANOM/GGA/1H33. June 1916 report, ANOM/GGA/11H44.

¹⁵⁰ General of Oran to GGA, 14 September 1917, ANOM/GGA/1H33.

¹⁵¹ 'Note sur budget de 100 000F attribués pour la propagande envers les musulmans', ANOM/GGA/15H25

¹⁵² MAE to GGA, 5 July 1917, ANOM/GGA/15H25.



Figure 9 Front page of Al Fabrika/ Al Kazirna (left) with detail of illustration (right), Both were printed on the same sheet of paper, Al Fabrika was on one side and Al Kazirna on the other. Constantine to GGA, 15 october 1924, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

In practice, printed words were not separate from other forms of media. They could imitate manuscript, feature images, and spread orally in the same social spaces as songs and rumours. While Muslim politicians focused their energy on the creation of newspapers, many more Algerians experienced the headlines through the cinema. Most people watched wars on the newsreel before they ever learnt how to read the paper. The zenith of the press industry in Algeria, 1896, was also the year when Algerians first discovered the cinema, along with many other places in the world: the Lumière brothers projected their films in Algiers as part of their world tour that took them from Bombay to Buenos Aires. There were 120 cinemas in Algeria by 1921, and 188 by 1939, compared to 47 in Tunisia and 56 in Morocco, which was indicative of its larger European

population.¹⁵³ As Frenchmen were pioneers in the creation of news in cinemas, with the first newsreels launched by Pathé-Journal in 1909, and then the longer-lasting Gaumont actualités in 1910, Algerians came to watch newsreels while the press industry was still booming. Cinemas were a predominantly European space – there were no cinemas exclusively for Muslims in Algeria.¹⁵⁴ Muslims, however, sat in on news at the movies, and the projection of moving images, especially as they were unaccompanied by sound and thus quite ambiguous in meaning, opened up subversive space. Movies, like illustrations, had looser meaning. In 1915, when a film showed Turks massacring Armenian Christians at the Alhambra cinema in Constantine, ‘the Muslim audience felt compelled to clap.’ Clapping at the wrong time was a sign that the message had gone wrong.¹⁵⁵

The radio, starting in 1929 with the creation of Radio-Alger, was also intended for Europeans.¹⁵⁶ The station itself was a public-private arrangement run by European volunteers enthusiastic about technology.¹⁵⁷ The Minister of Telecommunications (PTT) at the time of its foundation himself, André Mallarmé, was born in Algiers. Thus Radio-Alger aired talks about agricultural settlement in French and concerts of Western classical music, along with a few successful concerts of ‘Oriental’ music.¹⁵⁸ European listeners did not like it when ‘Arab’ shows would interrupt ‘their’ broadcast, as they represented the great majority of listeners and taxpayers.¹⁵⁹ In November 1936, there were 54,500 radio receptors in Algeria, and six months later this had increased to 66,531. Of these, the

¹⁵³ Morgan Corriou, ‘Tunis et les « temps modernes » : les débuts du cinématographe dans la Régence (1896-1908)’ in Morgan Corriou (ed.) *Publics et spectacle cinématographique en situation coloniale*, Tunis: IRMC, 2012, 95-133.

¹⁵⁴ Program to spend budget for native information services, 22 February 1938, ANOM/GGA/15H32.

¹⁵⁵ Monthly report, July 1915, ANOM/GGA/11H44.

¹⁵⁶ Rebecca Scales, ‘Subversive Sound: Transnational Radio, Arabic Recordings, and the Dangers of Listening in French Colonial Algeria, 1934-1939’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:2, 2010, 384-417.

¹⁵⁷ Amicale Radio-Alger, Archives Nationales Algériennes [ANA], IBA/XXX-006.

¹⁵⁸ Amicale de Radio-Alger, yearly report 1934, ANOM/GGA/15H32.

¹⁵⁹ Program to spend budget for native information services, 22 February 1938, ANOM/GGA/15H32.

crushing majority were owned by Europeans – authorities estimated only 4-5%, or about 2,000 radios were owned by Muslims.¹⁶⁰

Yet, much like newspapers, Muslims listened to shows they were not supposed to. Given that newspapers were already heard rather than read, the arrival of the radio fit well into existing practices. Expensive and not easily purchased by individuals, radios found a place in that existing space of Muslim male sociability, the café, whose enterprising owners turned into symbols of modernity, replacing the mats with chairs.¹⁶¹ By 1938, even very small cities usually had radios in the single or even double digits: Tizi-Ouzou had 25 declared Muslim radio owners, Miliana 33, though these were still outnumbered 1 to 10 by European radio owners.¹⁶²

Radio was symbiotic with print: in 1930, the news broadcast for Radio-Alger consisted of speakers reading the city's daily newspapers out loud.¹⁶³ Newspapers and radios usually aimed for the same clientele, urban, educated, rich, as evidenced by repeated advertisements for gramophones and radio equipment in the press **[Figure 10]**.¹⁶⁴ Surveillance lists of Muslim radio-owners followed a well-established pattern of monitoring those who purchased suspicious foreign print.

¹⁶⁰ Figures are approximative as many people did not declare their radio posts to authorities. Report, Haut Comité méditerranéen, June 1937, ANOM/GGA/15H32.

¹⁶¹ Omar Carlier, 'Café maure'.

¹⁶² List of radio stations, 31 March 1938, ANOM/GGA15H31.

¹⁶³ A direct subscription to the Havas wire service was too expensive for the volunteer station's budget. Amicale Radio-Alger, Archives Nationales Algériennes [ANA], IBA/XXX-006.

¹⁶⁴ For advertisements to Europeans see Scales, 'Subversive sound', 390.

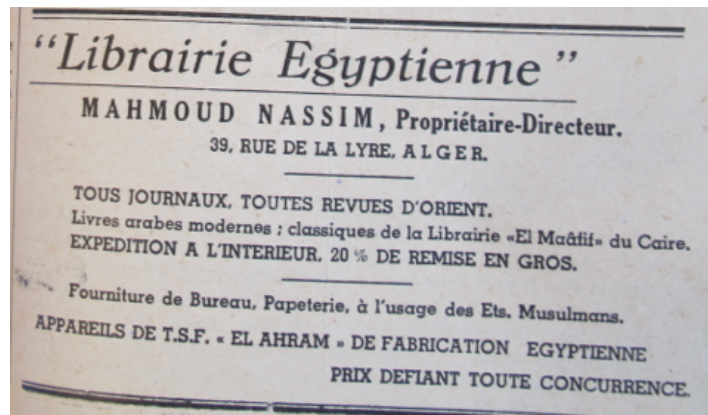


Figure 10 *Advertisement in El Ouma for an Egyptian bookshop that sold Arabic newspapers and radio posts made in Egypt, 1938.*

Much like newspapers, radio raised the problem of appealing to a Muslim audience. French authorities struggled with this as the radio offered for the first time the possibility of direct oral broadcasting without the intermediary of written language.¹⁶⁵ This opened up a whole host of new linguistic issues: should broadcasts be made in classical Arabic, in dialect, or in Berber languages which were rarely written and if so which one? Broadcasts in dialect would reach a wider, uneducated audience but educated élites despised them. In 1939, notables complained of a speaker ‘in all likelihood a [Berber-speaking] Kabyle, who speaks a very vulgar Arabic.’ When he was replaced a few months later, auditors lauded the ‘purity of language’ of the new speaker, recruited from the official Islamic clergy, but authorities worried that by using classical Arabic they were encouraging links to the rest of the Arab world and thus, Arab nationalism.¹⁶⁶ As Algerians had become used to listening to Eastern Arabic dialects through the mass success of the Arab recording industry in Algeria, reports noted that speakers had to have an ‘Oriental’, that is Mashriqi accent, in order to be convincing to Algerian

¹⁶⁵ Scales, ‘Subversive sound’.

¹⁶⁶ CIE Constantine, 12 mai 1939, ‘Emissions radiophoniques reçues à Constantine’ and CIE 14 septembre 1939, 15H32.

audiences.¹⁶⁷ To counteract the influence of Arabic and to reach broader audiences, Radio-Alger also issued broadcasts in Tamazight (Berber) dialects, especially in Kabyle. In turn, this angered speakers of the second most-spoken Tamazight dialect, the *shawiya*-speakers of the Aurès, who were not interested in listening to a radio that only broadcast in Arabic and Kabyle.¹⁶⁸ If suddenly anyone could listen to the radio, even Muslim women, new shows had to be designed for all.¹⁶⁹

Much like with the first Muslim newspapers in the nineteenth century, the French government attempted to attract Muslim audiences to the radio with programs specifically meant for them. The existence of a media did not just create its own audience, and it did not have the magical power of transforming society according to the will of those who diffused it. It had to capture the audience's attention.

And yet, much like printing before it, the radio created its own kind of magical media thinking which would endure well beyond the 1930s. Fanon's observation on the radio in 1959 at the beginning of this chapter reveal the FLN's magical media thinking during the war of independence. For Fanon, under colonialism, Muslims did not participate in the world of European communication, and it was only in the revolutionary process of decolonisation that Muslims started to intercept European media and recover political agency. Under colonialism, there was only media for Europeans, after decolonization, all Algerians would embrace the radio unproblematically. The experience of hearing the FLN's radio show was, to him, absolutely transformative: 'the identification of the voice of the revolution with the fundamental truth of the nation has

¹⁶⁷ On the recording industry in interwar Algeria see Scales, 'Subversive sound' and Bachaga Smati, 'Le disque de langue arabe', conference February 1937, WO/I/1/2260.

¹⁶⁸ CIE Constantine, 15 october 1939, ANOM/GGA/15H31.

¹⁶⁹ Bazous, 'Rapport sur les émissions musulmanes à Radio-PTT Alger', April 1940, 15H32.

opened up unlimited horizons.¹⁷⁰ After independence, the radio would be one with the people.¹⁷¹ Instead of magical printing, this was magical radio.

What Fanon was describing had never been true under colonialism, and it would not be true after independence. The radio never created a unified, homogenous Algerian nation speaking with one voice. Well into the 1970s, as François Chevaldonné's sociological study showed, the inhabitants of the Algerian countryside, far from constituting a mass of individuals equal in front of the media, had sharply unequal access to media. Depending on their education, region, social status, gender, and whether they were Arabophone or Berberophone, they had access to vastly different kinds of media, even in an independent state. Even with the arrival of transistor radio, many rural Algerians could hardly afford the batteries to make them run.¹⁷²

Conclusion

'The civilisation of a people can be measured by its schools, its print-shops, its theatre, its circles, its organisations and its press'¹⁷³

These words were written by an Islamic scholar, Ibrahim Abu al-Yaqdhan, in 1937. Abu al-Yaqdhan, born to the small Ibadi community of the Mzab in the Algerian Sahara, had studied in Tunis, printing newspapers there before setting up his own print-shop in Algiers in 1931. His words, however, could equally have been written by Victor Hugo. To both, the development of a country's newspapers was, a bit like GDP per capita would later become, a measure of progress along the axis of civilization. Once

¹⁷⁰ Fanon, *An V*, 82.

¹⁷¹ Fanon, *An V*, 81.

¹⁷² Chevaldonné, *Communication inégale*.

¹⁷³ Ibrahim Abu al-Yaqdhan, in *Al-Umma* (Mzabi), quoted by Augustin Jomier, 'Un réformisme islamique au Mzab', 232.

printed, a sheaf of paper became a metonymy for organised, rational, public life – in one word, civilisation.

In his 1937 article, Abu al-Yaqdhan lamented the ‘backwardness’ of Algeria: there were only three or four Arabic printing presses for all of Algeria, he claimed, while in Tunisia for fewer than a million Arabs there were ten daily newspapers and a great number of periodicals.¹⁷⁴ Faced with the Egyptian *Al Abram*, emperor of the Arab press, with its daily 16 pages, the (at best) weekly 4-page achievements of the 1930s Algerian Muslim press looked paltry.

Indeed, the expansion of print in Algeria excluded Muslims. France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a ‘civilisation of the newspaper’. From 1830 to 1930, the peak of French colonialism in Algeria was one and the same as the ‘century of the press’ (*siècle de la presse*) in France, to use Christophe Charle’s expression.¹⁷⁵ Newspapers, through raucous debates, biting cartoons and urgent political demands, created the world that conquered Algeria. In 1881, with a law protecting the freedom of the press for some and the denial of citizenship and the rule of law to others, the Republic reached its apotheosis. Colonial society consolidated in two increasingly homogenous blocs, one of whom was allowed untrammelled freedom of press, while the other was expected to stay quiescent or risk disciplinary action.

These developments were unique to Algeria. Elsewhere in the French empire for instance, the 1881 law was also ostensibly applied, but in colonies, there were usually restrictions even for French citizens who wished to print. In Indochina, Madagascar or West Africa for instance, the repressive measures of the *indigénat*, combined with a series of decrees forbidding foreign newspapers severely limited the 1881 law’s impact.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Ibrahim Abu al-Yaqdhan, in *Al-Umma* (Mzabi), quoted by Augustin Jomier, ‘Un réformisme islamique au Mzab’, 232.

¹⁷⁵ Charle, *Le siècle de la presse*.

¹⁷⁶ In Indochina, it was limited by the Décret du 30 décembre 1898 which gave the right to the Government General of Indochina to ban newspapers in foreign languages as well as making an offence of

In Algeria, even in times of crisis French citizens were free to publish what they wanted. In a settler colony attached to the metropole, revoking the civil liberties of European Algerians would have involved revoking them in France too. In the neighbouring Protectorate of Tunisia, the divide between the European and Muslim press was less stark than in Algeria, and Morocco would then follow this model.¹⁷⁷ The extreme disparities between the European and Muslim press in Algeria were part of the generally more extreme nature of settler colonialism, which appears, at least for press control, far more intense than in other colonies and protectorates.

This impact is only the more stark as the Algerian Muslim population shared a common written language with neighbouring countries, which did not endure the same intensity of colonial impact. Unlike in other settler colonies in the Americas, Australasia or southern Africa, settlers faced the competition of another written language, Arabic, which was shared with the countries around Algeria, and which they saw as a significant threat to their rule.

By the strict number of newspapers and printing presses, Algeria was far more developed than anywhere else in the Arab world, but they were not meant for the majority of its inhabitants. Abu al-Yaqdhan, like most French administrators, thought the most important thing about a newspaper was who published it, not who read it. It was difficult to comprehend this country where print was abundant but did not spread the light.

In practice, as we will see repeatedly in the coming chapters, newspapers got up to all sorts of things their publishers had never anticipated. This was not what Abu al-

‘exciting natives or foreign Asians to revolt against the French authority’. The same was done for Madagascar on 16 February 1901. In much of West and Equatorial Africa there was no press outside of French government publications until the First World War, after which similar legal measures were put in place. See Pierre Rodolphe Darest de la Chavanne, *Traité de droit colonial, tome second*. (Cannes, 1931), vol.2, pp.348-350.

¹⁷⁷ Morocco would later, follow a press control system on the Tunisian model where both European and Muslim publications were subject to censorship, Collot, ‘Régime juridique de la presse’, 346.

Yaqdhan had in mind. To him, *al-sibafa* or for the French administrators who translated his Arabic original, *la presse*, was more an ideal way of organising the world, a collective institution core to a functioning society. Its relationship to ink and paper was not always clear. Even when new media emerged, the French language continued to refer to them as a *presse* long after they had ceased to have any connection with the printing press, thus the delightful oxymoron *presse radio* and, later *presse en ligne*.

There is something sad about Abu al-Yaqdhan's complaint, yearning for a future that was already past. The hegemony of newspapers was lessening around him before it had ever quite taken hold of Algeria, as the radio and the cinema were less bound by the kind of scholarly guides that Abu al-Yaqdhan sought to be.

The triumph of the newspaper, the *siècle de la presse*, was always partly an illusion, dissimulating more complex practices of news circulation. This illusion, these years of magical printing, continued well after the arrival of the radio and well after the end of colonialism. They endured in the way Fanon thought the FLN could transform Algerian society through the radio. But most of all, they endured in the writings of historians and media theorists on the effects of print. In 1962, the year of Algerian independence, McLuhan published *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, in which he spoke of a 'typographic man' brought on by the rise of print. Twenty years after McLuhan, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* theorised that print-capitalism caused the rise of nationalism.

This view was very much the one that Algerian nationalists had of themselves, creating the nation through their newspapers. If anything, the historiography of the Algerian Muslim press written after independence in 1962 functions best as a primary source for understanding how print was thought of as possessing magical powers by Muslim élites. In the works of Algerian historians Ali Merad or Mohammed Nasser, the press becomes the means for elites to make the people into a nation, though it is once

again unclear how this process happens in an illiterate society.¹⁷⁸ Nasser, for instance, focuses on *jihad al-sahafiyya al-‘arabiyya al-jaza’iriyya*, the struggle of the Arab Algerian press to ‘revive’ (*ba‘atha*) the nation.¹⁷⁹

Magical printing was important to historical actors, but without critical distance it can blind us to seeing the different ways in which news could circulate. Certainly, most journalists in colonial Algeria thought that they were giving a voice to the people, but this does not mean that historians need to believe them. Having tracked the development of newspapers and the beliefs surrounding them, the next chapter turns to examining the unintended consequences of their circulation in more detail.

¹⁷⁸ For a critique of the link between print and nationalism in a largely oral and rural North African society, see Wyrzten, ‘Colonial state-building and the negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity’.

¹⁷⁹ Nasser, *Al-Suhuf*.

2. Electric News: Pan-Islamism and the Telegraph, c.1897-

1922

Rébeval, 1897. A ‘rather serious effervescence’ took hold of a small village in Kabylia, a Berber-speaking region in the mountains east of Algiers [Figure 11]. In the schools, young Kabyle boys told their French classmates that the harvest growing outside would be theirs, all theirs. The sharecroppers, or *khammès*, were plotting to take over their French masters’ houses.¹ A local French woman, Madame Inguimbert, was so worried about these rumblings that she asked a trusted Muslim neighbour to take her downstream to the town of Dellys if anything was to erupt. Insurrection was in the air.

People in Rébeval were excited about the recent Ottoman victory over Greece in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897. Sultan Abdulhamid II had crushed the Greek army, and was now clashing with other European powers, including France, who refused to allow the Ottomans to collect the fruits of their victory and insisted on the autonomy of Crete despite the Greek defeat. People in Rébeval believed that, riding on this victory against the infidel Greeks, the Ottomans were now going to come to the rescue of Algeria, sending 3 million men to take it back from the French, and it is these rumours that were getting everyone agitated.²

Official investigation traced these rumours back to one man, a certain Muhammad ben Muhammad ben Amar Allane. Allane, 37 years old, was a middling tobacco-grower who must have struggled to feed his eight children. According to a range of local European and Muslim witnesses, Allane had regularly held court in a café,

¹ The *khammès* could take home a fifth of the crop as payment for their labour tilling someone else’s lands, making some of the poorest members of Algerian rural society. The system or *khammessat* was heavily criticised during and after the colonial period.

² Administrator of Rébeval to sous-préfet in Tizi-Ouzou, 1 June 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

proclaiming to all and sundry that the sultan in Constantinople, having crushed the Greeks, had expelled the French ambassador from the Sublime Porte and was coming to the rescue of Algerians, who would soon take all their land back from the settlers. Local authorities immediately detained Allane for anti-French speech at the closest prison in Tizi-Ouzou, before requesting that he be interned at a safe distance in a camp in Boghari.³

What happened next was more surprising – a delegation of eleven local settlers, most of whom owned farms around Rébeval, came to his defence. They all testified that Allane and his family had been impeccably loyal to France and could not possibly be involved in this kind of agitation. Why would a clique of *colons* jump to save the reputation of a subversive Muslim? According to the investigating administrator, one of these men, Arnaud, was the owner of the café in which Allane used to speak, which he leased to Allane's brother. Arnaud, it seems, was only interested in protecting his rental income by keeping the café open. The other ten witnesses were all friends of Arnaud's, tied to the party of the former mayor of Rébeval, Mr. Coste. Allane had been the secretary (*khodja*) of Coste's administration. He thus enjoyed close relations with the previous administration and had many enemies in the current municipal government.⁴

Trouble in Rébeval came from a character with a reputation as a loyal servant of the French state, close relations to the local settlers, and the rare distinction of being literate in both French and Arabic, neither of which were his native language, Tamazight. If most colonial administrators assumed that insurgencies came from backwards-looking 'fanatical' Muslim traditionalists untouched by the light of Western civilisation, Allane hardly fit the bill.

³ PA to GGA, 28 May 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

⁴ Administrator of Rébeval to sous-préfet in Tizi-Ouzou, 1 June 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

It was through contacts with Europeans that Allane was well-informed about events in Crete: a retired army officer supplied him local French newspapers.⁵ During the Greco-Turkish War, French authorities fretted over the importation of foreign newspapers in Arabic. They noted anxiously that maps of events in Thessaly in Arabic appeared inexplicably in Muslim areas.⁶ Yet here it was French newspapers that were causing trouble.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, French authorities policed differential rights to public expression, whether through censorship and repression of seditious speech, using an arsenal that combined metropolitan laws, the *indigénat* and extra-judicial tactics. On the other hand, they did not control who read what. In the later years of the nineteenth century, as the settler press exploded, men like Allane became a frequent concern of surveillance reports.

The war between Greece and the Ottoman Empire came to Rébeval through the new channels of the later nineteenth-century, the cables that connected Istanbul to Paris, where news was packaged into wire dispatches, and then dispatched underwater through another cable to Algiers, where the telegraph materialised into print through a selection of local newspapers. In this first sense, the news in Rébeval was electric, in that it came through the new technology of the electric telegraph.

Armed with these newspapers, Allane would then go to the café, translate and comment on the news out loud in Tamazight to an eager audience. Despite its innocuous origins, it hit a nerve in Rébeval. The Kabyles had been hard hit by land dispossession enforced by the French state. In the lower stretches of the Sebaou river, close to the sea where Rébeval lay, the government had created little centres of European life for settlers. Peasants hoped for the restoration of their lands, and were receptive to news of a distant

⁵ Administrator of Rébeval to sous-préfet in Tizi-Ouzou, 1 June 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

⁶ Police in l'Arba to GGA, 18 May 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86. The map was also the subject of an article in *La Dépêche algérienne*.

sultan who would come to their rescue. The faraway conflict between other Muslims and other Christians mapped onto their own local struggles. News about Muslim victories, therefore, was electric, but in a different sense: local polarisation, when plugged in to distant events, produced a shock.

The analogy between news and electricity, between social and electromagnetic connection, was not uncommon at the time. News, much like electricity, flows. The title of one of the more influential newspapers in Arabic in this period, published in Istanbul, was *Al-Jawa'ib*, a rather poetic word for news literally meaning 'those that travel, wander, circulate'.⁷ The word *électrique* could refer both to the physical phenomenon of electromagnetic current but also, by analogy, to the effects of certain stimuli on people: a common figure of speech in French was that news could 'produce the effect of an electric shock' (*produire l'effet d'un choc électrique*) on people. Electricity captured the imagination of contemporaries because it was invisible, powerful and its underlying mechanism was mysterious, just like that of the human mind. The telegraph in particular seemed to embody the 'mystery of the mind-body dualism', to use James Carey's phrase, and contemporaries described it using a 'rhetoric of the electrical sublime' a quasi-spiritual language of secular millenarianism.⁸ News and electricity then, were currents that could have powerful and unpredictable social effects.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how newspapers spread unevenly throughout Algeria, shoring up the inequalities of colonial rule. This chapter examines the unintended consequences of these inequalities. In particular, it argues that the spread of the electric telegraph intended for settlers ended up connecting Muslims to the wider world in new ways.

⁷ Mohammed Alwan, 'The History and Publications of al-Jawa'ib Press', *MELA Notes*, 11, 1977, pp.4-7.

⁸ The definition of 'électrique' by the period's authoritative dictionary of the French language, the Littré (1873-77) stresses this mystery 'force électrique: la cause inconnue des phénomènes de l'électricité'. James Carey, 'Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph', from *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 160-161.

In 1877, *Al-Jawa'ib* noted that the spread of new technologies was changing the geography of Islam across the world:

‘The Muslims in all the countries of the world are thinking nowadays that they must unite. This is due to the proximity of their connections with each other, seeing that transportation and communication have become so much easier. This approach leads them to esteem the Government of the Ottoman Empire.’⁹

The telegraph, like its sisters the steamer, the railway and the printing press, was meant to be part of an age of progress which made everything closer, faster, smoother. Bridging distance, it was both an embodiment of and a tool for enlightenment. To use a current phrase, electricity was supposed to make the world flat. Instead, the telegraph created new geographies of information. It brought some places closer together and pushed others further away, redistributing space with unexpected results.¹⁰ Plugging Algeria into telegraphic news did not make things flatter, it made them more jagged.

In particular, it re-shaped the meaning of the word ‘Muslim’ by connecting local problems in Algeria with the rest of the Muslim world, participating in the building of a colonial society with hard internal boundaries. The same age of triumphant communication was an age of triumphant imperialism in which Muslim-ruled states were declining, and these defeats appeared increasingly connected in the wire dispatches printed on the pages of newspapers. Struggling to find meaning in the polarised world of colonialism, some Algerians turned to news of distant Muslim powers to understand the world. Settler colonialism in Algeria made news about the Muslim world closer at the same time as it tried to make Algeria more French.

However, Europeans ruling over Muslims in this period were convinced it was not their wires but another network that was tying Muslims across the world together. To describe this alleged desire of all Muslims around the world to unite, they coined the

⁹ Quoted in Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*, (Oxford, 1990), p.58.

¹⁰ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, pp.155-177. On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, (Berkeley, 2013).

word ‘pan-Islamism’. In many cases, ‘Islam’, ‘Islamism’ and ‘pan-Islamism’ were indistinguishable in contemporary usage in French, any faithful Muslim being suspect of agitation to destabilise the European world order. In the worst colonial polemic, Muslims were only interested in other Muslims through ‘fanaticism’, and these links had to be wiped out to create smooth, individual subjects of the Republic’s universalism. Muslim empathy was a sign of backwardness and an unwillingness to join the (European) networks of the modern world.

As historians, it is tempting to want to ‘rescue’ Algerians from these stereotypes, by showing their cosmopolitan links with other places, of which there were many. Tracking such an exotic cast of ‘global Muslims’, however, runs the risk of smoothing over contemporary friction.¹¹ The European pan-Islamic panic cannot be written out of the story, as Muslim attempts to connect across the world fed off their increasing alienation and isolation in places like Algeria. Rather than uncovering cosmopolitan Muslims, this chapter examines how colonial globalisation transformed the geography of what it meant to be Muslim in Algeria.

‘Islam’ as it was imagined both by Europeans and Muslims in Third Republic Algeria was a category that straddled personal belief, the law, and global geopolitics, to name but a few, from the most intimate matters of private status law to the grand pageantry of international meetings. The incident in Rébeval invites us to move beyond the boundaries between diplomatic, social and intellectual history, as these spheres were all very much linked at the time. This chapter will focus less on shifts in the meaning of ‘Islam’ in terms of religious practice and religious authority, which have been the object

¹¹ James Gelvin and Nile Green (eds.), *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, (Berkeley, 2013). Christelow, *Algerians Without Borders*.

of extensive scholarship, and focus instead on the relationship between the legal category of ‘Muslim’ in Algeria and Islam as a geopolitical concept.¹²



Figure 11 Detail of roadmap from 1930s showing Rébeval, just south of Dellys. Map by Maurice Allain, *Afrique du Nord: voies de communications et de tourisme*, Librairie Aristide Quillet (author's personal collection).

Cables and conduits: the telegraph and its human extensions

Cables

The electric telegraph, like the printing press, first came to Algeria as a weapon: Algeria was the first place where the French army used the electric telegraph in military operations.¹³ Cables were intended first and foremost to ensure effective control of the territory, and then later to bind together scattered European pockets of settlement. For

¹² The literature on Islamic modernism is vast and dominated by intellectual history. The classic is still Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.103-192. For an example of more recent literature critical of Hourani see Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*, (Palo Alto, 2008). On Algeria more specifically and on the kinds of changes wrought by the colonial era on Islam see Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1960*, (Paris, 1967), Jacques Berque, *Le Maghreb entre deux guerres* (Paris, 1962) and for more recent critical approaches Fanny Colonna, *Les Versets de l'invincibilité Les versets de l'invincibilité. Permanence et changements religieux dans l'Algérie contemporaine*, (Paris, 1995), and McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism*.

¹³ It was also the first time that civilian telegraph personnel were integrated into the army, and the Algerian conquest retains a privileged space in the memory of contemporary telecommunications officers in the French army, see http://www.appat.org/70ans/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14:le-telegraphe-electrique-et-le-telephone&catid=3:histoire-de-l-armee&Itemid=4, accessed October 2015.

thinly stretched French soldiers and isolated European farmers in this vast, poorly understood land, the telegraph was an essential way of ‘vanquishing distance’ to use Annick Lacroix’s phrase.¹⁴

Building on the existing optical telegraph, the electric telegraph network grew rapidly, from 249 kilometres in 1854 to 3,179 km in 1861. By the 1860s, cables stretched from Maghnia on the Moroccan border to Tunis in the East, where the French Algerian telegraphs had gained a concession to establish Tunisia’s telegraph network. The lines, however, only knitted Algeria together, and contact with the European motherland was still dependent on boat travel until 1870 [**Figures 12 and 13**]. Following several unsuccessful attempts starting in 1856, a British company finally laid down a permanent cable connecting Bône to Marseille via Malta in 1870. Preoccupied by the involvement of a foreign private company, the French government duplicated this connection a year later with its own cable.¹⁵ By 1886 three cables linked Algiers directly to Marseille, and further ones were laid down in 1892 and 1893, with additional cables linking Bône and later Oran to Marseille.¹⁶ From 50 hours between Marseille and Algiers by boat, the telegraph reduced communication time to ten minutes by the 1880s.¹⁷

¹⁴ Annick Lacroix, ‘Une histoire sociale et spatiale de l’Etat dans l’Algérie colonisée. L’administration des postes, télégraphes et téléphones du milieu du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale’, Doctoral Thesis, ENS Cachan, 2014.

¹⁵ Alfred Etenaud, *La télégraphie électrique en France et en Algérie depuis son origine jusqu’au 1er janvier 1872*, (Montpellier, 1872).

¹⁶ Headrick, *Invisible Weapon*, p.15.

¹⁷ Lacroix, ‘Administration des postes’, p.41.



Figure 12 Map of Algerian telegraph service, c.1862. At this stage, the network is not connected to France. The first attempt at a direct Marseille-Algiers cable broke in 1859 and has been erased from the map. Another attempt at a direct cable between Cartagena (Spain) and Oran in 1864, which would later fail was only in the planning stages and is pictured on the left. 'Carte du service télégraphique d'Algérie et de Tunisie', ANOM/F⁸⁰2039/10.

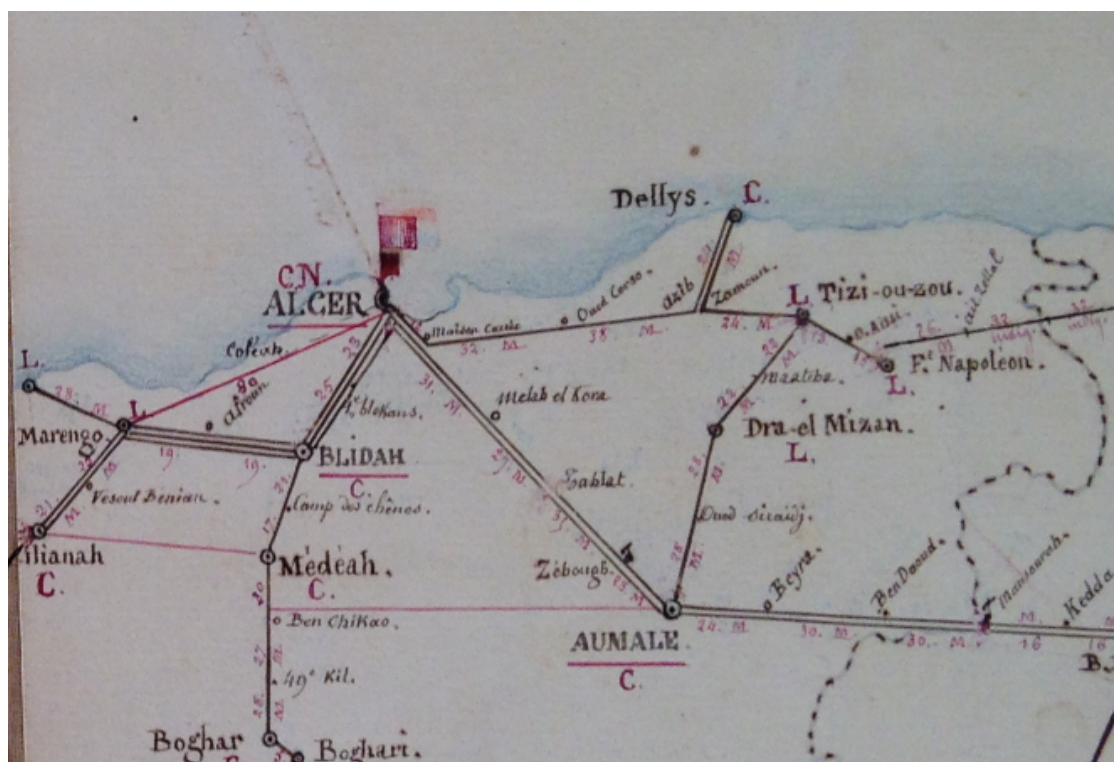


Figure 13 Detail of same map (1862) showing the telegraph network around Algiers. Notice the double telegraph line branching out to Dellys, the closest town to Rébeval.

This density of direct underwater connections across the Mediterranean was exceptional, an attempt to give material meaning to the belief that Algeria was part of France. Other French possessions were not so fortunate to enjoy direct connections with the metropole. The Caribbean islands, for instance, were only connected by a cable from West India and Panama Telegraph Company that linked it to the United State and ultimately Britain. In turn, this meant that the news received in these places was less exclusively French-flavoured. The governor of Martinique complained in 1881 that as they came from British sources, ‘dispatches containing news of France only give short and indirect items and also include information that is inexact and sometimes hostile to our country.’¹⁸ Along the West African coast too, British cables dominated the scene.¹⁹ Algeria, on the other hand, was both closer and more important and thus required its own cables at great expense. The undersea lines were both manifestations of the belief that Algeria was France and, through their technology, gave that belief a new geographical meaning. Cables quite literally bound Algeria to France.

The cables, however, did not just make Algeria French, as they also had the unintended effect of plugging Algeria into the emerging system of international news. While ownership and construction of cables was highly strategic for national purposes, the news that circulated on them did not stop at borders. Telegraphy emerged conjointly with news agencies, as the increasing costs of intercontinental cables led telegraph companies to partner with news agencies to ensure that there would be regular traffic on the line. Havas, the world’s first news agency founded in Paris in 1832, was quick to seize upon this development. The French government supported the commercial activities of the Havas agency through subsidies, and news dispatches occupied an intermediate space between administrative correspondence and private message.²⁰

¹⁸ Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon*, 55.

¹⁹ Lacroix, ‘Administration des postes’, 170.

²⁰ Pierre Frédérix, *De l’agence d’information Havas à l’agence France-Presse*, (Paris, 1959).

Along with Reuters (London) and Wolff (Berlin), Havas set up a triumvirate of news agencies that standardised international news through a formal cartel that split up all world news in 1874.²¹ Under this arrangement, the three news agencies ended up controlling the vast majority of international news. Though they were marked ‘Havas’ in French newspapers, for instance, news dispatches from the British Empire came via Reuters. Wire dispatches became increasingly commercialised and disconnected from their place of origin.

The telegraph network ensured that news at any point in the network was relatively uniform. Though some places occupied more central positions on the network than others, these marginal differences mattered less than being on the network at all: ‘most places were – telegraphically speaking – equally close or far to each other.’²² The dispatches sent to Shanghai, Buenos Aires or Vienna were effectively the same. Being on the network was what made the biggest difference.

Algeria’s status ensured that it was deeply and precociously plugged into the international network compared to its neighbours. An 1886 map of international telegraph networks shows how in Africa the telegraph followed axes of European economic penetration (for instance in Egypt and Tunisia) and European settlement (in North and South Africa) [**Figures 14 and 15**]. Libya, under Ottoman rule, had only one small connection from Tripoli to Malta, while Morocco had no telegraph at all. In Senegal, the French had begun to bring lines up the Senegal river, and elsewhere in Africa, the telegraph was merely a coastal presence, reflecting the lack of European penetration of the interior. Algeria was, by these standards, exceptionally connected,

²¹ Reuters and Wolff were both started by former employees of Havas. The first agreements were concluded in 1859 and 1867 but only for European news, while the 1874 one, like a kind of 19th century Tordesillas treaty, theoretically covered the whole world. Rantanen, ‘The globalization of electronic news’ Brennan, ‘International News in the Age of Empire’, and Jonathan Silverstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News: The Associated Press, Press Association and Reuters, 1848-1947*, (Cambridge, 2014). For commercial dynamics more specifically see Heidi Tworek, ‘Political and Economic News in the Age of Multinationals’, *Business History Review*, 89:3, 2015, pp.447-474.

²² Roland Wenzlhuemer, ‘The dematerialization of telecommunication: communication centres and peripheries in Europe and the world, 1850-1920’, *Journal of Global History*, 2:3, 2007, pp.345-372, p.366.

wires reaching deep into the interior to accompany European settlement. It is no coincidence that the only similar density of telegraph lines was to be found in South Africa, the continent's other major settler colony at this stage.

In 1880, Havas opened a bureau in Algiers.²³ In 1885, its director, Muston, participated in the launch of a newspaper, *La dépêche algérienne*, that was for some time the only one in Algeria to have a direct subscription to Havas' telegraph service. By the late 1880s, people in Algiers could take up Balzac's complaint from Paris in 1840 that given Havas' monopoly on information 'there is in effect only one newspaper'.²⁴ In 1899, the *Dépêche algérienne*, the very newspaper that had pioneered printing telegraph dispatches, complained that the telegraph was writing the newspaper, not the journalists, comparing the onslaught of wires to a 'a sudden flood of the Rio-Wire eats away at our columns, drowns our signatures and submerges our reputations. Make room for Electricity, the Telegraph *writes as boss and rules absolutely*'.²⁵

By 1910, the very urban geography of Algiers had been transformed to fit the reign of telegraphic news. Previously, the centre of town was on the Place du Gouvernement by the sea, reflecting the importance of the port where news arrived from France. The inauguration of the monumental Grande Poste in 1910, the new nexus of communications where telegraph dispatches arrived, marked a shift to a new centre of the city further west. Opposite it lay the headquarters of *La dépêche algérienne*, ideally placed to take print news coming off from the telegraph as quickly as possible. By 1930, the transformation was complete as the GGA itself relocated from the old Place du Gouvernement to a new building just above the Grande Poste. As the Grande Poste and the new GGA building defined the new monumental centre of Algiers, the telegraph was iconic of a triumphant colonial modernity [Figure 16].

²³ Germaine Sers-Gal, 'La presse algérienne de 1870 à 1900', *Revue africaine*, 103, 1959, pp.92-112, 102.

²⁴ Quoted in Frédéric, *De l'agence d'information*, p.26.

²⁵ emphasis original, quoted in Germaine Sers-Gal, 'La presse algérienne', p.112.



Figure 14 Map of world telegraphic service in 1886, red lines represent international borders, black lines represent telegraph lines. Networks are dense in Europe and scarce in Africa, where telegraph lines follow European economic penetration and settlement in Algeria/Tunisia, Egypt and South Africa. 'Carte des communications télégraphiques du régime extra-européen, dressée d'après des documents officiels par le Bureau International des Administrations télégraphiques', Bern, 1886, ANOM/CP/CTS1/69.



Figure 15 *Detail of the same map (1886) showing cable connections across the Mediterranean. Connections between France and Algeria are dense in contrast with the complete absence of telegraph in neighbouring Morocco.*



Figure 16 *Postcard of Algiers, c.1910. On the left, the neomauresque building meant to look like a mosque is the headquarters of La dépêche algérienne (1904-6) by architect Henri Petit. The other pseudo-Arab palace on the right, La Grande Poste (1910) remains the monumental centre of Algiers, the central post office where telegraphic dispatches arrived first from France (author's personal collection).*

Conduits

The telegraph built distance as much as it vanquished it. Like in the iconic painting representing America's Westward expansion, John Gast's 1872 *American Progress*, European civilization, here carrying the thin telegraph cable in her hands, was also meant to push the dark backwards Indians off the edge of the painting, along with other wild animals [Figure 17]. Frenchmen laying telegraph cables across the sea were part of the same 'bourgeois age' in the words of Wolfgang Schivelbusch, that believed that 'communication, exchange, motion brings humanity, enlightenment, progress and (...) isolation and disconnection are evidence of barbarism and merely obstacles to be overcome'.²⁶



Figure 17 John Gast, *American Progress* (1872), painting, Museum of the American West, Autry National Center, Los Angeles.

²⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, 'Railroad Space and Railroad Time', *New German Critique*, 14, 1978, pp.31-40.

Muslims were one such barbarous obstacle to be overcome. The telegraph was understood by both sides to be a key element of European power. One military officer congratulated himself on how the awesome speed of communication inflicted a ‘salutary terror’ (*une terreur salutaire*) that cowed natives into submission.²⁷ In cases of insurrection, cables were systematically cut and the *burj al-sinial*, the signal-tower, attacked.²⁸ The telegraph network was intended to bypass Muslims, connecting centres of European settlement. By plugging European Algerians in, the telegraph pushed Muslims away, creating an invisible border, ‘deepest and narrowest here, running right through Algeria’s cities and countryside.’²⁹

Yet Muslims could not be insulated from the effects of the telegraph. Where the cable ended, news hopped onto new modes of transportation to continue its journey. At these contact points, news became susceptible to politically sensitive interpretation and modification. In effect, the disparity between well-connected European areas and neglected Muslim areas concentrated political action at these narrow points of contact.

The arrival of electric news did not wipe out previous networks of news circulation, based on merchants, pilgrimages, private letters, caravans, market-criers, *meddabin* and wandering holy men.³⁰ New and old news combined, and information flows clotted at the points where these different networks intersected. The *café maure* where Allane brought the newspaper freshly printed off the Havas telegrams in Algiers, reading it to a group of men who would then travel back to their villages and repeat this news to the village assembly in Tamazight, was one such contact point. The incident at Rébeval was the outcome of a connection between different information ecosystems.

²⁷ Maréchal Vaillant, quoted in Étenaud, *Télégraphie électrique*, p.164.

²⁸ Lacroix, ‘Administration des postes’, 42. On a similar role of cutting telegraph lines as interrupting European control in Egypt, see Barak, *On Time*, 175-204.

²⁹ Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, p.10.

³⁰ For a rich illustration of this information ecosystem and its early interaction with European news networks see Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*.

The rise of the telegraph complemented the previous importance of migration in the diffusion of news. Before, news tended to move mainly with people, who would go from their village to the nearest town or city for trade, blessings, or both, acquiring information in the process. When Allane started commenting on the newspapers in Rébeval, another man from the village took a trip to Algiers, less than a hundred kilometres away, to verify his account.³¹ News was still best in the city, but it was no longer essential to go there. Allane himself did not need to go anywhere, as the newspapers came to him.

The coming of the telegraph and the explosion of print placed a new category of men as primary news purveyors. There were few men like Allane because not many Algerian Muslims were literate in French. The paper-reading Muslim, precisely because he was so scarce, was a regular plague of turn-of-the-century surveillance reports. Whenever there was an agitation it seemed, it could be traced back to one of these ‘agents of disorder’.³²

These administrative complaints expressed nostalgia for a time where the natives were real natives and too stupid to read newspapers. As the GGA Louis Tirman lamented, ‘the natives of 1882 are no longer those of 1870, they read our newspapers and comment on them’.³³ It is unclear that a time where the natives never read newspapers had ever existed outside of the administration’s imagination. In a classic trope, they lamented that colonialism was contaminating the innocent and creating a half-caste breed of semi-literate men at the root of all sorts of trouble.³⁴

While the ‘natives’ had never been isolated, surveillance reports make it clear that a new group of men educated in French schools were now at the forefront of news

³¹ Administrator of Rébeval to sous-préfet in Tizi-Ouzou, 1 June 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

³² Mayor of Blida to Colonel in Blida, 18 February 1899, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

³³ GGA to Foreign Affairs, 15 June 1882, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

³⁴ On the dismissal of the ‘half-educated’ native, see Homi Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man’ in *The Location of Culture*, (London, 1994).

circulation. In particular, authorities worried when these men read newspapers to an illiterate crowd. One report from Koléa, nears Algiers, singled out a certain M'Barek Kaddour ben Mahieddine, 26 years old: 'though he has studied in a French *collège* he affects to keep his distance from the French (...) Almost every evening his friends come and join him in his office and there, he reads to them the news published in various newspapers (...)'.³⁵

Bathhouses and markets were suspect spaces, but most of the time, these readings happened in that semi-public, semi-private space of Algerian male sociability and entertainment, the *café maure*.³⁶ While in larger cities groups of literate men could meet in a variety of spaces, the *café maure* played a particularly essential role in small towns, places like Rébeval. Here, people from the surrounding countryside came on market days to pay an attentive ear to the news before returning home, carrying the news with them to the *douars*.

The conduits between the world of the telegraph-connected European press and the oral news culture of the Algerian countryside had to be both literate and bilingual. As such, they were sometimes Jews, who increasingly went to French schools in the late nineteenth century and patronised *cafés maures* and certain spaces of Muslim male sociability. Around Algiers, 'in the little towns and villages, the Jews who go out to the *cafés maures* as much as the natives and are surrounded with a veritable circle of listeners, almost all natives from the countryside (...)'.³⁷ Most often, however, these bilingual men, like Allane, were Muslims who worked for the administration,

'those to which we have most given the benefits of our education (...) the interpreters, the *chaouchs* [bailiffs] of the lawyers, the ministerial officers of the city, who are literate. (...) You can see them (...) in the *cafés maures* and

³⁵ Commissariat de police de Koléa, 1 March 1899, 'Rapport sur l'état d'esprit de la population indigène', 1H86.

³⁶ Omar Carlier, 'Café maure'.

³⁷ Commissaire spécial d'Alger, Report on Margueritte trial, 15 January 1902, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

markets, surrounded by a numerous audience, eager and relentlessly renewed, giving readings and various translations of the newspapers (...).³⁸

An explosion of European settlement and increasing (though still limited) numbers of Muslims literate in French had unintended consequences. As the combination of the telegraph and the settler press unevenly flooded the Algerian countryside, news narrowed around certain contact points, and made a small group of men unusually powerful in shaping the interpretation of news. Allane used this power to rewire people in Rébeval to the Muslim world.

Charged fields: settler colonialism and the reinvention of ‘Muslim’

Rewiring: Algeria and the Ottoman Empire

The thin black lines of the telegraph did not produce the geography that was expected. Instead of spreading French influence to the remotest corners of Algeria, events in Rébeval suggest that the telegraph was connecting Algerians closer to the Ottoman sultan.³⁹ The telegraph built colonial inequality to create a peculiar sense of space. People in Rébeval envisioned a world where certain geographically distant allies like the sultan could suddenly come close, while Europeans neighbours who they knew personally were enemies who would soon disappear into the distance. The telegraph participated in building a society where Muslims felt isolated from Europeans in Algeria and more closely linked to other places in the Islamic world.

³⁸ Mayor of Blida to Colonel Commandant d’armes de Blida, 18 February 1899, ‘Au sujet de l’état d’esprit des populations indigènes’, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

³⁹ On the telegraph as a symbol of the sultan’s authority in the Ottoman Empire see Yakup Bektas, ‘The Sultan’s Messenger: Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy, 1847-1880’, *Technology and Culture*, 41.4, 2000, pp.669-696.

News coming through the cables made possible a shift in scales between village issues and diplomatic ones, a shift that generated political power for men like Allane. The figure of the saviour-sultan coming to rescue Algeria from the French connected local anger at land dispossession with the diplomatic power-politics of the never-ending 'Eastern question' and the future of the Ottoman Empire. The relationship between these different scales is essential to understanding the explosive effect of news in Rébeval, as it is the friction between them that generated energy.

The telegraph did not suddenly plug Rébeval in to the outside world – Kabylia was switched on to different networks before the telegraph, and would later move on to other grids of radio, television and internet. More recent anthropological work has shown how important long-distance networks of information and migration remain to articulating local relationships at the village level in Kabylia.⁴⁰ Yet the telegraph and its wire dispatches of diplomatic news reconfigured the relationship between closer and more distant events in a specific way.

The coming of electric news was a part of a re-shaping of 'Islam' that was happening at both ends of the line in Kabylia and Istanbul. By positing the immediate arrival of the Ottomans as saviours, villagers fused local concerns in Kabylia and global concerns about the future of independent Muslim powers. Communications between the Ottoman Empire and North Africa in this period were ever more indirect, taking new channels dominated by Europeans, yet people in the village compressed space and time and built their own direct connection to the sultan.⁴¹ This was a 'pan-Islamism' that was neither quite 'top-down' nor 'bottom-up'. Like many others at this time, the story as it circulated in Rébeval imagined 'Islam' as a cohesive entity, with 'Muslim' as a meaningful

⁴⁰ Judith Scheele, *Village Matters: Knowledge, Politics and Community in Kabylia, Algeria*, (Melton/Woodbridge, 2009). Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. (Bloomington, 2004).

⁴¹ For instance, under the Protectorate, a twenty-word telegram from Tunis to Constantinople would cost 15 francs, while a telegram to Paris would cost 4,40 francs. Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, *La communication entre Tunis et Istanbul, Province et métropole, 1860-1913*, (Paris, 1996).

category tying Rébeval to Constantinople. While events erupted in Rébeval, devotees in Algiers prayed: ‘God, bring glorious assistance to Sultan Abdulhamid, give him victory (...) so that we may all become Muslims again.’⁴²

It is likely that the excited crowds that listened to Allane had in mind a very vague notion of the sultan. Contemporary police reports claimed poor peasants would complain to them ‘if only the sultan would lay eyes on us!’, but upon interrogation, did not know if this was the sultan of Morocco or of Constantinople.⁴³ The sultan, whoever and wherever he was, was a distant figure of legitimacy. Allane’s role was to connect these vague expectations with something much more precise.

Within this understanding, the story was one about power and possession. Somewhere, a Muslim ruler was showing might over the French, and defending his possessions (*mamalik*) against European encroachment.⁴⁴ This strong, just ruler could protect local Muslims and help them regain their own possessions. The story reflects a widespread desire to be defended by the sultan, who was the embodiment of Muslim ‘power’, understood as the ability to forge an autonomous geopolitical destiny as well as financial and military might.

The focus on possession allowed for easy parallels between the two scales. It is not surprising that the ‘effervescence’ in Rébeval focused on land, in particular the seizure of the settlers’ lands and houses by the poor *khammès* sharecroppers, turning the social order upside down. Throughout Algeria, peasants had suffered the impact of mass dispossession as the conquest progressed. The region around Rébeval was initially less exposed. The Berber-speaking tribes of Kabylia, politically autonomous and protected by their mountains, resisted French military encroachment until 1857. After that, Europeans

⁴² The prayer was allegedly said at the zawiya of the Rahmaniya order, GGA to PM, 14 May 1897, ANOM/F⁸⁰1684.

⁴³ Commissaire spécial d’Alger, Report on Margueritte trial, 15 January 1902, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

⁴⁴ On the expression *al-mamalik al-mabrusa* or ‘well-protected domains’ to speak of the Ottoman Empire, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: ideology and the legitimation of power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, (London, 1998).

started to arrive, in Dellys, 17 kilometres downstream from Rébeval. In this lowland slice of Kabylia close to the sea, a few settlers had showed up by 1860.⁴⁵ However, the real shift happened in 1871, when the vast majority of tribes in Kabylia rose up against the French in colonial Algeria's greatest insurrection. The consequences were devastating. The tribes were placed under a vast system of sequestration, in which the French state seized over 400,000 hectares of land. The effects of this collective punishment lasted for decades, as tribes not only lost land but were also forced to pay huge fines (*soultés*).⁴⁶ In 1872, the settlement or *centre de colonisation* of Rébeval was founded on land seized by the state. Rébeval became a *commune de plein exercice* (CPE), a territory administered like a metropolitan French commune, except in Algeria it means a small minority of European settlers effectively administered a much larger Kabyle majority which had no say in the administration of the commune.⁴⁷

Defeat in the 1871 insurrection, which saw most of the Kabyle tribal aristocracy imprisoned, deported to New Caledonia or at best financially crushed by the loss of their lands, was understood as the end of a world. The 'effervescence' in Rébeval, though it never developed into an insurrection, reveals a classic desire for a moral and economic re-ordering of the world, that the lands would be taken back from the Europeans and everything would fall back into place.

In popular Kabyle culture at the time, the onset of the fourteenth century of the Islamic era (in 1882), had brought moral calamity upon the world. The works of the most famous Kabyle poet of that time, Si Mhand ou Mhand, whose family was crushed by the 1871 repression, are a constant opposition between 'then' and 'now' (*zik/tura*). In

⁴⁵ Henri Busson, 'Le développement géographique de la colonisation agricole en Algérie', *Annales de Géographie*, 1898, 7:31, pp.34-54.

⁴⁶ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, p.15. See also Fanny Colonna, *La Vie Ailleurs*, pp.67-68.

⁴⁷ Most of Kabylia, by contrast, was under the *commune mixte* (CM), a regime in which administrators were appointed by the GGA rather than elected mayors that was typically applied to large areas with little European settlement. Henri Busson, 'Le développement géographique de la colonisation agricole en Algérie', *Annales de Géographie*, 1898, 7:31, pp.34-54.

the cowardly new world of the 14th century (*lqern rbaâtac*), everything was upside down: the landed became poor, the poor thought they were rich, men dressed liked girls, the Jews (*Unday*) lorded their wealth over Muslims and the slaves (*akan*) reined over free men:

Aqlay g lqern rbaâtac	We are in the 14 th century
ikfa wis-tlettac	The 13 th has ended
a lhadeq fhem tthesis	Wise one, understand the truth
irbeḥ w illan d amâac	Success goes to the rich
la iheddeṛ ssettac	Who brag loudly
d lasel yey ba yisem is	And the names of ancestors are lost
oqwlen yer zzna bbwarrac	They fornicate with boys
ikfa dḍin ulac	With no religion at all
cban tidma s tteryis	Looking like girls ⁴⁸

The world (*ddunit*) was spinning out of control (*la tetyawal*), ‘giving birth/to all sorts of evils that befall us’ (*ddunit tura turew d / laayub akw bedfen d*).⁴⁹ The survival of Si Mhand’s poetry in oral tradition suggests its widespread popularity at the time, probably because it expressed common feelings of alienation (*leyrib*, from the Arabic *gharaba* to be exiled, to be foreign, strange), of being astray (*lmetluf* from the Arabic *matluf*, ruined, damaged, broken) in a world unmoored.⁵⁰

Events in Kabylia seemed to contemporaries to be only a smaller fraction of a larger re-ordering of the world. At the time, it looked like the entire *dar al-islam*, the portion of the world ruled by Muslims, was shrinking. The late nineteenth-century saw most states headed by Muslim rulers either wiped out or placed under European protection. In India, the aftermath of the Mutiny in 1857 saw the final dismantling of the

⁴⁸ Poem 19 collected by Mouloud Mammeri in (ed.) *Les isefra, poèmes de Si Mhand Ou Mband*, (Paris, 1969). The Kabyle version is the one presented by Mammeri, the English translation was prepared with the help of Kamel Boudjemil.

⁴⁹ Poem 21, *Les Isefra*.

⁵⁰ Poem 3, *Les Isefra*

Mughal throne. The sultanates of Muslim Southeast Asia were gradually taken over by expanding British and Dutch power, culminating in the Dutch War against Aceh in the 1870s, ending the independence of the region's most self-consciously Islamic state. At the same time, Russians pushed south into the Caucasus, where hostilities ended with the surrender of Imam Shamil in 1864, and in Central Asia, where Russian Turkestan was founded in 1865. In North Africa, Tunisia and Egypt fell under French and British protectorates, respectively, in 1881 and 1882, at the outset of the cursed 14th century that Si Mhand lamented. A combined Franco-British onslaught wiped out many of the Muslim sultanates of West Africa from the Toucouleur in the West to Darfur in the East, while British, Italian and German armies took control of those on the Eastern African coast.

By 1900, the only independent states led by Muslims, Afghanistan, Iran, the Ottoman Empire and Morocco, were all under heavy European pressure which extended from economic penetration to extraterritorial privileges. In Algiers in 1897, rumours swirled that the sultan of Morocco and the shah of Persia had pledged support to the Ottoman sultan in case of a war, forming a kind of nineteenth-century Axis of Evil just as imaginary as the twenty-first century one.⁵¹

Out of the remaining contenders, the Ottoman Empire was by far the largest, most powerful and possessed with the most 'universal' ambition to rule the world since its sixteenth century conquest of the holy places of the three monotheistic religions. The Ottoman Empire became the focus of worldwide desires for the survival of a Muslim order autonomous from Europe, including in places where there had never been a formal Ottoman presence, like in British India or the Dutch East Indies.

This worldwide focus was encouraged by Ottoman propaganda, especially under the reign of sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909), whose official policy encouraged Muslims all over the world to see the Ottoman emperor as their caliph to shore up the

⁵¹ Commissariat central d'Alger, Monthly report, 3 April 1897, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

Empire's fragility under increased European pressure.⁵² Having lost most of its Christian-majority possessions in the Balkans after the 1878 defeat against Russia, the now Muslim-majority Empire attempted to compensate by aggressively using its connections with the Muslim world beyond its borders. This was in part a retaliation against the encroachment of various European powers on the internal affairs of the Empire as 'protectors' of Christian minorities within it. If Russia could be recognised as protector of the Ottoman sultan's Orthodox subjects and France as the protector of its Catholics, then why could Abdülhamid II not become the protector of oppressed Muslims under Austrian, Russian, French or British rule?

Algeria's history gave it a rather peculiar relationship to the Ottomans. Having been under Ottoman rule from the sixteenth century to the arrival of the French in the 1830s, Ottomans provided the closest example of a functioning Islamic state.⁵³ Algerian popular memory retained a rather mixed view of Ottoman rule, to say the least, with songs and tales speaking of the massacres of Turkish columns (*mahalat*) coming to collect the taxes, which were reinforced by French colonial narratives that the Turks had always been murderous outsiders. This was more the case in some regions than others. Many Kabyles had hardly ever been loyal subjects of the sovereign in Constantinople. The country of the tribes (*bilad al-qaba'il*, thus the French 'Kabylie') maintained a rebellious autonomy and it was the Ottomans who had to pay tribute to ensure safe passage through the mountains. In Rébeval, however, a lowland area close to the sea, Ottoman

⁵² Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*. Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans & Britain (1877-1924)*, (London, 1997). Cemal Aydin, *The politics of anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*, (New York, 2007). Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam*.

⁵³ The exception to this was in some regions of Western Algeria, where the Moroccan sultan in Fes often appeared more legitimate than the one in Constantinople. James McDougall, 'Crisis and Recovery Narratives in Maghrebi Histories of the Ottoman Period (ca. 1870-1970)', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31:1, 2011, 137-148. Tal Shuval, 'The Ottoman Algerian elite and its ideology', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32, 2000, 323-344. For Tunisia Kenneth Perkins "'The Masses Look Ardentlly to Istanbul': Tunisia, Islam, and the Ottoman Empire, 1837-1931' in John Ruedy (eds.) *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, (New York, 1994), pp.23-36. For current debates on the Ottoman period in Algeria see Ouanassa Siari Tengour, 'Du Palais du Dey au Palais du Gouvernement : lieux et non-lieux de la mémoire', *Insaniyat*, 19-20, 2003, pp.117-131.

influence had been stronger than higher up in the mountains – the harbour at Dellys, less than 20km away, was an administrative centre under the direct authority of the dey of Algiers.⁵⁴

Even so, the sultan was always a nebulous figure in this marginal region of the Empire and Algiers was always loosely integrated with the imperial centre in Istanbul. Events in Rébeval in 1897 reveal a reactivation of longstanding links with Constantinople under settler colonialism along with an increasing identification of 'Islam' with the Ottoman Empire on an international scale. Abdulhamid's pan-Islamist policies found a receptive audience in Algeria: the current flowed both ways.

In some cases local dispossession and promises of distant success spurred people on to emigrate from Algeria to the Ottoman Empire, primarily to Syria. Following the departure of many élite families during the conquest, many Algerians left for the Ottoman Empire at irregular intervals until the First World War. In 1883, there were an estimated 4,000 Algerians in Damascus, and more in the surrounding countryside and in Galilee. The number increased gradually, leading the French consulate in Damascus to estimate 17,500 Algerians in Greater Syria by 1910.⁵⁵ Around 1888 there had been a peak of families leaving from Kabylia, some from around the region of Rébeval, coming after several bad crop years and locust plagues.⁵⁶ Sometimes, these were wealthy men uprooting their families and villages, voting with their feet against French rule. Often, they were poorer men who sometimes never even made it to Syria and had to beg

⁵⁴ Hugh Roberts, *Berber Government: The Kabyle Polity in Pre-Colonial Algeria*, (London, 2014).

⁵⁵ Pierre Bardin, *Algériens et Tunisiens dans l'Empire ottoman de 1848 à 1914*, (Marseille, 1979.) Kamel Kateb, 'La gestion administrative de l'émigration algérienne vers les pays musulmans au lendemain de la conquête de l'Algérie (1830-1914)', *Population*, 52 :2, 1997, pp.399-428. Mustafa Abbasi, 'From Algeria to Palestine: the Algerian community in the Galilee from the late Ottoman period until 1948', *Maghreb Review*, 28, 1, 2003, pp.41-59.

⁵⁶ The administration attempted to keep detailed statistics on departures, see ANOM/GGA/9H102. A cases around Rébeval was the subject of a monthly report in January 1891, ANOM/GGA/11H35.

French consuls to pay for their journeys back to Algeria from various ports in the Mediterranean.⁵⁷

In an odd parallel to the European settler colonialism that surrounded them, Muslim peasants were promised free passage by boat to the Ottoman empire and a grant of their own land once they arrived in Syria, in a sunny Eldorado of prosperity and just Islamic law. Newspapers published in Istanbul and Damascus stressed that Algerian immigrants, as *mühacir* or Muslim refugees, would immediately obtain Ottoman citizenship and be exempt from military service for twenty years by a special decree.⁵⁸ As this often turned out to be untrue, many retreated back to Algeria, much to the satisfaction of the French administration that saw them as the best propagandists against emigration.⁵⁹

French observers worried about this emigration because it suggested a failure of French colonialism. Critics of the colonial system blamed the pauperisation of landless Muslims for making them leave Algeria for the East.⁶⁰ While these commentators focused on the economic basis for emigration from Algeria, for those who left, the economic, political and religious reasons formed a whole. Emigration was an attempt to reconcile the distance between the miserable world around them, a world of dispossession and immorality, by travelling to the just, ideal world of prosperity and Islam.

Ottoman authorities encouraged Algerians to immigrate because they would be more loyal subjects than local Arabs in Syria. Along with neighbouring Tunisians, as well as Caucasians fleeing Russian rule, Bosnians, Afghans and other *mühacirler* were being

⁵⁷ Affaires indigènes to GGA, 1 December 1896, ANOM, GGA/9H102 and MAE/Turquie/493.

⁵⁸ *Dépêche algérienne*, 31 August 1888, 'Les algériens en Syrie'. Their actual legal status varied. At times Ottoman authorities banned land sells to incoming Muslims from Russian, British and French lands, while in 1907, in the final throes of Abdulhamid's reign a law granted them plots of land upon arrival in Syria. See Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, p.55.

⁵⁹ Monthly report, February 1891, ANOM/GGA/11H35.

⁶⁰ Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Les migrations des musulmans algériens et l'exode de Tlemcen (1830-1911)', *Annales*, 22:5, 1967, pp. 1047-1066.

recruited as loyalist counterbalances to emerging Arab nationalism. In Greater Syria, a small but influential intellectual and later political movement called for a specific Arab identity based on the Arab language and greater autonomy for Arab provinces of the Empire. By 1913, these men started the Arab Decentralization Party advocating for Arab autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Both Muslim and Christian intellectuals argued that there was a specifically ‘Arab’ nation that should not live under Turkish domination.⁶¹

This development is well-known. What is less well-studied is that to a large number of Arabic-speakers in the lesser well-known Western half of the Arab world, these debates mattered very little. Muslims in Algeria followed intellectual debates about Arab nationalism, but they did not resonate there in the same way. After all, in Syria, Ottoman rule was a direct, lived experience with many problems, and ‘Arab’ as a term reflected opposition to Turkish domination. For Algerians, in contrast, Ottoman rule had retreated to a distant, abstract notion. By 1897, for Algerians, Ottoman rule had not been an everyday experience for a long time, or in some places in Kabylia, had never been a daily experience at all. Safely distant, Ottomans looked like the best champions for Muslim rights, as the main problem was the French. As early as 1881, a pamphlet called for ‘the Arab nation’ [*al-umma al-‘arabiyya*] to rise against the Ottomans coming from the ‘Committee for the conservation of the rights of the Arab nation’ [*jam’iyyat hafad huquq al-milla al-arabiyya*] in Beirut arrived in Algiers. It is unlikely that this pamphlet calling upon

⁶¹ For an internalist Arabic nationalist account see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening. The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London, 1938). See also, Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, pp.260-324 and Ernest Dawn, ‘From Ottomanism to Arabism: Origins of an Ideology,’ in *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana, 1973), pp.122–47. For more recent and critical studies see Michael Provence, ‘Ottoman modernity, colonialism, and insurgency in the interwar Arab east’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43,2 (May 2011), 205-225 and James Gelvin, *Divided loyalties: Nationalism and mass politics in Syria at the close of empire* (Berkeley, 1998) William Cleveland, ‘The Arab Nationalism of George Antonius Reconsidered’ in Jankowski and Gershoni (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York, 1997), pp.65-87.

‘Muslims and Christians’ to unite would have had much impact in Algeria.⁶² A specifically ‘Arab’ identity was, before the First World War, far less useful there than in other regions of the Arab World. Indeed, many of the emigrants leaving Algeria, like those around Rébeval, were not Arabic-speakers anyway.

In Algeria, political mobilisation happened around the term ‘Muslim’ rather than ‘Arab’, and Ottomans seemed more desirable than the French. Algerians primarily wrote in Arabic but their defences of the Ottoman Empire were much closer to those of Muslims in British India than they were to those of fellow Arabs in Syria. In India, men like Abul Kalam Azad chastised emergent Arab nationalists from Syria like Rashid Rida for undermining the unity of the last independent Muslim power. To Indian Muslims too, saving Ottoman power seemed so much more urgent in a context where the British were ruling the show.⁶³ The events in Rébeval in 1897 then, were part of a refashioning of the meaning of ‘Muslim’ under the effects of colonial rule, which in Algeria was even more intense than in India. It was the French that made the Ottomans look closer, because under French rule Algerians were becoming more Muslim than ever.

Polarisation: ‘Muslim’ as ethical and geopolitical category

The strong self-identification of North Africans as Muslim preceded colonialism. Unlike in the Levant and Egypt, there were no Arabic-speaking Christian minorities in North Africa. On the Western edge of the Muslim world, North Africa had for a long time shared a relationship with Europe across the Western Mediterranean that was

⁶² Consul in Tunis to GGA 23 April 1881, the proclamation itself is dated 19 March 1881. ANOM/GGA/1H84.

⁶³ John Willis, ‘Debating the Caliphate: Islam and Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad’, *The International History Review*, 32:4, 2010, pp.711-732. Pan-Islamism in the Indian subcontinent followed remarkably similar patterns to North Africa, but it was also considerably more powerful and better organised, which makes sense given the far larger numbers of Muslims in South Asia, see Özcan, *Pan-Islamism*.

especially close and especially militarised, though this was not quite the ‘three-hundred years’ war’ (*harb al-thalatha mia sana*) between Algeria and Spain described by nationalist historian Tawfiq al-Madani. Nonetheless, *jihad* as a war against Christians was a well-worn language of political legitimacy in North Africa by the time the triumphant Christian army of the Restoration monarchy arrived in Algiers in 1830.⁶⁴

Colonial rule, however, built on this pre-existing peculiarity by flattening Algerians into Muslims and Muslims only. The pre-colonial world was one of many other social distinctions: by region, by tribe, by occupation, between city-dwellers and rural dwellers, between the aristocratic descendants of the Prophet (*sharif*) and the plebs, between the educated and the ignorant. These distinctions persisted, but the steamroller of settler colonialism made them ever less salient. Land dispossession affected the traditional hierarchies of wealth, while enforced peace between tribes (the so-called *pax gallica*) reduced the role of the local military aristocracy and affected traditional hierarchies of prestige.⁶⁵ When Jules Cambon complained in 1894 that colonisation had reduced Algerians to ‘a dust of men, a tribe with no shepherds’, this was an exaggeration, yet it contained some truth.⁶⁶

Divisions between Muslims became less salient than the increasingly important divide between all Muslims on the one side and the newly dominant European minority. ‘Muslim’ (*musulman*) was emerging as a harder, racialised legal category under the Third Republic. Before 1871, ‘natives’ (*indigènes*) were governed differently from Europeans, but this category referred to anyone present on Algerian territory before 1830, including Jews. After 1871 and the naturalisation of Algerian Jews, *indigène* became virtually

⁶⁴ Amira Bennison, *Jihad and its Interpretations in pre-Colonial Morocco: State-society relations during the French conquest of Algeria*, (London, 2002). On Madani and a nationalist history of this early modern period see McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism*. On the ‘Christian’ nature of the French conquest see Sessions, *By Sword and Plow*.

⁶⁵ Peter Von Sivers, ‘Insurrection and accommodation: indigenous leadership in Eastern Algeria, 1840-1900’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6, 1975, pp. 259-275. Neil MacMaster, ‘The Roots of Insurrection: The Role of the Algerian Village Assembly (*Djemâa*) in Peasant Resistance, 1863-1962’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:2, 2013, pp. 419-447.

⁶⁶ Speech to Senate, 18 June 1894, quoted in Augustin Bernard, *L’Algérie*, 1929.

synonymous with *musulman*. This only increased with the naturalisation of most European foreigners in Algeria in the last years of the nineteenth century. The three words *musulman*, *indigène* and *sujet*, in administrative correspondance, occur in various interchangeable combinations. While previously there had been several different categories of non-citizens in Algeria, increasingly ‘Muslim’ meant being disenfranchised and dispossessed. In French legal terminology, ‘Muslim’ was a racialised category. In a beautiful show of absurdity as demonstrated by Laure Blévis, ‘Muslims’ could, for instance, convert to Catholicism, but they remained legally Muslim.⁶⁷

This racialisation of ‘Muslim’ under colonial rule is now well-known in the scholarship. Yet ‘Muslim’ was effective as a legal category partly because the targets of this categorisation accepted it. Many people in Algeria would not have called themselves ‘natives’ but readily self-identified as Muslim in a number of contexts. Many legal ‘Muslims’ were quite happy to self-identify as such, though this did not necessarily mean the same thing to them: to many people in Algeria, ‘Islam’ remained a heavily moral way of organising the world rather than a racial one.⁶⁸ The word ‘Muslim’ could work on both these levels, at the intersection of different categorisations of populations in French and in Arabic.

To illustrate this process at work, I turn to another case, which happened a few years after Allane’s, in the winter of 1899 in the mountains south of Sétif. A local notable named Si Salah, a man not unlike Allane with a minor post in the administration, was similarly accused of having made seditious public comments after having read too many newspapers. Unlike Allane, however, the archive preserves the writings of Si Salah in his own words. Si Salah vigorously protested the accusation, writing back that he was a loyal servant of France, and claiming to be the victim of a ‘cabal’. As his complaint in Arabic

⁶⁷ Blévis, ‘La citoyenneté française’.

⁶⁸ James McDougall, ‘Histories of Heresy and Salvation: Arabs/Berbers, Community and the State’, in Katherine E. Hoffman and Susan Gilson Miller (eds.) *Berbers and Others: Beyond Tribe and Nation in the Maghrib*, (Bloomington, IN, 2010).

was translated into French, this allows us to see divergent categorisations of the people around him.⁶⁹

Si Salah's letter described the people around him primarily through moral categories. His enemies plotting against him were a 'party of the corrupt' (*ḥizb al-muḥsidin*), spreading *fitna* or strife, he accuses them of poor morals and gambling, among other things. Occasionally, Si Salah mentioned Frenchmen (*faransawiyyin*), but most of the people in his story are just men (*rijal*) or people (*al-nas*). In his world, the most important distinction was between two types of men: sinners and believers.

By contrast, the French translation of his letter dropped most of this moralistic vocabulary: spreading *fitna* merely became 'exciting parties against one another'.⁷⁰ Si Salah alleged his enemies had been *min ru'sa' al-nifāq*, literally among the leaders of deceit, duplicity or hypocrisy (*nifāq*). The French text renders this as 'they took an active part in the insurrection'. For Si Salah, insurrection was framed as an act of deceit against the correct, truthful order of things, while in the French translation the primary problem was whether or not they had taken up arms against France. It translated Si Salah's rather neutral 'men' and 'people' by assigning them colonial legal categories: they became 'un indigène', 'des indigènes'. *Ahl Saint-Arnaud* 'the people of Saint-Arnaud' became 'les colons de Saint-Arnaud'. For the translator and for the purposes of the state investigation underway, the most important thing was knowing who was a settler and who was a native, and the vocabulary chosen reflected this.

Si Salah's world was no less Manichaean than that of the colonial administration, only it operated according to a different divide. The world in the French letter is about colonisers and colonised, the world in the Arabic letter is about believers and non-believers. Si Salah's framing, as James McDougall put it, is one in which 'individuals and

⁶⁹ Si Salah's deposition, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

⁷⁰ The important exception to this was in describing an enemy of Si Salah's as a *mauvais sujet* a term that in France too had a long history of Christian morality and sinful disobedience to the Catholic monarchy.

groups were defined by judgements of their moral worth', that is, distinguishing '“bad” Muslims, “good” Muslims'.⁷¹ Yet these divergent categorisations overlapped: Si Salah called himself a Muslim and this was also his legal identity.

Algerians until the interwar period much more commonly described themselves as 'Muslims' than as 'colonised'. Some men engaged in politics with liberal metropolitan environments self-identified as 'indigène' to stress their plight, but this usage was quite rare.⁷² Self-identification as *musulman* and especially in Arabic as *muslim* was far more common, in combination with geographical markers such as *jaza'iri* (Algerian) or *min bilad al-jaza'ir* (from the land of Algeria) or more specific indicating the region, city, or tribe depending on the circumstance and audience. At the turn of the twentieth century, contemporary Algerian texts in Arabic did not make much use of the words 'colonialism' (*isti'mar*), 'settler' (*mustawtin*) or 'native' (*ahali*) - this is a development that would occur later.

This nuances some arguments made by scholars of metropolitan France like Todd Shepard or Naomi Davidson, who have focused only on the French 'invention' of Muslims as a category.⁷³ While 'Muslim' was an inescapable racial category constructed by the colonial state, it was not just a colonial imposition. It would be bizarre if historians were to assume that people in Algeria really were 'colonised' as if this were an unproblematic term but that 'Muslim', on the other hand, was a problematic construct. Under colonial rule, Muslims in Algeria were only becoming more 'Muslim', that is, not necessarily more devout, but increasingly labelled by the one thing that isolated them from the rest of colonial society.

'Muslim', unlike 'native' (*indigène*), could have far more positive meanings because it gave a much broader global meaning to Algerian problems. For some Algerians, this

⁷¹ McDougall, 'Histories of Heresy and Salvation'.

⁷² See for instance Chérif Benhabylès, *L'Algérie française vue par un indigène*, (Algiers, 1914).

⁷³ Todd Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, pp.19-54. Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France*, (Ithaca, 2012).

was the most important aspect, more so than everyday religious practice. While historians have noted the importance of the category ‘Muslim’ for Algerian political mobilisation, they have paid less attention to the ways in which this category allowed Algerians to see themselves as part of the wider world.

Around 1911, some of the first newspapers targeting Algeria’s majority population all proudly proclaimed themselves to be ‘for the defense of Muslims’, and would even bear titles like *L’Islam*. These newspapers reinforced the idea that Muslim was a global category. Unable to compete with French publications and to subscribe to wire services for hard news, they focused on providing coverage of developments across the Islamic world, from Nigeria to Java, with separate sections for news from the Muslim world. That these newspapers also carried advertisements for heavy liquor and champagne on the back-page is an indication that ‘Islam’ had a specific meaning to these men that some other more practice-oriented coreligionists might have argued with [Figure 18].



Figure 18 Ad for champagne at the back of El Hack (Oran) a newspaper ‘defending Muslim interests’ founded in 1909.

Indeed, looking at coverage in the Algerian Muslim press, it is sometimes striking how much the geopolitical aspects of Islam could trump the doctrinal ones. The best example of this is that Algerians continued to cheer for strong men in Turkey even when they were clearly not symbols of religious orthodoxy. During the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), Mustafa Kemal, who led resistance to the Allied partition of the Ottoman Empire, became wildly popular in Algeria, as the conflict acted as a kind of 'liberation war by proxy' for Algerian Muslims.⁷⁴ Just like twenty years before they had said the same about Abdülhamid II, men in Kabylia in 1920 alleged that Kemal was about to take over Algeria.⁷⁵ In 1922, the newspaper *L'Ikdam* waxed lyrical praising Kemal 'We salute with a deep respect and veneration (...) the saviour of Turkey, the glory of Islam'.⁷⁶ This time too, information about Kemal's victories was mainly pilfered from Havas dispatches and local French newspapers.

The problem was that Kemal, later better known as Atatürk, was a less obvious symbol of Islamic orthodoxy than Abdulhamid II: the abolition of the caliphate by the Turkish Parliament in 1924 dismayed many Muslims outside of Turkey, especially in India where a huge political movement had formed around preserving the caliphate. Yet well after Kemal turned out to be an aggressive secularist who abolished the caliphate, secularised the Turkish state, and banned the hijab, Algerian Muslims continued to celebrate his achievements. When Kemal died in 1938, the nationalist *El Ouma* praised Kemal for having saved 'the dignity of Islam', and prevented the total dismantling of Turkey which would have been 'the crushing of the Crescent by the Cross'. The article conceded that Kemal had been unduly obsessed with matters of clothing and that he had 'strayed in matters of religion, which we regret, which we deplore', but that this was

⁷⁴ Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, in Bouchène et al. *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, p.322.

⁷⁵ October 1919 ANOM/GGA/11H46.

⁷⁶ *L'Ikdam*, 10 November 1922.

insignificant in comparison with his achievements.⁷⁷ Even salafis in Algeria, invested in the moral renovation of a pure Islam, saw him as a model.⁷⁸ Much like in 1897, it seemed like what was most important was a strong ruler out there somewhere who would allow Muslims in Algeria to retain their dignity. The strength of the Turkish army holding Europeans in check, in 1897 or in 1922, meant Islam was strong, in weapons if not in faith.

Even though news came on wires from France, it only brought Muslims in Algeria closer to the rest of the Muslim world. Local settler colonialism, by taking land away from Muslims because they were Muslims and building new infrastructures of information technology to connect settlers to Europe, had unintended consequences. The same telegraphic lines simultaneously made European Algeria into a part of France and Muslim Algeria into a globalised Islamic space. French authorities remained blind to this. Instead, they believed there was another hidden network binding Muslims together.

The other switchboard? Panislamism and European entanglement

To French authorities, the kind of rewiring that was happening in Rébeval was puzzling. Around the turn of the twentieth century, all European powers now ruling vast numbers of Muslims like Russia, Britain, France, the Netherlands and Italy developed a common anxiety about the phenomenon they dubbed ‘pan-Islamism’. Most colonial understandings of pan-Islamism, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, were convinced that Muslims were connected by an alternative underground network that was invisible to

⁷⁷ *El Ouma*, 10 December 1938.

⁷⁸ Nahas Mohammed Mahiedinne, ‘La pensée politique de Mustafa Kémal Atatürk et le mouvement réformiste en Algérie avant et après la seconde guerre mondiale’, *Insaniyat*, 11, 2000, 65-73.

Europeans. As outsiders to Muslim society, Europeans vastly overestimated connections across the Muslim world, and especially, their organisation.

United by an emerging Islamological literature and shared imperial concerns, European powers feared a subversive Muslim network connecting insurrections across the world, especially in the aftermath of insurrections against European rule like the 1857 Indian Mutiny and the 1871 insurrection in Kabylia. Colonial administrations anxiously commissioned studies on the organisation of Muslim societies to prevent further uprisings. *Marabouts et khouans*, the 1884 study of Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa*) by the head of the Algerian *Affaires indigènes* bureau Louis Rinn, quickly became orthodoxy, and was read well beyond France by Russian administrators.⁷⁹ Rinn's work came out of a need to understand, as he explained on the first page the 'panislamic movement that, spreading from the Sunda islands to the Atlantic, constitutes a real danger for all European peoples who have interests in Africa and Asia.'⁸⁰

Panislamism was understood to be an actual organisation, a secret society frequently compared to freemasonry. For Europeans, therefore, it was not the telegraph but some other, alternative network which must be causing electrical reactions among Muslims. The hubs of the oral news system, the *cafés maures*, cafés owned and patronised by Muslim men were compared to 'telephone booths' of an invisible underground system.⁸¹ The mechanisms of oral communication, mysterious to European observers, excited this speculation. As Julia Clancy-Smith pointed out, administrators sometimes complained that the 'native' knew of events in North Africa or Europe before they did.⁸² When a violent uprising occurred in the village of Margueritte on the morning of 26

⁷⁹ I thank Alexander Morrison for this observation.

⁸⁰ Louis Rinn, *Marabouts et khouans: étude sur l'Islam en Algérie*, (Algiers, 1884). On the interrelationship between ethnographic knowledge and surveillance see George Trumbull, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge, 2009).

⁸¹ Joseph Desparmet, 'Quelques échos de la propagande allemande à Alger', *Bulletin de la société de géographie d'Alger et de l'Afrique du Nord*, 10, 1915, p.48. On Desparmet see chapter 3, p.181.

⁸² Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, p.100.

April 1901, the news had reached Orléansville [Chlef], some 110km away, by that evening.⁸³

The question was who was pressing the switch. ‘There exists, in the Muslim world, a secret society that everywhere extends its ramifications (...)’ said the very serious French consul in Jeddah in 1882, yet ‘I do not know where the general of this society lives.’⁸⁴ The locus of pan-Islamism was always unclear. Sometimes, it was in Mecca, where all the Muslims met and no Europeans could enter. Sometimes, it was in Istanbul, at the court of Abdulhamid II. Sometimes, in the analysis of one particularly fanciful Russian report, it was ‘between Abyssinia and Sudan, in the district of Mataam’ and the work of a certain ‘Shaykh Omer-Ejel-Rubini-Mehdi, originally a Catholic Frenchman from Algeria’.⁸⁵ Usually, the core of this organisation was assumed to be in a place far removed from European influence.

Particularly suspicious was one of the few orders that continued to operate in lands removed from any European influence, the more recent and rising Sanussiyya brotherhood based in what is now Libya, with branches stretching from Hijaz to central Africa. Thus in French colonial demonology, a special space was reserved for the Sanussiyya brotherhood, ‘whose formidable organisation radiates all over the Muslim world and excites it against European civilisation.’⁸⁶ By blaming all Muslim agitation on an imaginary parallel network, Europeans were oblivious to the effects of their own imperial expansion in provoking this ‘excitement’.

⁸³ Havas telegram, 27 April 1901, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1690. Cf. Charles-Robert Ageron’s claims that during the Second World War, ‘Un bruit mis en circulation à Alger le matin parvenait simultanément le soir à Tlemcen, Souk-Ahras et Batna’, in Ageron, ‘Les populations du Maghreb face à la propagande allemande’ *Revue d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale*, 29:11, pp.1-39

⁸⁴ Djeddah to MAE, 19 May 1882, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Landau, *Politics of pan-Islam*, pp.342-3. The story alludes to the Sudanese Mahdi and his state which emerged in the early 1880s, but beyond this its origins are unclear. On Russian fears of pan-Islamism see also Alexander Morrison, ‘Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic: Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the Aftermath of the Andijan Uprising’, *Past and Present*, 214, 2012, pp.255-304..

⁸⁶ GGA to MAE, 15 June 1882, 1H84. Many of these views on the ‘black pope’ of the Sanussi (*il famoso papa nero*) were also taken up by Italian administrators in Libya. On the black legend of the Sanussiyya see Jean-Louis Triaud, *La légende noire de la Sanusiyya. Une confrérie musulmane saharienne sous le regard français (1840-1930)*, (Paris, 1995).

Within Algeria, the most important thing was to watch people coming from other Muslim countries, those who lurked in the darkness untamed by exposure to European civilisation. In his surveillance instructions, the governor-general of Algeria Jules Cambon particularly advised administrators to watch the ‘foreign religious characters’ whose numbers were increasing

‘whether they come from Arabia, Tripolitania, Morocco, Syria or any other point in Oriental countries, these characters present themselves under a religious appearance, and sell amulets or more-or-less authentic Zamzam water (...) under a pretext of religious or political mission, they exploit the credulity of the natives, circulate false news and comment the acts of our Administration.’⁸⁷

The relationship between Muslims here and Muslims there was unclear in colonial vocabulary. Indeed, the conflation of *indigène* and *musulman* contained an inherent contradiction, as revealed in the title of the surveillance instructions published by Cambon, targeting ‘native Algerians and Muslim foreigners’ (*indigènes algériens et musulmans étrangers*).⁸⁸ The native (*indigène*), etymologically, was defined by local anchoring (‘born-within’ in Latin), and thus denied the possibility of cosmopolitanism. The Muslim (*musulman*), on the other hand, through contact with ‘foreign Muslims’ was also part of a wider world beyond the borders of France. *Musulman* could also refer to non-Algerian Muslims passing through Algeria, who would be specified as *musulman étranger*, separate from *étrangers*, or ‘regular’ foreigners, who were assumed to be of European descent.

Certainly, activists across the Muslim world did advocate greater unity of Muslims in the face of European encroachment. However, their connections to European networks were often far closer than colonial authorities acknowledged. Often, they were men, like Allane or Si Salah, who worked for the colonial state.

To illustrate this, I turn to one final case, that of Khoualdia Salah, possibly the Algerian pan-Islamist agitator most famous to his contemporaries though not to

⁸⁷ Jules Cambon, *Instruction sur la surveillance politique et administrative des indigènes algériens et des musulmans étrangers*, (Algiers, 1895).

⁸⁸ Cambon, *Instruction sur la surveillance politique*.

historians. Known to French authorities as Khouldia Salah, but known in other circumstances and in other countries under longer versions of his name like Salah bin Al-Sayyid Omar al Khalidi al Husayni or Salah bey el Khalidi, he was also, depending on times, a more-or-less dependable servant of the French state, hardly untamed by European civilisation.

Khouldia was arrested in 1906 in Oran, having been caught in Tangier distributing propaganda advocating the union of Muslims with Abdulhamid II. In particular, his pamphlet accused the French and British governments of attempting to give the caliphate away to other figures so as to weaken the Muslim world. It was signed with the important-sounding title 'president of the Central Committee of Islamic Union.'⁸⁹

Khouldia came from a family of loyal service to France. Born in 1880 near Guelma his father, Khouldia Amara ben Laala, was *caïd* of the douar Ben Mezeline just east of Guelma and had been decorated with the *légion d'honneur* for good and loyal services to the French Republic.⁹⁰ Having been educated at the French lycée in Constantine, Khouldia became an interpreter for the French army, and participated in a variety of missions for the Ministry of Colonies across the Sahara. Khouldia, before his arrest in 1906, had been employed by the French government to penetrate the hidden galaxy of the Sanussiyya order. In 1903, he was apparently tasked with a mission to visit Hijaz (what is now Saudi Arabia), Jaghbub (currently Libya) and Wadai (now in Chad) respectively the location of the Sanussiyya's origins, current headquarters and expanding territories. He claimed to have been to Upper-Ubangui (or what is now the Eastern part of the Central African Republic), Mauritania and Timbuktu (in Northern Mali), even

⁸⁹ *Questions diplomatiques et coloniales*, 16 February 1906, pp. 296-7. The pamphlet can be found in *Bulletin de l'Afrique française*, 1906, pp.164-172.

⁹⁰ GGA to MAE, 14 July 1906, MAE/Turquie/177. On his father see the obituary in *Guelma-journal*, 22 March 1894.

giving talks to the Algiers Geographical Society on his explorations of Bahr al-Ghazal in what is now South Sudan.⁹¹

In 1903, however, on the eve of his new mission to the Sanussiyya, things started turning sour. He was accused of having stolen letterhead paper from the Government-General in Algiers and having used this to forge letters to recommend other people for employment. He was severely judged under the system of the *indigénat* and put in prison.⁹² It is an indication of Khoualdia's high contacts that the affair triggered a number of indignant denunciations in the metropolitan press, who believed his side of the story.⁹³

Despite his first detention in Algeria in 1903, Khoualdia continued to attempt to be of service to French authorities. When he reached the Hijaz in 1904 after stints in Constantinople and Cairo allegedly working as a secretary to the sultan, he managed to convince the French consul in Jeddah that he was still on a mission for France and to extract funds from him. Superiors were furious about this 'swindle' (*escroquerie*). Khoualdia then produced a report on his journeys in the Hijaz which he sent back to the French consul in Cairo, presumably expecting payment.⁹⁴

Khoualdia never stopped moving, hopping across the Mediterranean offering his services to a variety of governments. At one point, he appears to have been particularly close to German interests in Cairo, and it is at this juncture that he became involved with the production of the pan-Islamist pamphlet of 1906 that would get him arrested once again, this time in Morocco.

⁹¹ See *La Géographie*, July 1901, p.390 and Cairo to MAE, 12 April 1904 in MAE/Turquie/432.

⁹² MAE to RG in Tunis, 3 January 1906, MAE/Turquie/177.

⁹³ There was a front-page article defending Khoualdia in the liberal newspaper *L'Aurore*, 9 November 1903. Albin Rozet, the famously *indigénophile* deputy of Haute-Marne, had close contacts with Khoualdia.

⁹⁴ The report, as Khoualdia put it, was allegedly destined for his new boss, the Ottoman sultan, but this claim seems implausible. Considering that Abdulhamid II (at least nominally) ruled over Hijaz, it is unclear why he would have needed an obscure French subject to write a report on it for him. The report of some 60 pages was sent by Khoualdia to the French consul in Cairo on 27 April 1905, MAE/Turquie/432.

The pamphlet's reference to the model of the oppressed 'Polish nation' reveals the tight involvement in this co-production of another intriguing figure, Thadée Gasztowtt, born in Paris to a Polish émigré family.⁹⁵ After giving a series of conferences in Algeria, Gasztowtt would later relocate to Istanbul and become a prominent journalist and pan-Islamist activist.⁹⁶

The pamphlet's advocacy for Muslim unity in order to avoid Muslims 'selling themselves off to foreigners' is particularly delicious given Khoualdia's primary form of income: in the words of one particularly scathing French official in Malta he was merely 'a vulgar charlatan (*aventurier*) who has a finger in every pie (*qui mange à tous les râteliers*), as dangerous as he is educated'.⁹⁷ As he bounced between Tunis, Tripoli, Malta, Cairo and Constantinople among others, Khoualdia appears to have also worked at the very least for British intelligence in Khartoum, as well as for the Germans to mention only the better-attested of his alleged employers.⁹⁸

Yet until the end, he continued to offer his services to the French, meeting officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1908, and then continuing to write a variety of articles in the Cairene press. French consuls in Cairo were not unsympathetic to him:

'[Khoualdia] is haunted by the idea of taking service with a European government, and despite his repeated failures, it is to us that he comes back to present his unrelenting demands. (...) Deep down, despite his twists and his sometimes inconsiderate speech, [he] is not anti-French.'⁹⁹

He apparently even defended France in Egyptian political circles. The consul in Cairo recommended giving him a (minor) job. The fact that he could be imprisoned in

⁹⁵ Information note on Thadée Gasztowtt, MAE/Turquie/432 and Interior to MAE, 6 March 1914 in MAE/Turquie/479, Gasztowtt appears to have had connections with the small anarchist milieu in Algeria.

⁹⁶ RG Tunis to MAE, December 1906, MAE/Turquie/177. See also Paulina Dominik, 'A Young Turk from Lehistan: Tadeusz Gasztowt aka Seyfeddin Bey (1881 – 1936) and his Activities During the Second Constitutional Period' in *Occasional Papers in Ottoman Biographies* <http://www.ottomanbiographies.org>

⁹⁷ Malta to MAE, 14 October 1906, MAE/Turquie/177.

⁹⁸ Khoualdia carried several letters from 1908 from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudanese administration in Khartoum promising payment for a mission West of Kordofan. The letters are unmistakably in Egyptian handwriting and on the official Khedivial letterhead. It is possible that these were forgeries as this would not be Khoualdia's first attempt at fraud, but their general sobriety suggests that Khoualdia was in the employment of the Sudanese administration, if only for a short mission. MAE/Turquie/432.

⁹⁹ Cairo to MAE, 18 March 1909, MAE/Turquie/432.

Algeria for dangerous pan-Islamist activity, and still considered for a job in the Foreign Ministry three years later is revealing. Khouldia, judging from his writings, was not wholly inconsistent in his loyalty to France – his advocacy for a stronger Islam and for an independent Ottoman Empire was not necessarily opposed to French policy. His tendency to offer his service to the French state should not lead us to dismiss his ideas as being insincere. His main opponent in polemic and the target of some of his pamphlets, Najib Azouri, a Syrian Christian advocate of Arab nationalism who lobbied European powers against Abdulhamid II, engaged in similar practices. Azouri also claimed to be president of a committee of which he was probably the only member and repeatedly offered his services as an envoy to the French government to attract their attention and bolster his projects for an independent Arab state.¹⁰⁰

Khouldia, essentially, was not an anomaly. Men like him profited from their desirable status at the edges of different imperial systems to sell their services to all and sundry.¹⁰¹ Khouldia inhabited a political space made possible by competing European attempts to use the pan-Islamic network to their own advantage. While European colonial powers feared pan-Islamist connections, each was increasingly keen, in the build-up to the First World War, to stress its role as a ‘Muslim power’ exerting influence beyond the boundaries of its empire. Each administration tried to elaborate a ‘Muslim policy’ at the expense of its competitors. As one Italian report contrasting German, French and British policy towards Islam by prominent Orientalist Enrico Insabato noted, ‘Islam is under assault by all powers’, only to plan its own attack.¹⁰²

In Paris, the Quai d’Orsay was doing exactly the same, preparing reports contrasting Austrian, German, British and Russian policy. The problem, according to the author of one report by interpreter Émile Piat, was that France had no ‘reasoned system’

¹⁰⁰ Martin Kramer, ‘Azoury: A Further Episode’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 18:4, 1982, pp.351–352.

¹⁰¹ For a cast of similar characters from South Asia, see Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism*.

¹⁰² Enrico Insabato ‘Sul modo di penetrare nel mondo islamico – relazioni e progetti’, Archivio Storico Ministero dell’Africa Italiana (ASMAI) , Libia/109.1.

of Muslim policy as a whole, one that went beyond the various interests of different agencies.¹⁰³ Indeed, in the years preceding World War I, the need for coordination seemed urgent. Policies towards Muslims were made in the Ministry of Colonies (for West Africa), of Interior (for Algeria) and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for Tunisia, Morocco, and France's growing interests in Syria). In 1911, an Interministerial Commission on Muslim Affairs (CIAM) was instituted, following years of requests for a more cohesive policy.¹⁰⁴ Because 'Islam' was so densely connected, so French policy must be too.

The connection between Algerians and the wider Muslim world could be a hindrance or an advantage to French policy. The different ways in which authorities dealt with this connection reveals a tension between a colonial and an imperial logic. On a local, colonial level in Algeria, the most important thing was for Muslims to be *contained* so as to ensure stable settler land ownership and avoid insurrections. For Algerian local authorities as well as for *colons*, a good native stayed in his *douar* and did not move. On the other hand, from a broader, imperial perspective of maximising France's global power, the wanderings of Algerians could be very handy, especially in Muslim spaces abroad where Frenchmen could not enter, like the *hajj*.¹⁰⁵

This contradiction was present at all levels of the French state, but in practice, it often led to tensions between the Government-General of Algeria, the GGA (which reported back to the Interior Ministry) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE or Quai d'Orsay). These tensions were heightened by discrepancies between the two administrations: the foreign service was a more prestigious career than the Algerian

¹⁰³ Piat to MAE, 25 November 1913, MAE/Turquie/479.

¹⁰⁴ Pascal Le Pautremat. *La politique musulmane de la France au XXe siècle*, (Paris, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ On this contradiction see also James McDougall, 'The Secular State's Islamic Empire: Muslim Spaces and Subjects of Jurisdiction in Paris and Algiers, 1905-1957', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:3, 2010, pp.553-580.

administration, and consuls working for the Quai d'Orsay were typically better-educated and better Arabic-speakers than their Algerian counterparts.

Khoualdia noted that he was treated very differently by officials at the Quai d'Orsay and the Algerian administration, and lot of his troubles stemmed from differing priorities between various people in Paris and in Algiers. In 1906 when he was arrested by consular authorities in Tangier, he contrasted his treatment by both jurisdictions: 'while the French legation [run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tangier] treated me with the utmost courtesy, Algerian authorities have mistreated me and considered me like a vulgar Arab accused of theft or assassination.'¹⁰⁶

Policy towards the Algerian community in Syria similarly oscillated between limiting emigration and using the growing number of Algerians in order to exert more influence in the region. The Algerian community in Damascus in particular was seen as an important tool for French influence.¹⁰⁷ French consuls repeatedly asserted their consular protection over Algerian subjects in the Ottoman Empire to protect them from military conscription when they requested this, as in 1908.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, the activities of the 'Fraternal Association for assistance and moral support among Algerians and Tunisians', created in Constantinople in 1910 by a group of prominent Tunisian and Algerian *émigrés*, with active branches in Damascus, was regarded as extremely dangerous. Despite their small numbers, these men were highly active in newspapers across the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, even starting the Algerian community's own newspaper in Damascus, *Al Muhajir*, in 1912.¹⁰⁹

Subversive underground societies connecting Algeria to the outside world did exist, they just were not as removed from French influence as pan-Islamist panic

¹⁰⁶ Khoualdia to Ottoman ambassador in Paris, 6 August 1906, MAE/Turquie/177.

¹⁰⁷ MAE 31 July 1885, 'Le nombre et la cohésion des colonies algériennes établies à l'étranger sont, sur beaucoup de points, la cause première et principale de notre influence'.

¹⁰⁸ Damascus to MAE, 26 March 1908, MAE/Turquie/493.

¹⁰⁹ See Abbasi, 'Algerians in Galilee' and Bardin, *Algériens et tunisiens dans l'empire ottoman* and Damascus to MAE, 26 January 1911 MAE/Turquie/432.

suggested. In 1910, the ‘Maghrebi Union’ society was founded in Cairo, putting together a number of people working against the impending French invasion of Morocco.¹¹⁰ The society published a number of articles in the Egyptian press slamming French rule in North Africa. Local directives in Algeria reveal the administration was most concerned that information might leak from the state to the native population: administrators were advised that any correspondence on the Maghrebi Union was confidential and should be ‘kept in your office where it must be locked up safely.’¹¹¹ There was no other switchboard: it was the colonial globalization of the telegraph that created desires for Muslim unity, and it was along those wires that it connected.

Conclusion

All these cases, from Allane to Si Salah to Khoualdia, reveal a close proximity between alleged anti-French agitators and local Frenchmen. All of them were or had been minor employees of the administration with close connections to government. Without Allane’s chummy relations with the local retired French officer and Mayor Coste’s clique who brought him a supply of newspapers, incidents in Rébeval would not have taken the shape they did.

In the case of Si Salah, the one accused of plotting insurrections in 1899, the local administrator Manuel Bugéja believed that Si Salah, one of his trusted *agents indigènes*, had never been guilty of subversive speech and defended him.¹¹² His superiors, however, the *sous-préfet* in Sétif, and the *préfet* in Constantine, were not so convinced. In Bugéja’s

¹¹⁰ Constantinople to MAE, 29 August 1913, MAE/Turquie/479.

¹¹¹ Circulaire, préfecture de Constantine, 24 May 1911, ANOM/CM Chateaudun-du-Rhumel, 93102/44.

¹¹² Bugéja, born in Bejaia of Maltese descent, later rose to becoming a controversial character in the small world of colonial Algerian politics. He is one the rare administrators to have left us a memoir. Though this was perhaps linked to the constraints of the genre, he never mentioned his Maltese origins or a supposed proximity to Arabs in this. See Manuel Bugéja, *Souvenirs d'un fonctionnaire colonial. 34 ans d'administration algérienne*, (Tanger, 1939).

personnel file, they quietly concluded that he should be removed from the region to another posting, for he is ‘a bit too inclined to listen to one of his native agents, Si Salah, whose intrigues are a hindrance to the administration.’¹¹³ Si Salah’s proximity to the local administrator was dangerous, and distance had to be reinstated. Similar dynamics were at play around Khoualdia, who worked for the Ministry of Colonies, but then came to be seen as too close to European power, pilfering letterhead paper to the great displeasure of the Governor-General.

Even when looking at emigration to Syria, the list of people suspected as ‘promoters of emigration’ reads strangely, as many of them were either French citizens or that rare breed, Muslims with French citizenship (*naturalisés*). When a wave of emigration took off around Orléansville in 1899, authorities blamed a number of public writers, who spread rumours about emigration because they brought in a roaring trade of illiterate rural men paying to fill in emigration authorisation forms. Attention zeroed in on a certain Joannès Truche, born in Lyon in 1867, fired from several previous jobs for being an inveterate drunk and stealing wine, who owned a café with his wife ‘of loose morals’. Around him operated a clique of men who were suspected of sleeping around with Mrs. Truche, who had colourful bilingual nicknames such as ‘Philippe Charles dit Ben Djelloul Le M’tourni’ and ‘Bensalem Mohammed ben Larbi dit Paillasse’, the nickname *m’tourni* in particular indicating that the man had ‘apostasised’ from Islam in favour of French citizenship. Beyond the salacious detail, the picture is one of intimate relations between Europeans and Muslims.

The point here is not to engage in the colonial administration’s polemic against these indispensable intermediaries, ‘half-educated’ men who seemed to be causing all the trouble. The role of these men across the colonised world, is, by now, an established

¹¹³ Dossier de personnel de Manuel Bugéja, Feuillet signalétique année 1899, ANOM/GGA/19H95.

trope.¹¹⁴ Rather, the repetition of cases reveals a more disturbing paradox. While the circulation of news reveals a social proximity between natives and settlers on a local level, the interpretation of that news reinforced a narrative of conflict between two blocs.

News circulation revealed great personal proximity between certain Muslims, local European settlers and the administration, yet despite these contacts, events were consistently read as involving two blocs: settlers and natives, Christians and Muslims. This was the case in the administration's investigation into Si Salah, which persisted in splitting people between settlers and natives in his narrative. It was also the case in Rébeval with Allane, where a rather murky story about diplomatic tension around Crete turned into a much starker global conflict between Muslims and Europe. Close individual relations did not undermine the reality of broader, inflexible social categories. As soon as one zoomed out to the level of the community, relations across the colonial divide could not be understood as meaningful, and were re-interpreted as a total clash between two blocs. Herein, perhaps, lies some of the mystery of the colonial situation. The two worlds of the coloniser and colonised were very much in contact, and yet the system continually produced division, rendering this contact into friction. It was, fundamentally, colonialism which made the news electric, that made news most meaningful if it opposed France and Muslims, or whatever proxies could be made to stand in for each side, like Greece and Turkey.

Algerians, as well as North Africans more broadly have been relatively absent from the literature on pan-Islamism. Compared to much-better studied Muslims in British India, or in the Arab East, they were less numerous, less rich and not as organised. Yet this relative absence can in turn allow us to rethink pan-Islamism more broadly. While the literature on pan-Islamism as an intellectual phenomenon is extensive,

¹¹⁴ For parallel problems at a similar time in French West Africa see Emily Lynn Osborn, "'Circle of Iron': African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 44:1, 2003, pp.29-50.

events in Rébeval in 1897 underscore the importance of social and diplomatic tension in shaping the debate about the caliphate and the future of Islam in the world. After all, 'Islam', during this period, was conceived as much as a system of personal ethics as a geopolitical entity that needed its own army and navy. A powerful Muslim state, somewhere, would guarantee the rights of Muslims here.

'Did panislamism (...) reach Muslim Algeria?' asked the great historian of colonial Algeria Charles-Robert Ageron in 1968, confessing that the available sources made this question difficult to answer.¹¹⁵ Yet the problem lay less with the sources than with the question itself, which took up the assumptions of the colonial administration, that panislamism 'came' from elsewhere, a cohesive ideology and organisation that could be located and what is more, located outside Algeria. The question bypasses the point, that panislamism did not 'reach' Algeria, but came out of two-way interactions between charged spaces in North Africa and the Middle East. It was generated out of alignment between different scales of demands, from peasants in Kabylia to court politics in Istanbul.

This alignment was made possible by two correlated developments: first, the new technology of the telegraph, which reconfigured distance and brought news from Istanbul closer, second, simultaneous European encroachment both on Algerian lands and on the Ottoman sultan's sovereignty. Together, they made the news electric.

Events read as involving Muslims suddenly became *closer*, more politically immediate and more sensitive in Algeria. This does not mean that people in Algeria were only interested in other Muslims. The same was true of events involving France, however little they applied directly to Algeria. If a news item could be interpreted as involving French weakness or French defeat, then it immediately became more salient.

As another local administrator would write some years later,

¹¹⁵ Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans et la France*, vol.2, p.908.

‘the natives of the countryside are only interested in events in foreign countries, even if they are of the Muslim religion, only if they are particularly grave and important and if they see the European population of the settlement villages worrying about them.’¹¹⁶

This was meant to be a reassuring message. In fact, it meant that when reports of distant events in Muslim lands intersected with the local settler population, sparks flew.

The administration remained persuaded that the problems came through other networks.

As long as the natives only found things out through the papers, events were calm.

Those who wrote surveillance reports thought they could breathe easy when ‘the Algerian natives only know about events in the East through reading French newspapers.’¹¹⁷ As such, they dismissed the ability of Muslims to interpret the news in ways that were politically meaningful to them, and their own responsibility in introducing a new, warped phase of globalisation onto Algeria.

When Algeria was plugged into networks of telegraph news, it only made things more polarised locally. Contemporary Frenchmen, like their counterparts elsewhere, believed that the telegraph would annihilate all social division through understanding and effortless communication. As Americans wrote at the time, ‘It is impossible that old prejudices and hostilities should longer exist, while such an instrument has been created for an exchange of thought between all the nations of the earth.’¹¹⁸ Yet the telegraph did no such thing. Instead, it fused local inequalities and global conflict together. Nile Green’s view that the ‘industrial collapse of distance’ caused a ‘corresponding diminishing of difference’ in which Muslims easily moved to and fro in Europe, seems, at least for Algeria, somewhat naïve.¹¹⁹ Greater connection to Europe hardly diminished difference.

¹¹⁶ CM Chateaudun-du-Rhumel to PC, 19 February 1920, ‘Au sujet des événements de Syrie’, 93102//44

¹¹⁷ Monthly report, November 1903, ANOM/GGA/11H42.

¹¹⁸ Briggs and Maverick in 1858, quoted by Carey, ‘Technology and Temporality’, p.7.

¹¹⁹ Nile Green, ‘Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West: Industrial Communications in the Making of the “Muslim World”’, *American Historical Review*, 118:2, 2013, p.428.

The cases detailed here show that there were many levels of grayscale in colonial society, many zones of contact, but this ‘society of contact’ was hardly a hopeful one.¹²⁰ It is easy, looking back, to rail against the binary categories used to describe colonial society, as if coloniser/colonised was a problem with the historiography. The stories above suggest otherwise – that the binary was an important ‘native category’ to those living under colonial rule, that they used to interpret the world around them, even the very distant world. Whatever the complexities of their quotidian social interactions, the world was best explained as a total conflict even when things appeared to be at peace. Just as the telegraph did not make the world flat, close personal interactions did not make colonialism go away, they only enhanced friction. What is visible here is a system which continually needed to produce space whenever contact occurred.

While this chapter has charted how news could redistribute space, the next one turns to examining how news organised people’s sense of time.

¹²⁰ Sylvie Thénault et Emmanuel Blanchard, ‘Société du contact’.

3. War-time: Temporality and False News

Mascara, 1914. At the outbreak of the First World War, a small insurrection erupted in Western Algeria. In the mountains of the Béni Chougran just north of the city of Mascara, men had decided that the outbreak of hostilities between France and Germany was the sign that they should take their future into their own hands. They rose up and attacked French soldiers in charge of conscription operations in the vicinity: two of them were captured, decapitated and their genitals mutilated.¹ Events remained localised, and the uprising was swiftly crushed. Having started on October 5, violent conflict had ended by October 9, and conscription operations unrolled more or less smoothly in the rest of Algeria. By December 1914, fourteen men had been executed for participating in the insurrection, and the disturbances appeared to have ended.²

In the aftermath, the local *sous-préfet* in Mascara, Paul Bert, looked for the causes of this agitation. He blamed the disturbance not on conscription, but on a ‘campaign of false news’ (*campagne de fausses nouvelles*) that had swept the region in the months preceding the insurrection. Since the outbreak of war and the announcement of mass conscription in August 1914, rumours had circulated claiming that the Germans were coming very soon to liberate Algeria and would give back lands and eliminate all debts.³

Closely connected to this campaign of false news was a manuscript that had been circulating in the region in the build-up to the insurrection. The document proclaimed

¹ Gilbert Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée. La guerre de 1914-1918 et le premier quart du XXème siècle*, (Geneva, 1981), pp.280-282.

² Monthly report, December 1914, ANOM/GGA/11H44.

³ Sous-Préfet in Mascara to Préfet in Oran, 15 October 1914, ANOM/9H16.

itself to be a work of history entitled *‘Aja’ib al-akḥbar dhat al-ta’sis fi ma waqa‘ aw sanfa yaqa‘ li-l-muslimin wa-al-fransis* [Wonders of the news that is well-established on what happened and will happen to the Muslims and the French]. It was thus both history (*tarikḥ*) and news (*akḥbar*). It recounted the origins of the French up to their present behaviour in Algeria. In the final pages, the author purported to know the date of the end of French rule at the hand of the Germans. News of the beginning of the First World War combined with understandings of the past and expectations of the future.⁴

As Will Slauter has written about the American Revolutionary Age, ‘people found ways to bring distant events closer and transform the future from a zone of uncertainty into a zone of action.’⁵ The first part of that statement we have examined in the previous chapter, looking at the ways in which news rearranged space. This chapter is about the second half, or how the future could be made into a zone of action.

What counts as news depends on our notions of time. The French *nouvelle* is an exact calque of the English ‘news’, that is something new, a piece of reported information that is time-sensitive.⁶ Implicitly, the idea here is that the events being described are past, but they have a certain relevance to the present moment, a nowness. This temporal relationship is slippery – news is an account of events in the recent past, but it often appears as an announcement of things to come, a basis for prediction. In Arabic, the word *naba’*, (plural *anba’*), can refer both to news (as in *wakalat anba*, news agency) and to forecasts. In both Christian and Islamic contexts, words for news are often linked to predicting the future, and thus religious revelation and the coming of the

⁴ A version of the manuscript with a different title is mentioned in Allan Christelow, ‘Oral, Manuscript, and Printed Expressions of Historical Consciousness in Colonial Algeria’, *Africana Journal*, vol. 15, 1990, pp.258-275, who appears to be only aware of one version of the manuscript, the one sent by the Procureur-général d’Alger in ANOM/GGA/9H5. James McDougall in *History and the culture of nationalism*, pp.104-105 notes that different versions were circulating across the region in ANOM/GGA/9H16, and I have found another in ANOM/GGA/1H33.

⁵ Slauter, ‘Forward-Looking Statements’, p.759.

⁶ Another word which is in more common use in contemporary French is *l’actualité*, which expresses the collective body of newsworthy events in the world, something more akin to the English phrase ‘current events’.

Hour. In English and French, news can be the good news, *la bonne nouvelle*, that is, the Gospel.⁷ In Arabic, the one who spreads news, the *nabi* (literally the one who announces or predicts) is a prophet. Not all words for news relate to the future. Both Arabic and French use the plural of the word for information (*akbhar/informations*) to mean news, through a kind of metonymy which makes a particular kind of information (reports of important political events) stand for the whole. Even so, knowledge of recent events (information) is often connected to the ability to predict the near future, a logic which for instance underlies financial speculation.⁸

Taking the region around Mascara as a case-study, this chapter examines Algerians' reactions to a single event, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. By looking at divergent understandings of war-time, it asks to what extent people in Algeria lived under different temporalities.

Europeans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries experienced themselves as undergoing a 'discordance of times', to quote Christophe Charle's expression. Modernity, to them was a rupture with the past and a hurtling towards the future. One of its characteristics was a sense of ever greater acceleration of news coming through faster technological means.⁹ By contrast, Muslims were considered to have an improper relationship to time. For instance, they were considered to have no sense of the future. So prevalent was the idea that Muslims were incapable of acting towards future goals that an Arabic word entered the French language to describe Muslim fatalism. *Le mektoub*, from the Arabic *maktub*, written, meaning 'it is written', as in 'it is destiny', was allegedly

⁷ In Arabic, the word used in Christian contexts is not *naba'* but *bishara*, a word which specifically refers to announcements that bring joy, or glad tidings.

⁸ Will Slauter, 'Forward-Looking Statements'.

⁹ Charle, *Discordance des temps*. James Carey, 'Technology and Ideology: the case of the telegraph'.

what Muslims would say when confronted with unfortunate events. Muslims were also considered to have no sense of the past or of history.¹⁰

Indeed, many scholars have shown that colonial rule relied on denying that natives lived in the same time as Europeans. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, colonialism rendered the difference between Europe and non-Europe temporally: travelling to the colonies was described as going back in time to Europe's own past. The British in India asserted that the colonised were *not yet* part of modernity. The colonised could only access it at some later stage of political development, suspending them outside of historical progress.¹¹

Pushing back against these colonial assumptions, more recent scholarship has emphasised that the colonised were not just locked out of time, but had their own vernacular temporalities, their own understandings of the past and its relationship to the present and future. Romain Bertrand has pointed out that historians should pay attention to vernacular histories of the colonised, in which the 'colonial moment' may not appear as a rupture but might just appear as part of a longer or different understanding of history.¹² On Barak has argued that standardised time came into Egypt as 'Western' time, thus leading to a split between a notion of 'Western' and 'native' time. Technologies such as the railway and the telegraph produced their own 'countertempos' as reactions to this hegemonic time. Insurrections, cutting telegraph lines, marked a reappropriation of the flow of time.¹³ In Algeria, James McDougall has shown how older idioms of understanding the past remained strong throughout the colonial period, emplotting the arrival of French rule within longer narratives to make sense of the world.¹⁴

¹⁰ Raphaële Branche, "Au temps de la France", *Identités collectives et situation coloniale en Algérie*, *Vingtième siècle*, 117, 2013, pp.199-213.

¹¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, 2000).

¹² Romain Bertrand, 'Politiques du moment colonial : historicités indigènes et rapports vernaculaires au politique en "situation coloniale"', *Questions de recherche*, 26, October 2008, pp. 1-49.

¹³ On Barak, *On Time*.

¹⁴ McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*, pp.97-110.

How did people who saw themselves as living in different eras live alongside each other? If, as Raphaëlle Branche has noted with respect to Algeria, ‘the colonial moment is characterised by the parallel coexistence of people or groups inserted into different temporalities’, understanding this coexistence raises a challenge.¹⁵ This chapter shows how news circulated between different groups in colonial society, slicing through different temporalities to create a shared sense of an event.

To do so it focuses on one event: the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Even by the troubled standards of colonial everyday life, 1914 was a disruption which allows us to see dynamics of news-making particularly clearly. The French government reintroduced censorship from 5 August 1914, and the effects of mass mobilisation and the German invasion of Northern France created vast information blackouts. Newspapers shut down and people developed a distrust of official information as the war went on, giving the term ‘propaganda’ its current negative connotations.¹⁶

In Algeria, the conflict had its own peculiar geography. While people in Paris feared the progress of German troops as a very close physical reality, war was more distant on the other side of the sea. With the exception of a brief shelling of two Algerian ports at the outset of the war in 1914, German military intervention remained confined to the European half of the Republic. However, conscription into the French army made the war into a lived experience for Algerian men. Mass conscription was applied to European and Jewish men, 73,000 of whom served in the army between 1914 and 1918 out of a population of some 750,000. A total of 172,000 Muslim men served, a greater number in absolute terms but smaller considering their larger share of the population of 4.5 million. Following a controversial law passed in 1912, Muslims could be forced to

¹⁵ Branche, ‘Au Temps de la France’. For another study of Algerian temporalities of the colonial period see Giulia Fabbiano, “‘Pour moi, l’Algérie, c’est les Béni-Boudouane, le reste j’en sais rien’”, *Construction, narrations et représentations coloniales en Algérie française*, *Le mouvement social*, 2011, 236:3, pp.47-60.

¹⁶ Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (eds.) *Vrai et faux dans la Grande Guerre*, (Paris, 2004).

serve in the French army despite not having any of the benefits of citizenship. Resistance to this conscription lay at the root of two insurrections, the smaller one in 1914 in the Béni Chougrar mountains which is the focus of this chapter, and the much larger insurrection that took over the Aurès mountains in Southeastern Algeria in 1916.¹⁷

The onset of war was not the same for all. For Europeans, censorship and mass conscription marked a sharp rupture with colonial everyday life, and many found themselves going to metropolitan France for the first time.¹⁸ For Muslims, war may have seemed like less of a dramatic disjuncture given the humdrum brutality of colonial rule, though conscription was felt to be morally outrageous. The war also opened up possibilities through the disappearance of most European adult men to fight far away in the metropole. Yet all Algerians faced severe disruption of normal economic and information networks: mail from soldiers in France was subject to censorship, and all distrusted to various degrees the newspapers which repeated the Ministry of War's directives.

In wartime, people's perceptions of the past, present and future were disrupted, and in an atmosphere of intense censorship and speculation rumours seemed to abound on all sides. Contemporaries in Europe and in North Africa noted these developments, leading to a rash of secondary works attempting to explain this seeming regression in the twentieth century.¹⁹ Because of these heightened concerns during the Great War, the period is also one for which we have some of the most richly documented forms of popular news in Algeria. French administrators and ethnographers (who were often one

¹⁷ For recruitment figures see Meynier, *Algérie révélée*, p.398 and 589.

¹⁸ A largely autobiographical of this is in the opening of Albert Camus' *Le Premier Homme*, as Camus' father died in the First World War.

¹⁹ Prochasson and Rasmussen, *Vrai et faux dans la Grande Guerre*. For a classic in the English-speaking literature see Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time, Containing an Assortment of Lies Circulated Throughout the Nations During the Great War*, (London, 1928). On the importance of war in studies of rumours more generally see Emmanuel Taïeb, 'Des rumeurs de guerre', *Quaderni*, 49, 2003, pp.5-16.

and the same) captured an array of chatter, songs, poems and manuscripts.²⁰ As this chapter relies particularly heavily on such documents, it is important to be sensitive to the ways in which these forms of news were collected in a colonial context; but the use of the ‘archives of repression’ of the French state to trace popular political culture is not new or exclusive to colonial periods.²¹

This chapter examines the temporality of different news about the outbreak of war in 1914. It begins with the manuscript history of the French, which emplotted events in 1914 in a much longer history of conflict. It then contrasts this with the view held by many contemporary French administrators and social scientists that Algerian news of the war was no news at all, only a repetition of certain immutable mental patterns trapped outside of time. Finally, it examines a set of Algerian popular songs collected during the war in order to show how news circulated between European and Muslim spheres. Accounts of recent events could cut across different temporalities, providing a strange unity to people who otherwise thought their neighbours were historical anomalies.

²⁰ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, p.100.

²¹ Here, those working on Algeria have much to learn from works in metropolitan history see for the eighteenth century Farge, *Subversive Words* and for the nineteenth century Ploux, *De bouche à oreille*. Ranajit Guha, writing on peasant politics in India also warns us that there is no way of avoiding the official archive in colonial settings, Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (Durham, NC), p.14.



Figure 19 Detail of 1930s roadmap of Algeria focusing on *département* of Oran. To the West is the Moroccan border, main places mentioned in the chapter are underlined. The yellow circle north of Mascara indicates the mountains of the Béné-Chougrane, zone of the insurrection in 1914.

The wonderful news of Abu Ras

The insurrection around Mascara in 1914 was linked to a manuscript history. The text placed the outbreak of war in a much deeper history of other wars, in particular the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and used it to predict the forthcoming liberation of Algeria from the French. Several different versions of this manuscript were seized by French authorities around 1914 and found their way into the colonial archive.²² The text is difficult to categorise: it describes itself as a history (*tarikḥ*) but also as a prophecy. The most extensive version explains the origins of the French nation in scripture by linking them to Japheth son of Noah (*Yafath bin Nuh*), then explaining rather confusedly the origins of the Gauls, the conflict between the Romans and the Berbers in North Africa,

²² I refer throughout to the version in ANOM/GGA/1H33 which is the most extensive and to my knowledge has not been used before. The copy is dated to the year 1332 in the Islamic calendar, which ran from November 1913 to November 1914 in the Gregorian calendar.

and the Crusades. It proceeds to give a more detailed account of the first true treachery of the French, the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, which may be at least partly taken from the famous chronicle by Al-Jabarti.²³

The author then describes the coming of the French to Algeria in 1830, focusing on the role of Abd al-Qadir, his successes and misdeeds (understandably given that Mascara had been his capital), and the defeat of the Muslims because ‘they did not gather to kill their enemies’ (*wa lam yajtam‘u ‘ala qatal ‘adubum*). It goes over the imposition of the French state, noting with some contempt the constant changes of administrative structure (‘in every year they changed the laws to govern their affairs’ *fi kul sana yubadithun min al-qawanin li-tadrib umuribim*) and the coming of news by cable (*jalaba al-akbbar bi-al-silk*). Under French rule, the moral order is turned topsy-turvy: the mosques are empty and the markets are full. Prostitution, corruption and lies fill the land, as all operate under a pretence of false equality: the rabble (*awbash*) think they are the equal of the educated (‘*ulama*’) and the nobles (*ashraf*). Women and slaves fancy themselves on the same level as free men.

The author of the manuscript concludes that he knows the ‘year, the month, the week, the day, the hour, the second’ of the end of French rule. Knowledge of the past and knowledge of the future are thus deeply connected, and therein lie the wonders of news (‘*aja’ib al akbbar*’) of the work’s title: the one who knows whence the French came knows when they will leave, the beginning and the end (*al-mabda’ wa al-ghaya*).

Evidently, only one who had been granted divine blessing could speak of matters so distant in both time and space. The manuscript appealed to a very old tradition of wonders (Arabic ‘*aja’ib*, French *merveilles*), in which the author presents unusual and extraordinary events to the reader to create a sense of authority. In French too, accounts

²³ There is evidence that Jabarti’s chronicle was well-known in Algeria. A report from August 1902, for instance, sought to ban an extract of Jabarti printed in Cairo but concluded that given that the text was ‘very well known and widespread in Algeria’ there was no point banning it. GGA to MAE, August 1902, MAE/CP/24.

of the ‘wonders occurred in our time’ (*‘merveilles advenues en notre temps’*) had been some of the earliest written forms of news.²⁴

The text purported to be written by a scholar named Shaykh Abu Ras al-Nasri (known as Abu Ras) who was predicting the future. Abu Ras, thanks to his great devotion and scholarly powers, had allegedly been given divine clairvoyance and was thus able to anticipate both the arrival of the French and their demise well before they occurred. Abu Ras is historically attested as a prolific late eighteenth-century scholar who was also from Mascara. He was most active around the 1790s, and by this time he was already a mature scholar, having travelled to Tunis, Fes, Egypt and completed the pilgrimage to Mecca twice. Around 1814 he was still writing, and in these later works he mentioned Napoleon.²⁵

Because he was already an old man by 1814, it is (to put it mildly) highly unlikely that Abu Ras authored the text that was found in 1914. The manuscript refers explicitly to events around 1870, the defeat of the French at the hands of the people of *al-Brus* (Prussia), who take tribute from them and rape their virgins, following which the French would ‘meet as a Council’ (*jama‘a shura*), and ‘the Jews came to sit on this council and join the party of the French’ (*wa tasir al yahud ma‘kum ahl mashura wa jama‘a wa yadkbulun fi hizbibhim*). Here, the author describes quite precisely the birth of the Third Republic in 1870-71.

The manuscript of 1914 appears to be a kind of pious adaptation by a later disciple, a pseudo-Abu Ras [Figures 20 and 21]. The real Abu Ras’ most famous work

²⁴ Faiz et dictz de maistre Jehan Molinet, quoted in Bellanger et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol.1 (Paris, 1969), p.28. Early modern millenarian rumours flowed freely between Christian and Islamic contexts see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Sixteenth-century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges’, in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: from the Tagus to the Ganges*, (Oxford, 2005).

²⁵ Abu Ras’ work was known to contemporary French Orientalists and had been studied and translated. Abu Ras had written his own autobiographical catalogue of works, in which the ‘French history’ did not feature. General Faure-Biguet in 1900 listed a version of this history as one of Abu Ras’ many attributed works, under the different title *Aqwal al ta’sis ‘ama waqa’ wa sayaga’ min al-faransis*, ‘Well-founded words on what happened and will happen of the French’. It is not clear if he read it himself or if he was just listing works usually attributed to Abu Ras. Faure-Biguet, *Notice sur le cheikh Mohammed Abou Ras En Nasri de Mascara*, (Paris, 1900).

was a long panegyric (*qasida*) celebrating the takeover of the city of Oran from the Spanish in 1792. Like most works in Arabic before the late nineteenth century, it had a rhyming title: '*Aja'ib al asfar wa lata'if al akhbar* [Wonders of travels and pleasures of news]. Despite its title it was neither an account of recent events nor a travel narrative, but rather a work of history (*tarikh*), intended to 'expose the origins of individuals and races, be they foreigners or Arabs'. The work focuses on the history of Spain, explaining the origin of the Spanish, sons of 'Romulus, founder of Rome and descendant of 'Aljan son of Japheth son of Noah'.²⁶

The later history of the French in 1914 was an adaptation of this, turning many of the original's phrases to discuss not the Spanish but the French. For instance in the account of their geographical origin it switches from describing these enemies as coming from South of *al-Birra*, the Pyrenees, to the North. It is quite likely that the author of this adaptation belonged to a study circle in Mascara that had been founded by Abu Ras himself.²⁷ Abu Ras' house and the mosque associated with him were on the outskirts of the old city in the neighbourhood of Baba-Ali, on the road leading north towards the mountains of the Béni Chougran. It is in this exact neighbourhood that the *sous-préfet* noticed some suspicious activity among various 'bad subjects' and 'pimps' (*souteneurs*) as early as August 1914.²⁸

²⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Arabe 4618 (supplément arabe 2428). This is a handsome manuscript from 1283 Hijri/1866 A.D. and is the version I have used here, along with the French translation by the chief translator for the *Mobacher*: Mohammed Abou Ras Ben Ahmed ben Abd el-Kader en Nasri, *Voyages extraordinaires et nouvelles agréables: Récits historiques sur l'Afrique septentrionale*, transl. Marc-Antoine Arnaud, (Algiers, 1885).

²⁷ On study circles and practices of manuscript copying in a different context in Yemen see Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, (Berkeley, 1993).

²⁸ Commissariat de police de Mascara to sous-préfet, 4 August 1914, Wilaya Oran, I/1/2260.

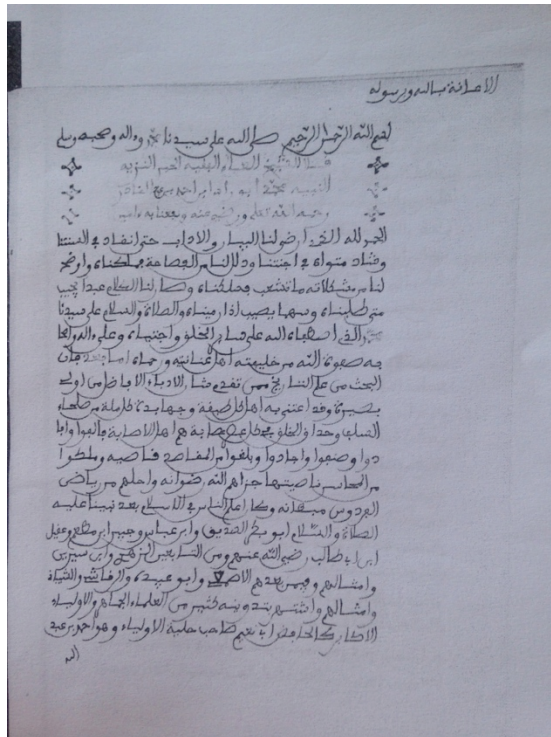


Figure 20 Facsimile of first page of manuscript of Abu Ras' 'Aja'ib al-asfar wa lata'if al-akhbar, copied 1866. Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Arabe 4618

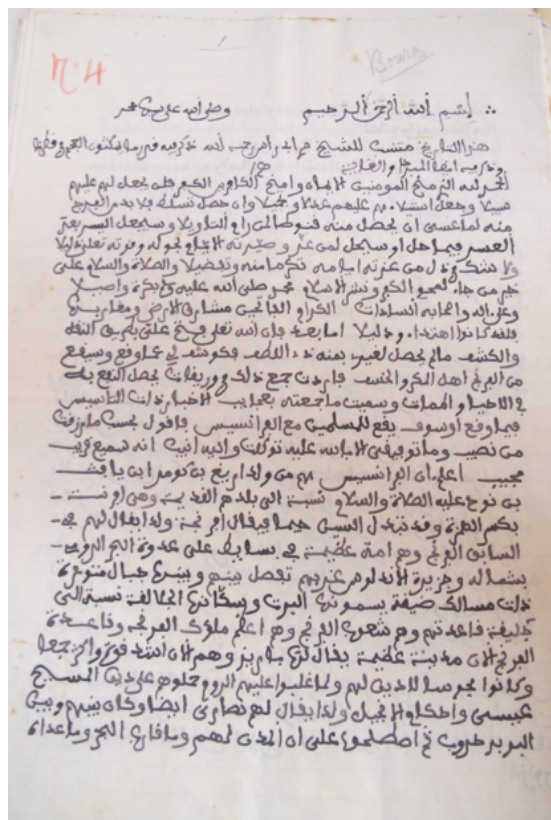


Figure 21 First page of 1914 Manuscript attributed to Abu Ras, ANOM/GGA/1H33.

Why would someone in 1914 write a text that pretended to be over a hundred years older? This appears to have been relatively common practice: in Tlemcen, also in the Oran *département*, another pseudo-prophecy emerged in the summer of 1914, by a ninth century scholar named Sidi Lakdar Baklouf, who alleged that during a great European war all the Christians would perish.²⁹

Behind this strategy there was the obvious benefit of anonymity. A manuscript claiming to be very old was a good way of dissimulating its author. Unlike a print document, moreover, the manuscript could be copied and added onto by other hands to update it in line with current developments. It is likely that the Abu Ras manuscript had multiple authors, about which the *Affaires indigènes*' experts endlessly speculated. Later, in 1917, the *sous-préfet* in Mascara found new copies and noticed that they featured several additions that had probably been written down from memory by a 'poorly educated scribe'. He suspected a local *talib*, Belbegra Benabbou, who had already been arrested in 1914, and who, by virtue of having spent some time in Egypt in 1901 on his way back from the *hajj* to Mecca, was inherently suspicious.³⁰ Given the text's preoccupation with the salt tax and the 'average culture' displayed by the writing style, another report from the central *Affaires indigènes* service suspected a certain Benzain Abdelbaki ben Ahmed, a *shaykh* of the *Darqawa* order (a Sufi order that was particularly suspicious in the hierarchy of colonial danger) living in a nearby area, who had already been condemned to internment twice and was the object of an investigation in 1914 for encouraging resistance to conscription operations.³¹

Beyond the anonymity, attributing the manuscript to *shaykh* Abu Ras considerably heightened its power. The main body of the text was a quite sober history of the origins of the French and their rule in Algeria, largely free of any supernatural

²⁹ Report of the Commissaire in Tlemcen, 3 August 1914, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

³⁰ Sous-préfet in Mascara to préfet in Oran, 31 May 1917, ANOM/GGA/9H16.

³¹ Procureur général près de la cour d'appel d'Alger to GGA, 29 November 1916, ANOM/9H5

explanation. But by framing it as a revelation of someone long dead, it made history into a call for insurrection. The authorial strategy made Abu Ras' knowledge of the past and of the future one and the same. This was not unique to this particular manuscript. Other narratives of the conquest collected in Algeria around this time also emplotted the woes of French rule as part of a divine plan, to punish Muslims for their sins and then allow them the possibility of redemption. These narratives were reassuring, proclaiming that despite the appearance of a world governed by infidels, God was still very much in charge.³²

Unlike some of these other narratives though, the manuscript of 1914 did not just use divine providence to provide comfort to believers. Instead, it provided reassurance by widening the temporal horizon, identifying current disturbances as a minor predicament in the grand flow of history. Had not the people of *Rum* (Romans, but also Christians in general) come and gone before? Recounting hundreds of years of conflict between North Africans and European aggressors, history made the presence of the French ephemeral. The Romans had come and fought against the Berbers, the Crusaders had come and gone too, the French had invaded Egypt then departed, and now they had come to Algeria but soon they too would depart. At a time when the French army had been in the vicinity of Mascara for over seventy years, adapting Abu Ras' manuscript from 1792 was particularly effective: the Spanish too had long been present in Algeria, holding Oran for various stretches of time between the sixteenth and late eighteenth centuries, but they had been gloriously defeated and the same could happen to the French. Beyond the discourse of moral exhortation to his fellow Muslims, the author of the manuscript expounded a vision of history that most French historians

³² On this narrative more broadly see James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*, pp.98-110. Another history of the conquest collected by Joseph Desparmet around 1908 had a fixed narrative format that was regularly adapted to fit current events. Joseph Desparmet, 'L'oeuvre de la France en Algérie jugée par les indigènes', *Bulletin de la société de géographie d'Alger*, 1910, pp.167-186.

at the time would have found difficult to contest: many empires had held Algeria, and the time of the French would end at some point.

The manuscript, while copied in 1914, does not mention the declaration of war. Instead, it limits itself to describing with great detail the defeat of the French at the hands of the Prussians in 1870, some forty years before. After France's previous defeat in 1871, many Muslims, especially in Eastern Algeria, far from Mascara, had risen up in Algeria's largest insurrection.³³ In turn, some of their lands were settled by Alsatians who fled German rule.

The manuscript ends there in 1870, with the assertion that the author knows the end of the time of the French is nigh, followed by the date in which it was copied, 1332, or 1914 in the Christian calendar. It therefore implies that events in 1914 are but a repetition of France's previous war with Germany.

Many Frenchmen at the time would have agreed with the chronology: to them, 1914 would avenge the defeat of 1870, and the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine would finally be regained. The manuscript gave a different spin on events, in effect encouraging insurrection against the French at a time of weakness and hoping that France would meet with defeat once more at the hands of *al-Brus*. If its interpretation of the outbreak of war was different from that of the contemporary French press, its sense of chronology was effectively the same.

³³ On the 1870-71 insurrection see Chapter 2, pp.125-6.



Figure 22 Poster announcing general mobilisation in Algeria, 2nd August 1914, ANOM/9Fi234

The false news of Marc Bloch

For Europeans too, the outbreak of war in 1914 seemed like a return to the times of Muslim insurrection. On 2 August 1914, the day after France had declared an order of general mobilisation, the little settlement of Trois-Marabouts, not very far from Mascara, was tense. Europeans there swore they saw the natives light a bonfire to celebrate the departure of French men across the sea. In fact, the cause of this 'great emotion' was a rather banal ritual unrelated to the war. A sick man had visited the marabout and had roasted a lamb to attract the holy man's healing blessings.³⁴ Given the international

³⁴ CM Aïn-Temouchent, 4 August 1914, Wilaya Oran [WO], I/1/2260.

context, settlers were tense to the point of seeing potential insurrections everywhere, especially in magic rituals they did not understand.

The news of mass mobilisation had spread widely throughout remote regions [Figure 22]. Muslims came to town in greater numbers ‘hungry for news’, yet administrators throughout the region reported that the natives were ‘very quiet’. Europeans, meanwhile, were causing more problems to local authorities. In particular, as European men departed for the front, fears grew about their vulnerable wives left alone on isolated farms, and administrators set up specific patrols to reassure them.³⁵ ‘I am trying through every means possible to make Europeans understand that it would be wise (...) to avoid showing publicly any fear or suspicion towards the natives’, wrote one administrator. According to him, it was settlers who were spreading ‘the most fanciful information’ (*les renseignements les plus fantaisistes*), projecting their own fears onto the inscrutable masses surrounding them.³⁶ ‘In their gossip (*racontars*), Europeans attribute to the natives a way of thinking (*tournure d’esprit*) that is (...) a reflection of European opinion.’³⁷

Throughout the Western *département* of Oran, the region of densest European settlement, administrators were concerned that European fear would be contagious, giving the previously quiescent natives unhealthy ideas. European rumours were to the administration a symptom of fear, and in front of the natives one could not show fear. As in other colonial societies, outward emotional discipline was essential to maintaining order. An incontinent display of panic could threaten the façade of European unity and might.³⁸ News of the outbreak of war risked becoming overly emotional, thus turning into false news.

³⁵ Several reports along these lines from August 1914 are in WO/I/1/2260.

³⁶ CM Aïn-Temouchent, 4 August 1914, WO/I/1/2260.

³⁷ CM Têlagh to PO, 6 August 1914. WO/I/1/2260.

³⁸ On the importance of the managements of emotions by colonial states see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, (Berkeley, 2002). On state management of

One of the foremost authorities on the problem of false news is another, more famous historian in Algeria during the First World War: Marc Bloch. Though this information is scarcely to be found in most accounts of his life, for part of the First World War Bloch served in Algeria. For three months, he moved between Philippeville [Skikda], Constantine and Biskra. He served as an intelligence officer in the repression of the other insurrection that erupted against conscription in wartime Algeria, the much larger revolt of the Aurès mountains in 1916.³⁹ 15,000 conscripts were moved from the Western Front to Algeria to force 1,366 Muslim conscripts into joining the army, demonstrating the French state's might at a time when absolute loyalty was essential for victory.⁴⁰

Bloch was posted on the other side of Algeria from Mascara, but even if he had met pseudo-Abu Ras he probably would not have mentioned it given his exceedingly Eurocentric views of history. Later, during another war, Bloch would write that only Europeans had a sense of history: 'For, unlike others, our civilization has always been extremely attentive to the past'.⁴¹ He never mentioned his time in Algeria, which must have been uneventful. And yet, it is likely that Bloch and the man pretending to be Abu Ras had a similar sense of the significance of the year 1870 as Bloch's father, Gustave, had left Alsace in 1870 to avoid becoming German.

Marc Bloch was one of the more famous observers of wartime news, which became the subject of an article published in 1921 entitled *Réflexions d'un historien sur les*

rumours and fear in a non-colonial context see Steve Smith, 'Fear and Rumour in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s', *Cultural and Social History*, 5:3, 2008, pp.269-288.

³⁹ Carole Fink, *Marc Bloch: A Life in History*, (Cambridge, 2001), pp.69-70. Fink, 'Introduction' to Marc Bloch, *Memoirs of War, 1914-15*, (Cambridge, 1988), p.40. Bloch's memoirs of the First World War have only been published for the years 1914-1915.

⁴⁰ Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*, p.597.

⁴¹ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, English edition, (Manchester, 1954), p.4. By 'we', Bloch repeatedly emphasised that he meant the heirs of Christianity, for 'Christianity is a religion of historians'. While this later statement was quite a characteristic confusion of Christianity and universalism, there is something bitterly poignant about it coming from an Alsatian Jew during the Second World War.

fausses nouvelles de la guerre.⁴² This was part of a trend: many contemporaries were troubled by what they saw as an epidemic of false news during the war, leading to more and more publications about false news (*fausses nouvelles*) [Figure 23].⁴³



Figure 23 Google Ngram on French corpus showing a spike in usage of the term '*fausses nouvelles*' in books published in 1914-1918. Notice smaller spikes in 1870-1871 and 1936-1940, suggesting a link between war and concerns with false news

For contemporary observers, wartime led to epidemics of false news. *Fausse nouvelle* was a legal term: spreading false news (*colportage de fausses nouvelles*) was a criminal offence under the 1881 freedom of the press law.⁴⁴ For citizens in peacetime, the law was rarely enforced under the Third Republic. In situations of war or for colonial subjects (who were understood to be living under the after-effects of military conquest), however, false news came back with a vengeance.

Bloch's 1921 article on false news has been foundational to the historical study of rumours, yet few have paid attention to Bloch's connection with the state intelligence apparatus. After all, 'false news' was primarily defined as news that was subversive to the

⁴² Marc Bloch, *Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre* (Paris, 2012 [1921]).

⁴³ Prochasson and Rasmussen, *Vrai et faux dans la guerre*.

⁴⁴ On the 1881 law see chapter 1. Article 26 punished 'all seditious songs or cries proclaimed in public places or reunions' while article 27 forbade the 'publication or reproduction of false news'. The law inherited much previous 19th century legislation on 'alarming noises' (*bruit alarmants*), see Ploux, *De bouche à oreille*. pp.47-57.

state.⁴⁵ In contemporary French, false news was often conflated with rumour, a collective form of news that was necessarily subversive.⁴⁶ Rumours, in most current sociological and anthropological definitions, are not necessarily false, only a form of news which appears collective and has no traceable origin – once it can be sourced it ceases to be a rumour.⁴⁷ But at the time, rumour was inherently politically subversive, and thus likely to be deemed false news by the state. As an intelligence officer, Bloch's view of false news was influenced by the perspective of a state desperately trying to control the truth in wartime.

In his article, Bloch described the experience of the outbreak of the Great War like going back in time to his period of study, the Middle Ages. He saw this as an opportunity to experience first-hand the mental world of the people he studied: 'censorship, abolishing the passing of centuries, brought the soldier on the frontline back to the means of information and to the state of mind of the old ages, before the newspaper, before printed news, before the book.'⁴⁸ For him, rumours and wonders were medieval, not in the generic sense of archaic, but specifically remnants of a past before the printing-press and mass literacy. They belonged to an era of primitive emotions before technology and before reason. With the collapse of technology and social order during the war, unchanging mental structures bubbled up to the surface, precipitating Bloch's later research into *mentalités*. Rumours were an endless series of identical stories with the same motifs, reflecting people's deep *mentalités* rather than their reactions to the present. False news was false because it was quite simply not news, only repetition.

⁴⁵ There are some other meanings, like for instance insider trading, which are still legally enforced today.

⁴⁶ See the entry for 'rumeur', in Emile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1863-1877): 'Rumeur: bruit sourd et général, excité par quelque mécontentement, annonçant quelque disposition à la révolte, à la sédition.' Available online at <http://littrereverso.net/dictionnaire-francais/definition/rumeur>.

⁴⁷ There is no such thing as a 'rumourer', a word which is grammatically impossible in Arabic as in French and English, and which distinguishes 'rumour' from concepts like 'gossip' or 'slander' which are more personalised. I thank Yousif Qasmiyeh for this observation. On the impersonal nature of rumours see Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, pp.251-268, however Guha insists that rumour is categorically different from news, while it is best seen as a particular type of news.

⁴⁸ Bloch, *Réflexions sur les fausses nouvelles*, p.42.

Like Bloch, many servants of the French state did not see rumours as news, only as the outcome of intemporal laws of human behaviour. If these laws were studied and could become predictable, epidemics of false news could cease to become events and fade into repetition. At the best of times, reports on the ‘political situation’ in Algeria could be entirely meteorological, speaking only of the rains, the heat and the harvest, of good natives tightly preoccupied with the soil and not with foreign events.⁴⁹ Practices in Algeria drew on existing French administrative attempts to establish precise relations between physical conditions and political agitation, to the extent that reporting on the news itself was irrelevant. In 1800, a minister of the Interior, having asked the *préfets* to compile detailed statistics on grain prices, epidemics and crime in their region, concluded:

‘In the end I have not included a column so that you may insert your opinion on the public spirit (*l’esprit public*) (...). Everywhere where beggars are few, where crime is rare, where contributions are paid, where the population is increasing, the public spirit is good; it is bad everywhere where the opposite is to be observed.’⁵⁰

In the process, those under surveillance ceased to be historical agents who responded to current events. Their behaviour was just repetition.

Similarly, in 1914, the sous-préfet of Mascara Paul Bert pitied the insurgents of the Béni-Chougrán as mere victims of rumour-mongering: ‘The poor imaginations of our *fellahs* (peasants) and native workers, clumsy, eager for the supernatural, have been targeted by puerile stories, absurd tales on which their brains have exalted themselves.’⁵¹ In Algeria, it was colonial common knowledge that Muslims were especially prone to false news: as one observer noted, ‘Nowhere are historical facts more deformed than in

⁴⁹ For parallel practices in British India where ‘the Inspector-General of Police invariably prefaced his annual report on crime with a summary of the year’s rainfall and grain prices’, see Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, p.87.

⁵⁰ Lucien Bonaparte, Minister of Interior to préfets, 1 Prairial an VIII, quoted in Karila-Cohen, *L’Etat des esprits*, p.71.

⁵¹ Sous-Préfet in Mascara to PO, 15 October 1914, ANOM/GGA/9H16.

[North] Africa. (...) In no other [country] are newsmongers [*nouvellistes*] more numerous and bring more zeal to spreading false noises.⁵²

In French the game of Chinese whispers, in which one person whispers a message to another until at the end all participants take delight in the comical deformation of the original message, is called ‘Arab telephone’. The term, naturally, originated in Algeria, and was probably brought into mainstream metropolitan usage during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962).⁵³ The expression ‘Arab telephone’ encapsulated the view that rumours were the inverse of modern progress, an amusing sign of backwardness. However swift, the *téléphone arabe* was considered to be deficient, even comical, in contrast to the clear, Western technology of the telephone. As with other expressions like *travail arabe* (‘Arab work’ or shoddy work), *arabe* here had pejorative connotations.⁵⁴ When not directly threatening, oral communication among Muslims could be scoffed at as merely the result of a particularly good game of Chinese whispers.⁵⁵ Arabs who attempted to use the actual telephone were ridiculed in the settler press. One newspaper claimed that the natives, too superstitious and primitive to understand the telephone booth, thought that it was possessed by Satan.⁵⁶

The inability to properly use technology and to transmit information properly was part of the perceived innate racial characteristics of ‘natives’, part of the same

⁵² Joseph Desparmet, ‘Les réactions nationalitaires en Algérie. La vieille poésie nationale’, *Bulletin de la société de géographie d’Alger*, 1932, 132, 437-456.

⁵³ Dating the emergence of the term with precision is difficult. The expression appears in the North African press since at least the 1930s, but was rare in metropolitan usage until the 1950s, which comforts the *Trésor de la Langue française*’s hypothesis that it was the War of Algerian Independence that brought the term to France, probably through extensive media coverage and mass conscription of metropolitan soldiers in Algeria.

⁵⁴ Much like the Australian equivalent ‘bush telegraph’, the equivalent expression *téléphone de brousse* (bush telephone) used in French West Africa has not made its way into the 21st century French metropolitan lexicon. On ‘Arab work’ see Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Colonialism and Popular Culture in Algeria’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, 1, 1979, 21-53. The expression ‘Arab work’ is also to be found in Modern Hebrew, see the popular Israeli TV series *Avoda Aravit/Shughl Arab*, by Sayed Kashua.

⁵⁵ As Pascal Froissart points out, the tendency to conflate the phenomenon of ‘rumour’ with the game of Chinese whispers has made its way into most of 20th century social science. Scientists have often deployed experimental methods mimicking a Chinese whispers-type game in a controlled environment to test the deformation of information. Pascal Froissart, ‘Historicité de la rumeur: la rupture de 1902’, in *Hypothèses 2000*, Paris: Sorbonne, pp.315-326.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Annick Lacroix, ‘Administration des postes’, annex 25, p.895.

package that saw Algerians as inherently thieving, superstitious, and duplicitous. The idea that rumours are a sign of backwardness endures in much social scientific literature on rumour, which continues to envision them backwards through the image of an ancient, deficient telephone – rumour, we are told, is the oldest medium in the world and therefore according to modernist teleology, the most deficient one.⁵⁷

Social scientific studies to this day treat rumours as repetitions to establish a pattern, isolated from their relationship with other forms of news and thus their relationship to time. In French-speaking scholarship, Bloch's ideas endured through the classic sociological study of 'la rumeur d'Orléans', a moral panic that spread in 1969 in Orléans and other French provincial towns in which people were convinced that Jews were abducting young ladies in fitting rooms to sell them into prostitution. In his influential study, Edgar Morin described the rumour as a 'spontaneous' moral panic that harked back to 'medieval' anti-Semitic beliefs deep in the collective unconscious.⁵⁸ The rumour, for Morin, was entirely separate from standard news, so he was less interested in the rumours' relationship to myths of White Slavery spread in a variety of media to be found in Orléans, which particularly targeted Jews as pimps.⁵⁹ Rumour had to become the opposite of modern news, a sign of stagnation in time.

Despite the myth of the 'Arab telephone', however, false news was not in fact the monopoly of the treacherous natives or of the distant past. Europeans, too, had their own broken telephones, and they were not immune from sliding back down the scale of progress to this pre-rational past, especially in time of war. As the German proverb

⁵⁷ Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumours: Uses, Interpretations, and Images*, trans. Bruce Fink, (New Brunswick, NJ, 1990). For an opposite approach that treats rumours as sources for the history of an event see Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (Berkeley, 2000).

⁵⁸ Edgar Morin, *La rumeur d'Orléans*, (Paris, 1969).

⁵⁹ Jean-Marc Chaumont, 'Des paniques morales spontanées? Le cas de la "rumeur d'Orléans"', *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, 43-1, 2012, pp.119-137.

quoted by Bloch ran: 'Kommt der Krieg in's Land/Dann gibt's Lügen wie Sand.' War comes to the land/then lies spread like sand.⁶⁰

Administrators were concerned that false news spread through expressions of collective emotion. In the case of the ominous roast lamb at Trois-Marabouts in August 1914, the administrator, wielding his superior knowledge of popular Muslim rituals, expressed mild contempt for his panicked fellow citizens and their hysteria. The model of modern, rational consumption of news was a lone man coolly reading his newspaper. Collective news, on the other hand, was false because it was not shaped by events. It was only an iteration of unchanging emotional structures.

According to contemporary theories of crowd psychology, masses reacted to news in more irrational ways than individuals, and crowds regressed down the racial hierarchy. In one particularly famous bestseller, Gustave Le Bon's 1895 *Psychologie des foules*, being in a crowd makes everyone more stupid, for in a crowd, man 'descends several degrees down the scale of civilisation'.⁶¹ A collective reveals the 'true soul', the racial essence of those gathering – they would slide backwards, out of the rational, modern ability to face the present. Administrators in Algeria shared these beliefs: 'false news' among the Spanish, wrote the *sous-préfet* of nearby Sidi bel Abbès, 'betrays the intimate sentiments of a community (*collectivité*).'⁶²

To Le Bon, the behaviour of crowds exposed the fragility of the modern rationality upon which Republican politics depended. He anxiously noted how the age of the telegraph was full of problematic news spread by wires. In 1870, it was famously a distorted telegram that launched the war between France and Prussia. In 1885, a Havas telegram exaggerated a retreat of French troops against the Chinese at Langsong in

⁶⁰ Bloch, *Réflexions sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre*, p.17.

⁶¹ Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, (New Haven, 1981).

⁶² Sous-préfet in Sidi-bel-Abbès to PO, 10 May 1915, ANOM/DO/3099.

Indochina. The uproar caused the Ferry government to collapse overnight – by the time more detailed information came through the next day it was too late.⁶³

False news occurred when a person did not have the ability to exercise individual rationality. From the administrative perspective, it was those with the least political power, such as women or Muslims, who were especially prone to false news, and educated European male individuals less so, though if they were in a crowd they became more prone to distortion. While print was linked to citizenship, false news was the attribute of subjects. Earlier on, under monarchical régimes where peasants were only subjects, they had also been considered particularly susceptible to rumours, from the Grande Peur that catalysed the 1789 revolution to the recurrent rumours about the return of Napoleon Bonaparte that wracked the July Monarchy.⁶⁴ The onset of the Republican regime, universal male suffrage after 1870, the rise of literacy rates and the mass expansion of the press in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, all diminished the gap between peasants and the state apparatus.⁶⁵ As gradually metropolitan anxieties surrounding rural rumours faded, ever more disenfranchised Algerian peasants came to be seen as more bizarrely backwards.

Even in the metropole, however, anxieties about false news never entirely disappeared, and during the First World War official suspicion of false news came back full swing. The state of siege, suspending the normal political press, placed all inhabitants of the Republic under the same relatively egalitarian suspicion. For officials, in war-time news ceased to be about current events and was an endless repetition of unmanageable emotions.

⁶³ Both the Ems Dispatch that launched the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and the Langson Telegram are cases highlighted by Gustave Le Bon in his *Psychologie des foules*. Gustave Le Bon theories of crowd psychology were linked to his previous writings on Arab civilization and on racial psychology; see Gustave Le Bon *La civilisation des Arabes*, (Paris, 1884) and *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, (Paris, 1895).

⁶⁴ Georges Lefebvre, *La Grande Peur de 1789*, (Paris, 2014 [1932]) and Ploux, *De bouche à oreille*.

⁶⁵ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* and Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens*. For a case of peasant rumour and violence in 1870 see Alain Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, 1990).

The Algerian news of Hajj Guillaume

Popular news in wartime Algeria, however, was hardly repetitive. Instead, accounts of the war took on new formats, changing rapidly to keep up with current events. Moreover, news circulated between Europeans and Muslims, suggesting that the outbreak of war functioned as a shared event, rather than as evidence of separate temporalities.

The most porous type of news was not in the newspapers but in an incredibly popular song, hummed across Algeria and even Tunisia throughout the war: *ghania mta' hajj giyum*, the song of Hajj Guillaume. Throughout the First World War, Algeria bristled with rumours that the German emperor Wilhelm II (in French, Guillaume) had converted to Islam and completed the *hajj* to Mecca, thus the nickname *Hadj Guillaume* (or, in literal transcription *Hajj Giyum*).⁶⁶ According to the *sous-préfet* in Mascara, the rumours circulating in 1914 had involved *Hajj Guillaume*. In some versions, Khaled, grandson of the hero of Algerian resistance Abd al Qadir had come on a zeppelin with German soldiers to promise that he would return to Algeria soon, leading the Kaiser's troops. In others, it was the German emperor Wilhelm II himself who would come to end the era of injustice.

Rumours of Wilhelm's conversion to Islam had started after his visit to Jerusalem and Damascus in 1898 in which he proclaimed Germany to be the 'true friend of Islam' to emphasise his alliance with the Ottoman Empire. In North Africa, Franco-German disputes over Morocco encouraged the idea that Germany was the best possible ally for

⁶⁶ The *Hajj Guillaume* songs are well-known in the secondary literature, Gilbert Meynier *L'Algérie révélée* pp.617-621, Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, pp.254-276, McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism*, pp.105-6.

Islam against France. These rumours seem to have become particularly strong after Wilhelm II's visit to Tangier in 1905 in which he claimed to support the sovereignty of the Moroccan sultan against French encroachment. By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, rumours of German conversion had been common for some time. Wilhelm himself did nothing to discourage these rumours as German war plans hoped for widespread Muslim insurrections against Britain and France across their empires and including in North Africa.⁶⁷

Rumours around Wilhelm II are well documented thanks to Joseph Desparmet, one of the keenest French observers of Algerian popular culture. After becoming the first man to obtain an *agrégation* in the Arabic language, Desparmet spent most of his life teaching Arabic in Algiers. Unlike other Orientalists, Desparmet was as much interested in contemporary Algerian dialect as in classical Arabic. Over the years, he spent much time collecting customs, legends and oral epic poetry in the town of Blida, just south of Algiers in the *Mitija* plain.⁶⁸ Throughout the First World War and beyond, Desparmet collected popular songs on the Germans, partly because he found them interesting as part of his hobby as a folklorist, and partly because they were extremely politically sensitive and he was sometimes on the GGA payroll for his intelligence work.⁶⁹ Many versions of the *hajj Giyum* song were collected by Desparmet and published in 1932 in an article in the *Revue africaine*.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, (Oxford, 2001), pp.694-776. Wilhelm's enthusiasm for Islam was possibly spread by the German newspaper in Istanbul the *Osmanischer Lloyd*, see Meynier *Algérie révélée*, p.250.

⁶⁸ The information draws from Desparmet's private papers deposited in the Fonds Desparmet at the Maison méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme (henceforth MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence. See also Fanny Colonna, 'Scientific Production and Position in the Intellectual and Political Fields: The Cases of Augustin Berque and Joseph Desparmet', in E. Burke and D. Prochaska (eds.) *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2008.

⁶⁹ Desparmet was contacted by the GGA during the First World War to bring his skills to the wartime newspaper *Akbbar al Harb*, on which see chapter 1, pp.91-93. He was also on a commission to spread propaganda among Muslims. ANOM/GGA/15H25.

⁷⁰ Joseph Desparmet, 'La Chanson d'Alger pendant la Grande Guerre', *Revue africaine*, 73, 1932, pp.54-83. The quotations from Algerian Arabic are taken from Desparmet, the translation to English is my own. The transcription has been adapted for consistency with current standards for Modern Arabic, as there are no conventions for transcribing the Algerian dialect.

According to Desparmet, people sang the same catchy tune in many different versions. One version sung in September 1914 in Algiers went like this:

*Ya al fransis wash fi balik / al-jazair mashi dialik
Yaji lalman yadiha lak / labad tarja' kif fi al-zaman
Ay Ay ki na'amal lhu / al-haj giyum yatla' sa'dhu*

Hey Frenchman what do you imagine? / Algeria is not yours
The German comes to take her from you/It must return as in the past
Ay ay, what to do against him? / Hajj Guillaume his star rises!

Given that we have so few sources for Algerian popular culture in this period, it is tempting to follow the administrators and use these songs as windows into the collective consciousness of Algerians. Several studies of colonial situations have zoomed out of individual rumours to see a generalised sense of resistance in the repetition of motifs. Rumours here are a perennial expression of subaltern discontent rather than news.⁷¹ The *sous-préfet* in Mascara saw the insurgents of the Béni Chougron in similar terms, not as creating an event but as part of a pattern. Their dreams of German zeppelins merely reflected 'the vague communism that all *misérables* dream of, the equal distribution of land and the elimination of debts'.⁷²

It is especially tempting to read the song of *Hajj Guillaume* as repetition because at first it looks more like tradition than news. There had long been periodic outbursts of news proclaiming saviour-figures in Algeria, some of which we have seen in the previous chapter in 1897. Earlier in nineteenth-century Algeria, revolts erupted around charismatic leaders who proclaimed themselves the *mahdi*, the harbinger of the apocalypse who would lead the faithful to victory.⁷³ James McDougall has suggested that the *Hajj*

⁷¹ Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* attempts to find a basic 'grammar' of revolts among hundreds of insurgencies. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, pp.183-201 looks at rumours as signs of infrapolitics among the dominated in a range of historical situations.

⁷² Sous-préfet in Mascara to Préfet in Oran, 15 October 1914, ANOM/9H16.

⁷³ The literature on mahdism in Algeria is quite extensive. On the connection between mahdism and news see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, pp.92-124. More generally see Peter von Sivers, 'The Realm of

Guillaume song is best understood as a 'refiguration' of this older prophetic idiom, showing signs of both continuity and change compared to previous genres of prophetic narratives of events.⁷⁴

Yet the songs of *Hajj Guillaume* drew on existing vocabularies of a saviour-figure only loosely. *Hajj Guillaume* had none of the many attributes of the *mahdi*, to whom very specific traditions applied. He was never, for instance, identified as being named Muhammad ibn Abdallah. In the sources that remain, Wilhelm II is never referred to as sultan or caliph, nor do they even refer to Wilhelm's alleged conversion apart from calling him *hajj*, a term which can mean a man who has been on pilgrimage to Mecca but also more broadly any respectable man of a certain age who is owed reverence. Hajj Guillaume was not so much the Lord of the Hour (*mawl al-sa'a*) of mahdist tradition so much as the Man of the Hour, the popular figure onto whom a whole set of stories could be pegged.

Imagining that Wilhelm II had converted to Islam made him more popular as a saviour but this was not always strictly necessary. Indeed it is striking that during World War I news focused much more on Wilhelm II than on Abdulmajid II the Ottoman sultan, who would have been easier to reconcile with older norms of Islamic sovereignty.⁷⁵ Some of the playfulness of the lyrics suggests that the belief in a foreign saviour might not in fact have been intended to be taken so seriously, even if French authorities certainly did so.

There is much to be gained from reading the *Hajj Guillaume* songs not just as part of a textual tradition but as a reaction to unique events. As Desparmet himself put it in

Justice: Apocalyptic Revolts in Algeria (1849-1879', *Humaniora Islamica* 1, 1973, pp.47-60, and Mouloud Haddad, 'Les maîtres de l'Heure. Soufisme et eschatologie en Algérie coloniale (1845-1901)' *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle*, 41:2, 2010, pp.49-61. For millenarian insurrections in other colonial contexts see Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order*, (Chapel Hill, 1979).

⁷⁴ McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism*, pp.105-6.

⁷⁵ Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*, p.618.

his article, ‘this song of the streets was the song of the times (*la chanson de l’époque*)’.⁷⁶ Perishable, like the pop hits that would follow later when the recording industry took off in the interwar period, its appeal lay in transience rather than repetition. It was a passing fad, or in French, *une mode*, a word closely associated to the rapid temporality of being modern. To contemporaries, the outbreak of war in 1914 was new, and the song reflected this. Just like any form of news, the songs played with existing idioms in order to be intelligible, but this was only half of the story. The tune helped memorise information, but within its framework anyone could change the verses, adding on a wealth of news: like the songs analysed by Robert Darnton in eighteenth-century Paris, *Hajj Guillaume* was a ‘sung newspaper’.⁷⁷

The *Hajj Guillaume* song was an Algerian pop hit in the broadest sense of the term, sung by little French and Spanish kids as well as their Muslim classmates. Rather than iterations of an idiom of Muslim tradition, the *Hajj Guillaume* songs are testimony to an Algerian popular culture that was highly dynamic, plastic, and where news circulated across colonial society.

Depending on the singer, the region and recent events, the *Hajj Guillaume* song reflected changing developments in the war. The plasticity of the song, characteristic of its diffuse popular origins, also gave it an unstable meaning.⁷⁸ The only stable part of the song appeared to be the chorus – *Ki na‘mal lhu?* ‘What to do against him?’ which led to exasperated Europeans calling the song *kinamélou*. After Italy’s entrance into the war in 1915, for instance, new versions led to the following comments:

Al-talyan rajul mabbul / ‘amr al-mudafi’ bi-l-maqarun
Wajibhu sultan lutrish / kbusk al-jaban wa al-tumatish

⁷⁶ Desparmet, ‘La Chanson d’Alger’, p.61.

⁷⁷ Darnton ‘An Early Information Society’, esp. 19-30.

⁷⁸ In this respect, the *kinamélou* is reminiscent of the more famous South Asian chapati mystery: before the 1857 mutiny in North India, peasants spread chapatis from village to village, spreading some kind of message though its meaning was ‘characteristically vague’, Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, pp.238-246.

The Italian is a crazy man / He's filled his canons with macaroni
The Sultan of Austria answered / "You're missing cheese and tomatoes!"

Other versions of the song dealt with the Dardanelles, or the terrible fortunes of Russia in 1915, pithily declaring '*al musku ruh ma'* 'Moscow is dead'.

The tune itself was as important as the lyrics, as it offered the protection of anonymity from which a variety of risky opinions could be voiced. In the later, especially tense years of the war in 1916-7, the police took to arresting anyone who was caught singing the *kinamélou*, as it was clearly understood as anti-French, even when its lyrics were as banal as 'Ay ay, Guillaume is in the casino'. Desparmet had trouble collecting some versions as singers were reluctant to perform the more seditious verses in front of a Frenchman.

Yet Desparmet also collected a number of pro-French versions working directly against German interests, usually sung by loyal Jews proud to be conscripted as citizens in the French army. In this version, for instance, *Hajj Guillaume* switches from being a saviour to a malevolent character who is about to be crushed:

Al-barud rah al-yawm / wa hadha al-shi 'ala al hajj giyum
Ya giyum ma ta'mal shi fi balik / aw barlan ma shi dyalik
Rahm al-nasiri yaftalu walidak / aw barlan yadyuha lak
Ay Ay ki na'mal lhu / al-haj giyum yasud sa'dhu

Powder speaks today/and that's Hajj Guillaume's fault
Hey Guillaume don't get any ideas/cause Berlin is not yours
The Christians will kill your children/and will take Berlin from you
Ay ay, what to do against him? / Hajj Guillaume his fortune falls!

Desparmet claimed that some 'néo-Français', that is, Spanish or Italian Europeans who had acquired French citizenship in Algeria, would also sing the song with different lyrics in Arabic.

In fact, the very tune of the *Hajj Guillaume* song, the catchy *kinamélou*, may have originated in a Spanish popular song that was sung at parties in the Algiers countryside, with rather different lyrics from *Hajj Guillaume*: ‘Avec deux sous de cacahuète/Le roi d’Espagne il fait la fête’ [with tuppence of peanuts/the king of Spain goes nuts]. As Desparmet himself acknowledged, the origins of such popular tunes were impossible to decipher, as many cities in Algeria claimed to be at the origin of the Hajj Guillaume song, but the possibility still opens up a whole world of social contacts between working-class Europeans, particularly Spaniards, and Muslim Algerians.

Desparmet himself admitted that his conjectures on the Spanish origins of *Hajj Guillaume* were impossible to prove, but there is much other evidence for the circulation of news between Spaniards and Muslims, especially if we return to the region around Mascara in 1914. In September 1914, a 17 year-old Arab newspaper salesman, Moustaphaould Bouzianould Sidi Amar, was arrested in Oran because he was screaming that the ‘king of Spain entered France with his army.’⁷⁹ The police report does not tell us if the budding activist was confused because of his limited linguistic abilities in Spanish. According to Desparmet’s notes, Spanish newspapers, prized because of their neutral information as opposed to the French war propaganda and censorship, made their way into the most remote Muslim villages smuggled in vegetable carts.⁸⁰

After the insurrection near Mascara, the *sous-préfet* Paul Bert tried to find the criminals responsible for the false news. The native agent (*agent indigène*), whom he sent to investigate walked into a café in Thiersville, just south of Mascara on the road to Saïda, to find a man holding court loudly in Arabic about how strong the Germans were. The man was a Spaniard by the name of Miguel Moll, who went on to explain that the only

⁷⁹ Rapport du commissaire central d’Oran, 12-13 September 1914, ANOM/GGA/9H16.

⁸⁰ Desparmet in MMSH XI/8. ‘Ils lisent les journaux espagnols qui leur parviennent dans des sacs de légumes secs. Ils ont une foi aveugle dans les journaux gallophobes.’

reason why the Germans had not invaded Algeria yet was because they were scared of the Spanish, not the weak French.⁸¹

Miguel Moll, the Arabophone Spaniard, was not alone. By the beginning of the First World War, Spaniards no longer outnumbered Frenchmen in the Oran region like they once had. However, as Spain remained neutral during the First World War, there were still enough Spanish citizens and French citizens of Spanish origin to cause some official anxiety in the Oran region.⁸² In 1912, during negotiations on nearby Morocco some Spanish ministers had considered taking over some parts of western Algeria from France as well.⁸³

The Spaniards, it seems, had their own version of *Hajj Guillaume*. In 1914, near Sidi bel Abbès, in the village of Lamtar, a persistent rumour circulated that Wilhelm II had written to the King of Spain to tell him that ‘among the dead and wounded of the French army, there were only Spaniards’. The lesson was the same as Miguel Moll’s: ‘without the Spaniards France would be lost.’⁸⁴ Many young men of Spanish origin attempted to renounce their French citizenship to avoid being conscripted. Some Spaniards believed that in case of a German victory, the region of Oran would revert to Spanish rule, which they saw as their rightful legacy. Pro-German Spanish newspapers saw Wilhelm II as the defender of the Catholic faith against the godless French – their very own Hajj Guillaume.⁸⁵ The German emperor as saviour was hardly a Muslim exclusivity.

Many Frenchmen assumed that the legend of Hajj Guillaume must have been foreign news. In particular, they suspected it had been planted by German spies in order

⁸¹ ‘Rapport du commissaire de la Sûreté Générale de Mascara’, 9 October 1914, ANOM/GGA/9H16.

⁸² The 1911 census counted that French citizens outnumbered Spanish citizens two to one (92,986 Spanish citizens for 188,246 French citizens) in the *département d’Oran*, but many of these French citizens were recently naturalised Spaniards, Vilar, *Los españoles en la Argelia francesa* p.197.

⁸³ Vilar, *Los españoles en la Argelia francesa*, p.222.

⁸⁴ Sous-préfet de Sidi bel Abbès to préfet d’Oran, 10 May 1915, ANOM/DO/3099.

⁸⁵ Commissaire central d’Oran to général Audier commandant la division d’Oran, 24 November 1915, ANOM/DO/3099.

to start an insurrection. Even for the historian Charles-Robert Ageron writing in 1968, 'the popular origin, and for some, the spontaneity [of these songs] is far from demonstrated'.⁸⁶ Such claims were not implausible. After all, both the German *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (the Intelligence Bureau for the East) and the Ottoman *Teskilat-i Mahsusa* (Special Organisation) wished to encourage subversion in French North Africa through the use of covert agents. According to the German *éminence grise* on Islam, Max von Oppenheim, inciting Muslims to revolt in North Africa seemed like a cheap and efficient way to weaken the French. In nearby Northern Morocco, where French troops had barely entered since the beginning of the protectorate in 1912 and resistance continued in many regions, German authorities may have directly paid for a number of revolts. Ahmad al-Raisuli's revolt in the Rif, for instance, appears to have received German subsidies.⁸⁷

Worse for Algeria, a descendant of the hero of Algerian resistance Abd al Qadir, Abd al Malik, led a movement of resistance against the French around Taza, supported by the Germans. While Abd al Qadir himself had died in exile in Damascus in 1883, his family enjoyed great prestige in Algeria. While Abd al Malik fought against the French in Morocco, another grandson, Khaled, had studied at the French military academy of Saint-Cyr and fought in the French expeditionary corps in Morocco.⁸⁸ The mixed loyalties of the family confused and irritated officials: how could Khaled be so loyal to France when his uncle Ali Pasha was a representative in the Ottoman Parliament for Damascus, who roamed German prisoner-of-war camps spreading propaganda?⁸⁹ The rumour that Khaled had been seen on a German zeppelin promising to return to save

⁸⁶ Meynier, p.621.

⁸⁷ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, p.768.

⁸⁸ Ahmed Koulakssis and Gilbert Meynier, *L'Emir Khaled: premier zaïm? Identité algérienne et colonialisme français*, (Paris, 1987), 78.

⁸⁹ Koulakssis and Meynier, *Emir Khaled*, 160. Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Enquêtes sur les origines du nationalisme algérien. L'émir Khaled, petit-fils d'Abdelkader, fut-il le premier nationaliste algérien', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 2:2, 1966, pp.9-49.

Algeria, intercepted around Mascara in October 1914, came from a context of political uncertainty about his loyalties.

It is unclear whether there were any actual German spies in Algeria – attempts to destabilise French North Africa were far more haphazard than French fears assumed. The Ottoman *Teskilat-i Mahsusa* may have had a grand total of 8 agents in all of North Africa, including two in Morocco, far from the larger numbers they claimed.⁹⁰ German and, to a lesser extent, Ottoman propaganda pamphlets did circulate in Algeria throughout the First World War, proclaiming France to be an enemy of Islam, yet it was limited in circulation, and it is not clear how much Algerians actually read it.⁹¹ An Algero-Tunisian committee with German support called for independence in Berlin, and the special Crescent Camp (*Halbmondlager*) for Muslim POWs at Zossen served as a recruiting ground for Muslims to defect to the Central Powers.⁹² But this committee was only really active from 1916 onwards, which certainly does not explain whatever was going on in the Beni Chougran in October 1914. In fact, disturbances erupted in the region of Mascara in early October 1914, before the Ottomans had even entered the war on the German side on 11 November 1914, enjoining Muslims to join the *jihad* against France, Britain and Russia.⁹³

In brief, there was German involvement in Algeria but it cannot completely account for the Hajj Guillaume legends. Just because the legend of Hajj Guillaume fitted German ambitions does not mean that they had caused it. The very content of the *Hajj Guillaume* songs shows that they were heavily linked to French news sources, more playful riffs on the newspapers than German propaganda. The name of the mythical character himself, *Hajj Guillaume*, using the French version of the German emperor's

⁹⁰ Strachan, *First World War*, p.757. See also the possible presence of German spies in the Aurès mountains preceding the insurrection of 1916 in Meynier, *Algérie révélée*, pp.576-7.

⁹¹ A number of these can be found in ANOM/9H5.

⁹² James McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism in Algeria*, pp.29-58.

⁹³ Mustafa Aksakal, "Holy War Made in Germany?" Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad', *War in History*, 2011, 18:2, 184-199.

name rather than the German Wilhelm, suggests that its origins were firmly local. In all versions of the song, for instance, the names of foreign countries and places are derived from the French, *Lalman* (l'Allemagne) and *Lutrish* (l'Autriche) rather than *Almanya* and *Nimsa* in standard Arabic. Often, the rhyming heavily features code-switching to French. Versions in 1915 and 1916 for instance referred to the campaign in the Dardanelles by creating a rhyme with *demoiselles*. In another, the entire rhyming scheme depended on French words:

Ya g̃iyum washan hadha al-shi / ga' al-nas rahm mubliẓi
Akhr mit akhr blisi / akhr fi transhi ifasi

Hey Guillaume what's this?/ Everyone's *mobilisé*
 One is dead the other *blessé*/The other suffers in the *tranchée*

Even when the *Hajj Guillaume* songs were anti-French in sentiment they were firmly embedded within a local context of French-language news sources. They did not reflect some kind of Algerian subconscious but rather a critical approach towards official French news, which in time of war was not surprising given monolithic government propaganda. As such, they were not quite 'improvised news', woven out of information gaps as described by the sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani.⁹⁴ Rather, the songs were the outcome of an attempt by a number of Algerians to reorganise official news that they found untrustworthy.

The author of another song during the First World War exhorted his audience not to listen to what was in the newspaper ('don't listen to the words of a famous newspaper' *ma tasma' qul jurnan mashhur*), but it is quite clear that they did.⁹⁵ Blind reliance on newspapers was considered a true sign of foolishness, both naïve and unbecoming of men of action. As one withering version of the *kinamélou* went, sung by Kabyle workers

⁹⁴ Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*, (New York, 1966)..

⁹⁵ Anonymous song from the Hodna region south of Sétif, in 'Note pour le directeur du service de la Sécurité', 30 January 1917, ANOM/9H5.

in the vicinity of Algiers went '*Lalman yakul al-buldan / wa al-fransis yaqra' al-jurnan*' The German eats countries and the French read their papers.⁹⁶ The smart Muslim would follow the Quranic injunction and, in the presence of news from the duplicitous French, investigate its truth: 'O you who believe! If an evil person comes to you with news, then investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance, and then regret what you have done.'⁹⁷ Needless to say, Muslims were hardly the only ones to be suspicious of newspapers in the anxious days of the Great War.

Most of the songs reorganised French news in order to suggest a distinct historical destiny for Algerian Muslims. In one of the most suggestive versions above, France would leave Algeria *kif fi al-ṣaman*, 'as it was in the past.' However, it is important not to exaggerate the *Hajj Guillaume* songs as expressions of a popular consciousness. The songs only look like this because of the side-effects of French surveillance, which made its many authors anonymous. There is a risk here of confusing the necessary anonymity of subversive speech with its collective nature.

People in colonial Algeria were aware of living under a police state, especially in the jittery years of the First World War. During the *sous-préfet's* investigation in Mascara, people would immediately stop talking as soon as the undercover agent entered the café. When one old man kept blabbering about news of the war, the owner sharply reprimanded him: 'With your white beard you still speak'. The message was clear: the wise knew better than to voice dangerous opinions in front of foreigners.⁹⁸ Desparmet collected a number of popular exhortations to be watchful of who was listening: 'The forest has ears and the bush has eyes!'⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Desparmet, 'La chanson d'Alger'.

⁹⁷ Qur'an 49:6 '*Ya ayyuha al-ladina amanu in ja'akum fasiqun bi-naba'in fa-tabayyanu an tusibu qawman bi-jabalatin fa-tushibu 'ala ma fa'alatum nadimin*'

⁹⁸ Rapport du Commissaire de la Sûreté Générale de Mascara, 9 octobre 1914, ANOM/9H16.

⁹⁹ Desparmet, 'La chanson d'Alger', p.56.

While the *kinamélou* itself had no author, Desparmet also collected a number of longer ballads composed by individual *meddah* or bards, in a genre known as *malhun*, a formalized variant of the Algerian Arabic dialect used for oral poetry.¹⁰⁰ The authors of these poems usually attempted to dissimulate their identities with a disclaimer. One of them opened his ballad with: ‘This poem has ended up in our hands by accident/If we knew its author...’ [*badha al-kalma jat ilaina tawsal / law na’rif mayyazha...*]. Despite these precautions, the disclaimed fooled no one, and the author, a certain Si Rabah from the Soumata tribe, was well-known in the region around Médéa¹⁰¹

Popular does not mean trapped outside of time. The song of *Hajj Guillaume* was certainly widespread and anonymous, but it was nonetheless news. It was an informative account and an attempt to understand recent events and one that used particularly innovative forms. Compared to the manuscript history of the French, the songs were more easily accessible to the uneducated. The songs shared much in common both with Abu Ras’ alleged manuscript, with French officials, and with Marc Bloch, for they warned that events in 1914 were a repetition of 1870:

Ya sidi lalman lutrish / hibbu yazdimu ‘ala afransis
Khabu yadyu lhu baris / kif al-‘am al-swasandis

Hey Mister Germany and Austria/have decided to fall upon the French
 They will give laws in Paris/like in (18)70!

The rhyme *afransis/swasandis* here only works because the singer is using the French word for the number 70, *soixante-dix*, thus capturing the terrifying connotations in French of *l’année terrible*, the year of the Prussian defeat. The temporality it expressed was not so different from the news in the French newspapers.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed Tahar, *La poésie populaire algérienne (melhun), rythme, mètres et formes*, (Algiers, 1975).

¹⁰¹ ‘La qecca de Si Rabah’, in MMSH XI/8.

Conclusion

Muslims were not the only ones who thought the coming of the Great War represented the end of an era. It might seem at first, gazing upon the rumours that took over Algeria during the war, that only Muslims awaited the apocalypse while Europeans coolly read the newspaper, but nothing could be less true. Both European and Muslim Algerians experienced the war as a time of disruption, and pegged to the current horrors the hopes for a better future. *La Dépêche algérienne*, the most widely read newspaper in Algeria, exhausted by the war in early 1918, wrote that ‘the current war is not a simple episode. It is a catastrophe without precedent in the history of humanity. Out of peace will come a new world, that will rely on justice and peace.’¹⁰²

Starting with Desparmet himself, popular oral culture has sometimes been taken to demonstrate an enduring collective identity to Algerian Muslims under French rule: ‘a nation, even defeated by weapons, is only threatened to disappear if it loses its self-confidence.’¹⁰³ In this collective identity, Muslims would cultivate their own sense of time, distinct from the French hegemony surrounding them. The *Hajj Guillaume* songs certainly demonstrate the existence of a lively Algerian popular culture, but one that was very much part of the same temporality of French news around it.

The songs were part of a broader experience of the First World War that went far beyond Algerian Muslims. Their temporality, emphasising events in 1914 as a repetition of those in 1870, was widely shared in various types of news around Algeria. Around Mascara, settlers and natives both reached for their weapons and anticipated an insurrection, which shows how news of war acted as a common sign. Both sides

¹⁰² *La Dépêche algérienne*, 6 March 1918.

¹⁰³ Desparmet, ‘Les réactions nationalitaires en Algérie.’, p.10. This was largely taken up by Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France*, p.920.

understood the irruption of war in Europe as a resumption of local conflict. Muslim and European news of the Great War suggests shared temporalities rather than disjuncture.

The same goes for the two historians of this chapter, Abu Ras and Marc Bloch. Abu Ras, for Bloch, simply could not exist. Even if he had ever read him, Bloch probably would not have appreciated the original Abu Ras in the late eighteenth century, whose account of Spanish history smacked of erudite antiquarianism. The 1792 history was an excuse for the scholar to ramble about his knowledge of everything from the source of the Nile to the divergent versions of the Bible. And yet, in his proclamation that his work was an attempt to ‘research from the science of history’ (*al-babath min ‘ilm al-tarikh*), Abu Ras’ sense of the passing time was possibly not as different from Bloch’s as it first seems.¹⁰⁴

Different genres of news (manuscript, newspaper, official, sung, subversive) each had their own norms, which emplotted recent events differently. Telegraph dispatches used sparse language, mentioned no context and hid their origins, mentioning only a city and no source. Popular songs framed the latest developments as the doing of an imaginary German emperor. Manuscript histories framed them within much longer patterns of historical change. Accounts of recent events articulated between different temporalities making the outbreak of war in 1914 into a shared event.

Despite this, many people in colonial Algeria deployed considerable intellectual resources to proclaiming that the existence of their neighbours was a historical anomaly. To Europeans, Muslims were stuck outside of time. To Muslims, Europeans were a temporary scourge. Both sides had trouble acknowledging that the other lived at the same time, and yet news circulated, evidence that all went through the same war-time. Shared news formed the basis for different historical imaginations and political projects, but the temporality underlying it was quite similar.

¹⁰⁴ Abu Ras, *‘Aja’ib al asfar wa lata’if al akhbar*, BNF: Arabe 4618.

In the past three chapters we have seen how the use of print technology and the beliefs surrounding it built an unequal news system in Algeria, and then how people used this news system to locate themselves in space and time. In the next three chapters, we turn to examining how people used news to locate themselves within political units by determining what was foreign, first to make claims to the French government, second to compete politically within Algeria, and lastly for individuals to position themselves within the state.

4. Other Empires: using Britain and Italy to be part of France

Ouargla [Warqala], 1935. Gabriel Carbillet, the French colonel in charge of the territory of the Oases, the largest of the three military administrations that made up the Algerian Sahara, went on a trip across the desert to visit his Italian counterparts in Libya. Crossing the border at Ghat, he visited Tripoli, Syrte, Benghazi and the Jabal Akhdar, before returning across the border and taking his Italian counterpart, lieutenant-colonel Moccia, on a tour of Algeria from the deep South to Algiers [Figure 24].

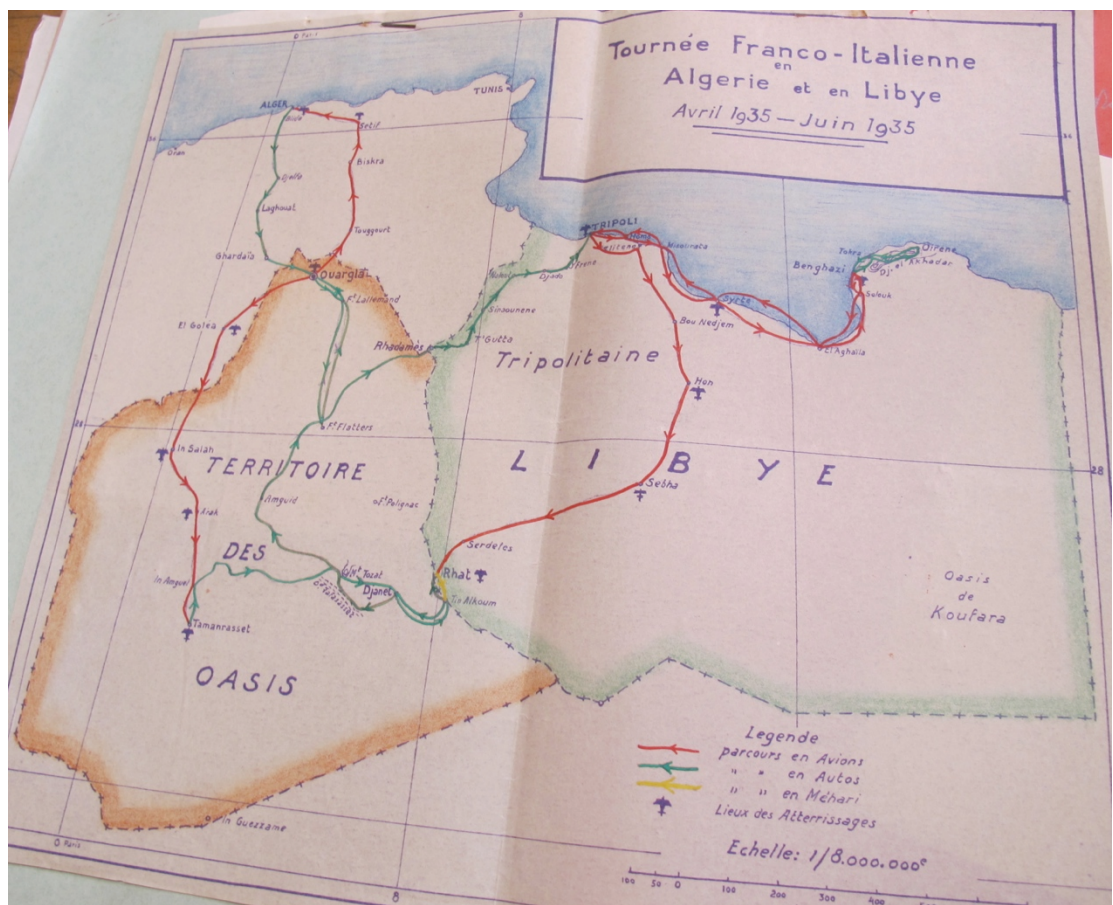


Figure 24 Map of Carbillet and Moccia's trip in 1935, ANOM/GGA/29H13

Both Carbillet and Moccia were celebrating a common project - the very recent European mastery of the Sahara. On the Algerian side, French troops had only reached the depths of the Sahara in 1900, finally bridging their North and West African possessions. For Italy, which had been nominally in control of Libya since the treaty of Ouchy in 1912, stable presence in the region was even more recent. By 1923, Ghat was still beyond Italian control, and it was only shortly before Carbillet's visit in 1931 that Libya was declared 'pacified' following decades of intermittent conflict.¹ Both Carbillet and Moccia were thus celebrating the expansion of European control over a recalcitrant region, as well as the new technological means which allowed them to dominate the desert: Carbillet's report went into great detail about the kinds of airplanes used, the cars and roads specially adapted for the desert, and of course the occasional camel-back journey.

Carbillet was enchanted with what he saw in Libya. The roads were smooth, the new villages intended for Italian settlement were 'very modern and polished in every detail' with their little white churches and the Italians had done a 'great effort' to excavate Roman ruins. 'The natives seem happy', he cheerfully wrote in his report, confessing that he saw virtually none for all the tribes had been forcibly removed.² The creation of little Christian villages of European settlement on land taken from expelled tribes, the construction of a gigantic infrastructure of roads, railroads, and telegraphs, the aggressive use of classical archaeology as an ideological weapon to claim colonisation as a 'return' of these twentieth century Latin conquerors to their birth right, even the wine that the

¹ Agreement between France and Italy, 12 September 1923, ANOM/GGA/29H12. Rodolfo Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, (Milano, 1932).

² Report by Carbillet on the joint French-Italian trip in Libya and Algeria, ANOM/GGA/29H13.

Italian settlers grew – there were many reasons why Carbillet might find Libya to be deliciously similar to Algeria.³

His superior, the Governor-General in Algiers, was less excited. He had insisted that Carbillet's visit would be purely a private one and not officially sanctioned, and worried about Carbillet's close direct relations with his Italian counterparts in the Libyan South, enjoining him to maintain a 'careful reserve'.⁴ The Governor-General was worried about how this visit might play to the wider public. In the media, it might seem like the chumminess between Carbillet and Moccia meant the French government approved of Fascist policy in Libya. Given widespread news in Algeria of Italian atrocities in Libya, this would place them in a delicate position vis-à-vis Muslim public opinion. Carbillet's trip was not news yet, and the Governor-General wanted to prevent it from becoming so. In the deteriorating diplomatic environment of the late 1930s and in view of the increasingly naked imperial ambitions of fascist Italy, French authorities were fearful of being tainted by association with their troublesome neighbours.

Carbillet's story suggests two things. First, it is a reminder that Algeria's legal status as a part of France did not remove it entirely from diplomatic activity with other powers. Alliances and rivalry with other European powers shaped events in Algeria. This is particularly evident with Italians because after the establishment of the French protectorate of Morocco in 1912, Algeria only had one border that did not adjoin another territory controlled by France – the Libyan border. Effectively it meant France had two borders with Italy: one across the Alps in Europe, and the other across the

³ His description was not dissimilar to that of other French tourists to Libya in this period who admired the modern roads, the wine and the little white farms, for instance Alice Guibon, *Routes fascistes. Au volant sur la Translibyenne*, (Dieppe, 1939).

⁴ GGA to Carbillet, 'Relations with Italian authorities', 10 March 1936, ANOM/GGA/29H13. Carbillet was a colourful character whose reputation preceded him. Before Ouargla, his previous posting in the Jabal Druze in Syria had allegedly launched the Syrian revolt of 1925. For a hagiographic but nonetheless informative portrait see Jean-Charles Humbert, *L'oeuvre du Colonel Carbillet au Sahara, 1927-1940*, (Nice, 1997).

Sahara in North Africa. Yet even powers that had no direct borders with Algeria, like Britain, could still create diplomatic problems.

Second, the Governor-General's wariness of news of Carbillet's trip getting out to the media shows how diplomatic rivalry could be used by public opinion to put pressure on the French government. Newspapers, for instance, made comparisons between the situation in Italian Libya and in French Algeria to make demands upon the government in Paris. Or they agitated the threat of a powerful rival power to advocate greater French involvement in Algeria. This chapter looks at these issues in more detail, showing how news of foreign powers could be deployed to locate Algerians within the French Republic.

Both Carbillet's enthusiasm and his superiors' wariness point to a unique challenge. On the one hand, French authorities could not but support Italians as part of the shared European project to 'civilise' North Africa. On the other hand, the presence of another imperial power so close could prove troublesome. The expansion of European powers in the high imperial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century contained an inherent contradiction. European powers saw themselves as engaging in a shared civilisational project, yet one of the primary drives for this expansion was European rivalry. In theory, colonialism was imagined as a set of perfectly parallel lines reaching out from Europe to the darker regions of the world, never intersecting or interfering with each other. In practice, these parallel lines intersected at times of European diplomatic tension, leading to dangerous crossed wires as rival powers coveted each others' colonial possessions and meddled with their internal politics.⁵ At a time where the independence of colonial possessions was barely on the horizon, it was the possibility of a foreign takeover of their colonies that haunted colonial administrators most.

⁵ Lewis, 'Geographies of Power'.



Figure 25 *Carbillet (in dark uniform left), Governor-General of Algeria Jules Carde (grey uniform centre) and Moccia (dark uniform right) in the oasis of Djanet, just next to the border with the Libyan oasis of Ghat. 'Escorted by Italian officers who have come to salute him, the Governor-General of Algeria, Jules Carde, reviews the Saharian Company of the Ajjer', 1933 (author's personal collection).*

Today's Italian friends might be tomorrow's enemies [Figure 25]. Carbillet visited in 1935 at a time of diplomatic easing between France and Italy, but tensions could resume swiftly, especially over Tunisia. The fascist regime had long made it clear that its expansionist ambitions included taking over the French protectorate of Tunisia, where Italians had long been more numerous than French citizens.⁶ In some of the more ambitious fascist plans in the 1930s, the Eastern Algerian *département* of Constantine, where Italian settlement was heaviest, would also be taken over by Italy. However, taking over Algeria was far more uncertain, and Italian propaganda targeted Algeria far less than neighbouring Tunisia or Morocco. The reason was that Algeria seemed too unshakeably French, its settler population attached to the Republic through decades of assimilation, while the neighbouring protectorates were easier targets for destabilisation.⁷ After all, was not Algeria, unlike Tunisia, part of France?

⁶ Juliette Bessis, *La Méditerranée fasciste. L'Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie*, (Paris, 1981).

⁷ Anna Baldinetti, 'Fascist Propaganda in the Maghrib', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 37:3, 2011, pp.408-436.

Compared to neighbouring territories, it is striking how little France's claim over Algeria was contested in this period. Other European powers occasionally made plans to take over Algeria and cut it off from the metropole, but these were far less serious than rivalry over Tunisia or Morocco, where tensions often led France to the verge of war with Italy, Britain or Germany.

Colonial possession, as Mary Lewis reminds us, did not mean an end to imperial rivalry, and 'European governments still tried to broker influence in lands claimed by their rivals'.⁸ In her study of Tunisia under the Protectorate, Lewis shows how French takeover did not end European competition. The struggle between the British, the Italians, and the French only took on new forms under this new peculiar legal régime. However, unlike their counterparts in Tunisia that Lewis describes, moving through a multiplicity of legal systems, people in Algeria had less opportunity to navigate imperial rivalries in the courts.⁹ Algerians could, however, use the threat of other imperial powers to make claims to the metropole. To do so, they used not the court, but the press. In newspapers, they summoned imperial rivalry not to escape colonial rule but to further their claims on Paris.

This chapter examines how Algerians used France's two main rivals in the Western Mediterranean, Britain and Italy, to make political claims within the French Republic. It does so through two successive case-studies across the early twentieth century, the first involving the settler press, while the second focuses on the Muslim press. First, it will examine the ways in which Algerian settlers generated news of British takeover to make demands from the metropole during the autonomist crisis of 1897-1901. By doing so, they transformed diplomatic rivalry between France and Britain into a

⁸ Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938*, (Berkeley, 2014), p.6.

⁹ There were numerous jurisdictional issues involving Algerians abroad, but fewer within Algeria itself. For uncertainties about the citizenship of Italians in Eastern Algeria and fishing rights, see Hugo Vermeren, 'Des "hermaphrodites de nationalité"? Colonisation maritime en Algérie et naturalisation des marins-pêcheurs italiens de Bône (Annaba) des années 1860 à 1914', *REMM*, 137, 2015, pp.135-154.

political argument for greater investment of the Republic in Algeria. Then, it will turn to examining how Muslim newspapers made the Italian conquest of Libya into Algerian news from 1911 to 1939 by demanding reforms of their status within the French Republic.

The actors in this chapter did not contest the value of colonial rule but they did vigorously debate the differences between specific kinds of colonialism.¹⁰ Colonialism, as Pierre Singaravélou has shown, was understood to be a science that could be improved by systematic comparison between different empires.¹¹ Therefore, the best seeming alternative for many people in Algeria was to suggest another kind of colony, based on foreign models. By stressing the superior state of foreign colonies, they could also emphasise the threat of a foreign takeover of Algeria. Through these comparisons, Algerians could make political demands on the French government, bringing Algeria, that odd little part of France, into the high imperial moment.

Mission creep: Britain in the autonomist crisis, 1891-1901

In December 1891, a minor disturbance unfolded in another Kabyle village upstream from Rébeval, Djemâa-Saharidj, perched on the mountains that rise from the valley of the Oued Sebaou. The local French Catholic priest was passing by the village,

¹⁰ Under the Third Republic more broadly there were many debates over types of colonial administration but rarely any discussion of the value of colonialism itself, especially when it came not to conquering new colonies but to surrendering any existing ones like Algeria. Henri Brunschwig, *Le parti colonial français*, (Paris: 1959). Charles-Robert Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris, 1978). Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962*, (Paris, 1972).

¹¹ Singaravélou, *Professer l'Empire*. Note particularly that courses in comparative colonialism were taught at the University of Algiers from the 1880s, p.247.

when a bunch of schoolboys shouted insults at him, yelling ‘pig!’ and ‘bastard Frenchman!’ [*porc, cochon, salop de français*]. Outraged at the behaviour of these unruly little natives, the mayor immediately wrote to authorities in Algiers about this incident. To him, these insults revealed a far bigger conspiracy afoot, a conspiracy to dismantle French rule in Algeria. The culprits? Four elderly British Methodist ladies who spent most of their days knitting in a stone house just outside the village.

According to the mayor, these women of the North Africa Mission Society, an organisation present in the village since 1881, had opened a ‘school’ that was the cause of all these troubles. ‘They attract children with gifts of money (...) and inspire sentiments hostile to the French.’¹² There was a local French school nearby, one of the first to open in Kabylia in 1883 but just a decade later it was already derelict, due to lack of funding and local interest.¹³ The boys who had insulted the priest did not go to this French school, so the mayor blamed the pernicious influence of the Protestant ladies for the unrest. It seemed in this report like a fragile, waning French colonial presence, represented by the derelict school of Djemaâ-Saharidj, could be easily upset by the machinations of another European power, embodied here by the conniving British ladies.

This incident might seem like an amusing anecdote, except it ended up being part of a diplomatic crisis between France and Britain. The mayor’s complaints climbed up to the Governor-General of Algeria, Jules Cambon, who wrote extensive letters complaining of the behaviour of British missionaries to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexandre Ribot, and in turn, the Ministry complained via diplomatic channels to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury. Finally, the head of the North Africa

¹² GGA to MAE, 5 May 1892, MAE/Correspondance politique/Algérie/Nouvelle Série/12. Zohra Ait Abdelmalek, *Protestants en Algérie, Le protestantisme et son action missionnaire en Algérie au XIXe et XXe siècles*, Lyon: Olivétan, 2004, 48-50. For another incident of amusing abuse suffered by Catholic priests in Kabylia in the late nineteenth century see Alain Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie XIXe-XXe siècles: anthropologie historique du lien social dans les communautés villageoises*, (Algiers, 2011), p.181.

¹³ On the rise and fall of French education in Kabylia see Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*.

Mission Society, Edward H. Glenny, wrote to Salisbury explaining that the ladies of Djemâa-Saharidj were up to nothing subversive, in fact they were ‘careful to shew the natives the advantages they possess under French rule, and there is reason to believe that their influence has been helpful in disposing them to regard with increased favour French civilization and dominion.’¹⁴ He was the final link in a chain of correspondence that stretched from Kabylia to Essex.

Despite Glenny’s reassurances, the controversy around the missionaries did not die down. All around Kabylia, local administrators complained of the dangerous activities of British missionaries, who were accused of harboring bandits, of offering illegal medical assistance, and especially of selling gunpowder and weapons to natives to prepare them for an insurrection against France.¹⁵ The missionaries were a thorn in French-British relations for several years, and this agitation was inversely proportional to their actual importance. Adding up the four ladies of Djemaâ-Saharidj, a few missionaries in Western Algeria near Oran, and a couple of pastors serving the large British tourist community coming to winter in the grand hotels of Algiers and Biskra, a grand total of twenty-seven British Protestant missionaries were in Algeria at any given time.¹⁶ They converted virtually no one, and this was widely acknowledged.¹⁷ Even Cambon recognised that there was ‘nothing to fear from their religious propaganda (...) They are met only with indifference and mockery, and as soon as they cease distributing free

¹⁴ Edward Glenny to Lord Salisbury, 12 June 1896, MAE/CP/12.

¹⁵ GGA to MAE, 5 May 1892, MAE/CP/Algérie/12.

¹⁶ British National Archive at Kew, Foreign Office [FO], 27/3572, I thank Jennifer Sessions for pointing me to this reference. MAE/CP/Algérie/12 and 23. PA to GGA, 19 November 1903, ANOM/GGA/9H4. For more on the British presence in Algeria see Joëlle Redouane, ‘La présence anglaise en Algérie de 1830 à 1930’, 38:1, 1984, pp.15-36.

¹⁷ The same cannot be said of their successors a century later. Under the colonial period, conversions to Protestantism were virtually non-existent, compared to the small but not insignificant number of conversions to Catholicism which enjoyed greater state support, especially in Kabylia. However, the North Africa Mission Society is still active in Kabylia today, under the new name of Arab World Ministries, and evangelical Christianity has been making great strides there, raising significant political issues in contemporary Algeria about creeping foreign influence. See Karima Dirèche, ‘Dolorisme religieux et reconstructions identitaires. Les conversions néo-évangéliques dans l’Algérie contemporaine’, *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, 64, 2009, pp.1137-1162. www.awm-pioneers.org, accessed 2 October 2015.

[clothes, food and medicine], their audience disappears.’¹⁸ If anything, some Muslim notables like the mufti of Tlemcen wrote letters to the French government complaining of British proselytising.¹⁹

Yet, Cambon still found them threatening, though it was not clear why. His colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had to deal with the diplomatic fall-out with the British, grew frustrated with the Governor-General, writing in private: ‘There are in the reports and in the attitude of Mister J. Cambon an intentional ambiguity that must be cleared away. Is he yes or no of the opinion that the facts are real, serious, and endanger public safety?’²⁰

Cambon’s attitude was ambiguous because even though the missionaries were not a serious threat, he was under huge pressure from the settlers and their newspapers. Even when confronted with an incident as seemingly comical as the one with the priest at Djemâa-Saharidj, the Governor-General had to listen, while his colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not. Local settlers, men like the priest or the mayor in Kabylia, made the missionaries into news. The crisis around the missionaries occurred at the same time as newspaper production in Algeria reached its peak, as small numbers of settlers magnified their concerns through prolific printing. Far removed from Parisian politics, European Algerians cashed in on the fact that Algeria was a part of France, emphasising the danger of a foreign threat to gain the attention of metropolitan audiences. The case of the British missionaries shows how Algerians could generate news of a foreign threat to emphasise their neglect within the French Republic.

Incarnations of Britain were especially effective targets because they canalised anger against the system while emphasising loyalty to France. For Algerian settlers at the turn of the twentieth century, claiming that they were part of France was one of the few

¹⁸ GGA to PM, 22 September 1895, MAE/CP/12.

¹⁹ *idem*

²⁰ Emphasis original, Manuscript note, 13 July 1896, MAE/CP/Algérie/12.

political and economic resources available to them. The colony underwent a severe economic crisis in the last years of the nineteenth century, as the two main exports, first cereals, and then wine, went bust in the 1880s and 1890s, leading to a concentration of capital in the hands of a small number of large landholders.²¹

Poorer settlers were dependent on the Republic for their continued economic survival. As Didier Guignard has shown, the French state owned a huge share of the Algerian economy, and Europeans benefited from being a small minority able to control the ways in which this share was spent. A side-effect of the conquest was that the state owned a large share of the land that it had taken away from tribes. In the twenty years between 1877 and 1897 alone, the state transferred 536,000 hectares of land to Europeans: two thirds of European Algerian private property was made up of these gifts of the Republican state.²² On top of this land redistribution, a massive flood of state investment programs in Algeria (completely disproportionate to any other overseas possession) compensated for a lack of private investment, as no cost was too small in order to build a 'second France' with equivalent infrastructure. As 900 million francs of investment poured in from 1871 to 1913, the belief that 'L'Algérie, c'est la France' had huge and very material consequences, putting settler élites at the centre of a steady flow of cash from the metropole.²³ Minuscule electoral minorities of European municipal governments decided the fate of vast public investment funds from the metropolitan government as well as the taxes collected from Muslim populations: in Tizi-Ouzou the 236 electors of the *commune de plein exercice* elected the council determining the use of the taxes of 22,357 Kabyles.²⁴

Even by the standards of the time, this system was susceptible to abuse and the administration of the colony was coming under increasing scrutiny by metropolitan

²¹ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, pp.100-118.

²² Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, p.32.

²³ Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, pp.115-8.

²⁴ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, p.23.

audiences. The first serious mention of trouble with missionaries occurred in late 1891, a few months after the French Senate had launched an investigation commission into corruption and administrative abuse in Algeria, launching a flood of accusations.²⁵ In this context, some settlers used an anti-British witch-hunt to stress how it was the Paris government that was failing France in Algeria. A weak French Algeria risked being taken over by Britain, and this was not the settlers' fault.

All over Algeria, a frenzied campaign used all the dirty tricks of the French Algerian political toolbox to frame missionaries. In Djemaâ-Saharidj, fake depositions signed by illiterate Muslims claimed they had been sold gunpowder in exchange for fresh game by the dangerous ladies. The witnesses were all suspiciously close to the limited local settler population, and at least one had just returned from serving in the expeditionary corps to Madagascar.²⁶ In the suburbs of Algiers, authorities worried about a letter 'found' on a road in the suburbs of Algiers in which two Englishmen described their strategies for spreading insurrection against the French. Despite being quite a bad fake (for starters, it was written in French, which should have been a hint), the *préfet* in Constantine investigated it because of its content, in which the imaginary Englishmen spread word that the French planned to 'destroy the tomb of Muhammad in Mecca and exterminate all Muslims'. The alleged author of the letter, a certain J. Kitchener, could not be located, and eventually authorities recognised they had been victims of a trap.²⁷

Most of all, settlers made use of their unique powers as citizens of the French Republic to ratchet up the issue of the missionaries through the press. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the publication of settler newspapers exploded. A flurry of ephemeral papers pushed the publication of newspapers in Algeria to an all-time peak of

²⁵ Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, p.279.

²⁶ See GGA to MAE, 4 July 1896. Mayor of Mékla to GGA, 3 June 1896. And Parquet du Procureur Général d'Alger, 16 June 1896, all in MAE/CP/Algérie/12. For more 'real fake complaints' in 1890s Algeria see Didier Guignard, *L'abus de pouvoir*, pp.291-2.

²⁷ PC to GGA, 7 February 1902, ANOM/GGA/9H4. For more cunning use of 'abandoned letters' to frame enemies in Algeria see the so-called 'Shaytana' letter in Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, p.181.

134 newspapers in 1897.²⁸ Around this time, metropolitan newspapers also got involved in Algerian issues, amplifying the debates of the Algerian press and emphasising a sense of crisis, before returning to their usual mild lack of interest in Algerian affairs.²⁹ The missionaries gave rise to impassioned tribunes in Algerian papers from *La vigie algérienne* to *Le réveil de Souk-Abras*, but also in Parisian papers from the anti-Semitic *La Libre Parole* to the respectable *Journal des débats*. Articles about the situation in Kabylia reporting unsourced accounts of missionary trouble were copied from the regional Algerian press to major metropolitan newspapers.³⁰

Newspapers magnified the concerns of the colony's political elites, as networks of patronage and political factions within European Algerian society lay behind most publications. Algerian politicians could not be ignored because they were central to the Third Republic. Faced with this kind of pressure, the administration had to prove that it was doing something to preserve Algeria from this grave danger, placing the governors-general in a defensive mode. It was the newspapers that drove the fight rather than the administration, leaving officials to clip out articles to chase up hints of suspicious British activity. The 1881 press law was taken to its extremes in these years, as settler publications put ever more pressure on authorities. Even when newspapers launched direct attacks against the government, the ministry of Justice noted that it would be unwise to prosecute them as settler juries would acquit them in court.³¹

In 1896, the Interior Ministry attempted to reassure its colleagues at the Quai d'Orsay, agreeing that 'this affair is (...) rather of the kind to empassion public opinion in Algeria and in Paris than to seriously compromise public safety.'³² The missionaries, he

²⁸ Guignard, *L'abus de pouvoir*, p.311.

²⁹ Guignard, *L'abus de pouvoir*, pp.385-392.

³⁰ For instance an article by the small newspaper *La Kabylie*, printed in Bougie, was taken up by the largest newspaper in Algeria, *La dépêche algérienne* on 26 March 1899. Copied in several metropolitan newspapers, it then led *Le journal des débats* to send its own correspondent on 4 May 1899 to write a 'Lettre de Kabylie'.

³¹ Ministry of Justice to Interior, 25 February 1899, F⁸⁰1690.

³² Interior to MAE, 23 October 1896, MAE/CP/Algérie/12,

thought, were nothing to worry about. Yet it is precisely the passion of public opinion in Paris and Algiers which was threatening public safety. As Ruth Harris has shown, emotions and behaviour dismissed by authorities as irrational, like the powerful fear of foreign takeover that motivated accusations against missionaries, were shaping French politics at the turn of the twentieth century.³³

The autonomist, anti-Jewish and anti-British crisis

By 1896, relations between the settlers and the administration in Algeria were in a full-blown crisis, variously known as the autonomist or anti-Jewish crisis, of which the British missionaries were only a side-effect. Radical settlers who wanted more power to run Algeria according to their own designs struggled against the administration in Paris and its representative the Governor-General in Algiers, which they saw as being too lenient to the natives and thus hindering the untrammelled progress of colonisation. It was also known as the 'anti-Jewish' crisis as the settler agitators violently targeted the Algerian Jewish population, perceived as allies of the administration. Five governor-generals waltzed in and out of the summer palace of Mustapha in an equal number of years between 1897 and 1901, casualties of a political stand-off between the people who appointed them in Paris and the autonomists in Algeria.³⁴

The crisis lay at the intersection of three developments: an institutional struggle over power in Algeria, the Dreyfus Affair, and the Fashoda Crisis. While all three have been written about separately, at the time there were one and the same. First, the triumph of the settlers of the Third Republic against the former military administration

³³ Ruth Harris, *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that divided France*, (London, 2010).

³⁴ Successively Jules Cambon, Louis Lépine, Edouard Laferrière, Célestin Jonnart and Paul Revoil. For a narrative of the anti-Jewish crisis see Ageron, *Algérie contemporaine*, pp.39-66. Lizbeth Zack, 'French and Algerian Identity Formation in 1890s Algiers,' *French Colonial History* 2 2002, pp.115-143.

of the Second Empire had led to expansion of their numbers and power. Between 1872 and 1891, the European population had doubled from 244,600 to 482,000.³⁵ Since 1881, many settlers had pushed for the ever-greater assimilation of Algeria to France through a system of *rattachements*, in which metropolitan ministries in Paris took on Algerian affairs relevant to their jurisdiction, reducing the power of the appointed Governor-General to ‘an inspector of colonisation in the palace of a lazy king [*inspecteur de colonisation dans le palais d’un roi fainéant*]’, in the words of Jules Ferry.³⁶ The Government-General was a generally unpopular institution, but opinions diverged as to how best to diminish its power: either by treating Algeria wholly like any other part of France (*assimilation*), or, conversely, by granting settlers even more self-rule to govern Algeria according to their own desires (*autonomie*).

Second, in 1870, Algerian Jews had been given full French citizenship, and thus voting rights, by the *décret Crémieux*. Despite being only 53,000 in number, given the small size of the European voting population in Algeria in some cities they could be a significant wedge in elections, triggering accusations of sectarian bloc voting. A new populist ‘anti-Jewish’ political movement formed, culminating with the election of Max Régis as mayor of Algiers on an explicitly anti-Jewish platform in 1898.³⁷ Violent riots against Jews and Jewish businesses became common across a number of Algerian cities, combining with the uproar around the Dreyfus Affair in France. The only murders of Jews during the Dreyfus Affair on French territory took place in Algeria.³⁸ Riots took over Algiers, and in their offices in the *palais du gouvernement* by the harbour, government employees felt besieged, surrounded by crowds in ‘effervescence’. In anti-Semitic meetings, people befell with ‘fever and vertigo. (...)’ The women rush there in great

³⁵ Ageron, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine*, pp.118-130.

³⁶ Ageron, *France coloniale*, 26-28.

³⁷ Ageron, *Algérie contemporaine*, p.121.

³⁸ Geneviève Dermenjian, *La crise antijuive oranaise (1895-1905)*, (Paris 1986). Pierre Hebey, *Alger 1898: la grande vague antijuive*, (Paris, 1986). On the Dreyfus Affair see Harris, *Man on Devil’s Island*.

numbers and go unbalanced [*s'y déséquilibrent*]. It is they who acclaim the apostles of anti-Semitism most fervently.³⁹ By specifically singling out women, officials painted a portrait of anti-Jewish hysteria.

Finally, for much of the 1890s French and British rivalry in central Africa had been gradually coming to a head. In 1898-9, these tensions reached a peak, as the French Marchand Mission, marching north from Gabon encountered British troops going South to take possession of the Sudan, in a little abandoned post called Fashoda. The incident captivated the imagination of political audiences back home: who would cede ground, and who would be the foremost colonial power? In the winter of 1899 especially, it seemed like France and Britain would go to war over their African possessions.

For anti-Semitic writers, these were all one and the same problem.⁴⁰ Both Jews and Britain roamed the world with no respect for national borders, and the Paris government did their sinister bidding to undermine the power of the *colon* in Algeria. For Edouard Drumont, author of the best-selling *La France Juive* and founder of the Antisemitic League of France who was elected deputy for Algiers in 1898, Britain was the very embodiment of rootless capital, run by Disraelis and Rothschilds. Britain was metaphysically Jewish or at least *enjuivée*, 'jewed up'.⁴¹ 'The Jew', to take up Zeev Sternhell's summary of French far-right thinking 'symbolises the anti-nation, he is the negative, the cosmopolite against which and through which national sentiment can be determined.'⁴²

With their fake crocodile tears, Drumont raged, the British supported the banished Jewish captain Dreyfus, accused of high treason, only to undermine the French

³⁹ PA to PM, 10 May 1901, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1691.

⁴⁰ On the interaction between Fashoda and the Dreyfus Affair, see Edward Berenson, 'Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand', *Yale French Studies*, 111, 2007, pp.129-142.

⁴¹ Despite being over 1,200 pages in two volumes, *La France Juive* sold over 62,000 copies in 1886 and then was reprinted over 200 times before 1914. Michel Winock, *Drumont and Cie, antisémitisme et fascisme en France*, Paris: Seuil, 1982.

⁴² Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire 1885-1914*, 1997, 274-5.

army.⁴³ They let their Jewish emissaries search for profit across the world, while France could only flourish as a nation through being rooted to the soil. The ‘English’, for Drumont, had ‘nothing in them which resembles the organ that we call the heart’, and thus never developed an attachment to the lands they occupied. ‘English imperialism’, in its attempt to take control of Algeria, was the same as capitalist Jewry: heartless, unbounded, only interested in money.⁴⁴ The British consul-general in Algiers inadvertently reinforced this imaginary connection by summoning a British warship in January 1898 to protect the safety of his Jewish *protégés* targeted by the riots at an unfortunate juncture.⁴⁵

Throughout the crisis, the radical settler press attacked both Jews and British missionaries as the physical embodiments of shadowy forces. What is striking is that the denunciation of the missionaries came from all sides of an otherwise bitterly divided Algerian political spectrum. Both anti- and pro-government politicians raved against the missionaries. For instance, Marcel Saint-Germain denounced the missionaries to the Chamber in 1897. In the next election shortly afterwards, he lost his seat to an anti-Jewish rival. One of the members of this new anti-Jewish faction, Émile Morinaud, who was elected to represent Constantine in 1898, would then proceed to lambast the government on its failure to quash the missionaries in 1901 in more or less the same terms. The possibility of British takeover was one of the few things that brought them together.

Newspapers did not wholly invent the British threat. At the height of the Fashoda crisis, the British government did consider that a general Algerian insurrection would be convenient in the event of a war with France. The British consul in Tunis

⁴³ Edouard Drumont, ‘L’Algérie devant la chambre’, 21 May 1901, *La Libre Parole*, F⁸⁰1691.

⁴⁴ Edouard Drumont, ‘L’Algérie et la guerre avec l’Angleterre’, *La Libre Parole*, 8 March 1898, F⁸⁰1691.

⁴⁵ ANOM/ F⁸⁰1686. The Foreign Office severely reprimanded him for this action, FO to Newton in Algiers, 24 January 1898, FO 27/3418, and Newton to FO, 13 February 1899 on the case of a Jew with British consular protection, Chalom Dahan, FO 27/3467.

envisioned this possibility with some ambiguity, weighing the disadvantages of undermining common European colonialism against the benefits of Britain's own interest:

'Naturally a British invasion of North Africa would upset for a time a great deal of the civilising work the French have initiated, as the Arabs would commence a savage war of extermination against the French colonists, who in the northern part of [Algeria] have dispossessed them of their lands through the subtle chicanery of the laws. But it would be the readiest way of striking at France on land with any hope of a speedy and successful result.'⁴⁶

These plans, however, remained in the abstract, and did not involve local missionaries.⁴⁷

Unlike in Uganda, where in 1890-2, conflict between Protestant and Catholic missionaries had seen the British-Protestant side triumph and extend its protectorate over the country, triggering much agitation around foreign missionaries in the French empire, Protestant missionaries were hardly as successful in Algeria. It was the settler press which made them into headline news.

Embodiments of Anglo-Saxon superiority

The missionaries were good targets for the press because they combined multiple offences in the eyes of Algerian European men: foreign, clerical, often female. Accusations particularly focused on female missionaries. Single European women living on their own were bound to attract suspicion and scandal, especially in the middle of Kabylia, a region where there was very little European settlement. As these ladies, fervent

⁴⁶ British consul in Tunis to FO, 25 February 1899, FO 27/3467. A later British military report on Algeria in 1903 made similar points, Kew, War Office 106/5929.

⁴⁷ For more on British ideas on French Algeria see Alex Middleton, 'French Algeria in British Imperial Thought, 1830-70', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16:1, 2015. Joëlle Redouane, 'British attitudes to the French conquest of Algeria, 1830-71', *The Maghreb Review*, 1990, vol. 15:1-2, pp.2-16.

evangelicals like Lilius Trotter, tended to be independently wealthy, local newspapers asked anxious questions about the source of their funds.⁴⁸

Moreover, the missionaries' educational activities resonated with much wider debates ongoing in France. The missionaries sometimes taught Algerian boys and girls some French or read the Bible to them, and this was enough for the government to accuse them of illegally opening schools. At the time, the role of foreign religious congregations in French public education was an explosive political issue. It was the role of Catholic congregations headed by the Vatican in controlling schools that had led to an explosive debate between partisans and opponents of the separation between church and state.

Settlers in Algeria had the political reputation of being very pro-Republican and thus, by metropolitan standards, anti-clerical, which explains their sensitivity to the alleged presence of foreign schools, as the missionary crisis erupted in the build-up to the law of 1901 which forbade all religious congregations from teaching. It was under the most staunchly Republican governments that Algerian settlers rose to the heights of power: the Rouvier government that introduced the infamous 1905 law on the separation of church and state featured two men born in Oran in key cabinet positions, Eugène Étienne as the minister of Interior and then of War, and Gaston Thomson as minister of the Navy.

Yet by 1895, the Governor-General, Cambon, reported that all the British 'schools', if they could even be called schools in the first place, had been closed, and it was after this that the controversy on the presence of the missionaries only escalated.⁴⁹ British missionaries made for easy political targets because they were religious, but this was not the root of the problem.

⁴⁸ Commandant supérieur de Biskra to Batna, 25 April 1900, ANOM/GGA/9H3. Lilius Trotter has become somewhat famous in Christian literature, see Miriam Rockness, *A Passion for the Impossible: The Life of Lilius Trotter*, (Grand Rapids, 2003).

⁴⁹ GGA to PM, 22 September 1895, MAE/CP/12.

The main accusation was that missionaries were spreading the idea that Muslims would be happier under British rule. Their presence was provoking comparisons between the superior state of Britain and its empire and the inferior colonising abilities of the French. It was this issue, above all, that Algeria's outraged representatives in the French Parliament repeatedly brought to the attention of the metropolitan public. Saint-Germain, the deputy from Oran, attacked the government in 1897 for allowing the missionaries to roam Algeria in 1897, claiming that they were guilty of 'exhibiting photographs to the natives to attract their attention on the honours reserved by England to their coreligionists in the Indies.'⁵⁰ Four years later, in 1901, Emile Morinaud, representing Constantine, returned with a similar attack, alleging that missionaries in his constituency had drawn away young native women students away from the French school by distributing tendentious images, which allegedly showed France in a bad light.⁵¹ In Algiers, missionaries supposedly told Muslim women that

'England has a considerable colonial domain, that its subjects enjoy all the liberties (...) Without explicitly making a parallel between France and England, they make their audience nevertheless understand that Algeria would benefit from becoming an English land.'⁵²

According to some, the missionaries might not even be aware that they were making these comparisons. One newspaper speculated that 'maybe, in a moment of tender or glorious remembrance of *Merry England* some *Miss* insisted, more than is appropriate in a foreign colony, on the extent that the English tint covers on maps.'⁵³ Thus, their very presence around Muslim natives was intolerable as it threatened the supremacy of French rule. Even if they did not intend to cause any harm, British missionaries were inherently dangerous, because their presence sowed the seed of an alternative to French rule.

⁵⁰ Quoted in GGA to Interior, 11 February 1897, MAE/CP/12.

⁵¹ Emile Morinaud, Chambre des députés, 24 May 1901, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1691.

⁵² Préfet in Algiers to GGA, 19 November 1903, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

⁵³ Italics indicate English in the original French 'Lettre de Kabylie', 4 May 1899, *Journal des débats*, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1689.

Accusations against British missionaries fitted into enduring concerns about the success of the Anglo-Saxons shared by both Algerian and metropolitan Frenchmen. At the turn of the twentieth century, many in France worried about the superiority of the British Empire. In 1897, Edmond Demolins had published the wildly popular, *À quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons?*, which featured on its cover a large map of the world showing all British colonies. It also included the United States, which despite its independence, was perceived as part of the same Anglo-Saxon race, that was creating ‘the most active, the most progressive, the most exuberant civilisation’ with its huge colonies, sprouting ‘new countries’.⁵⁴ The Third Republic’s most influential colonial thinker, Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, wrote a landmark book on the situation in Algeria and Tunisia in 1897. In it, he drew on the travels of his son, Pierre, who had gone round the world on a trip to the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in 1895-6, from which he wrote a book on *Les nouvelles sociétés anglo-saxonnes*.⁵⁵

Despite being formally the most French of all overseas possessions, Algeria’s status as the lone settler colony of the Third Republic (along with the smaller-scale experiment in New Caledonia), meant that it had always heavily borrowed from ‘Anglo-Saxon’ models, both British and American.⁵⁶ As Jennifer Sessions has pointed out, from the outset, Algeria was intended to be France’s equivalent for Britain’s expansive settler colonies following the disappearance of much of the former colonial empire in the revolutionary wars.⁵⁷ As Alexis de Tocqueville, both France’s pre-eminent nineteenth-century authority on the English-speaking world and the leading parliamentary authority

⁵⁴ Edmond Demolins, *À quoi tient la supériorité des anglo-saxons*, (Paris, 1897). Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*, (Lincoln, NE, 2005 [1960]).

⁵⁵ Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *L’Algérie et la Tunisie*, [2nd edition], (Paris, 1897). Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu. *Les nouvelles sociétés anglo-saxonnes. Australie et Nouvelle-Zélande, Afrique du Sud*. (Paris, [2nd edition, 1901 [1897]]).

⁵⁶ On the entanglement between British and French imperial systems see David Todd, ‘A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870’, *Past and Present*, 210, 2011, pp.155-186.

⁵⁷ For an example of this kind of rhetoric, the self-explanatory title of an 1830 pamphlet just before the conquest by Alexandre Colombel, *Du parti qu’on pourrait tirer d’une expédition d’Alger, ou de la possibilité de fonder dans le bassin de la Méditerranée un nouveau système colonial et maritime, à l’épreuve de la puissance anglaise*, (Paris :, 1830). More generally see Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow* and Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* pp.15-27.

on Algeria during its conquest, had once written, 'Without being a bad Frenchman, one can admit that it is good to imitate the English in matters of colonisation.'⁵⁸ Jules Cambon, the very Governor-General who complained of the pernicious effects of the Methodist missionaries, had also studied and scribbled detailed notes on the colonisation of Australia and the United States.⁵⁹ Algeria's exceptional status within the French empire, paradoxically, made it particularly porous to news about Britain.

By the 1890s, it seemed like the 'Anglo-Saxons' were everywhere triumphant while France was declining. In Algeria, this felt particularly acute because there was a growing feeling that settler colonialism was failing compared to its British peers. The settler colonial system which was supposed to lie on the shoulders of smallholding farming men who would build an ideal Republic, appeared some fifty years later to be failing, chipped away by economic crisis and weak demographics. Poorer settlers, despite the huge incentives provided by the government, had gone bust and were starting to flock to the cities, feeding a politics of resentment towards big capital.⁶⁰ Most worryingly, the Muslim population was rebounding, suggesting that Algeria would not turn out like Australia or the United States. Until the 1870s, the census had suggested that the native Algerian population was 'doomed to extinction'.⁶¹ Twenty years later, by the time of the anti-Jewish crisis, demographic figures made it clear that the Muslim population was rebounding, making Algeria's future uncertain.

Even the most prominent French colonial theorists like Paul Leroy-Beaulieu could not make sense of Algeria's development. While Leroy-Beaulieu penned an influential categorisation of colonies as *colonies de peuplement* (settler colonies) and *colonies d'exploitation* (in the British context, crown colonies), even he admitted that Algeria did

⁵⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, 'Notes prises avant le voyage d'Algérie et durant le courant de 1840', in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. André Jardin, (Paris, 1962), p.197.

⁵⁹ 'Colonisation aux Etats-Unis et en Australie – Notes', MAE, Papiers Jules Cambon, 4.

⁶⁰ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, pp.56-60.

⁶¹ In the words of Lambert Playfair, British consul in Tunis and then Algiers, in 1871 FO 881/2266. On the myth of Algerian natives as a disappearing race see also Kamel Kateb, "Européens".

not fit into either of these modes, and that its demographic proportion of a large European minority next to a numerous Muslim population was, ‘a fact without precedent or analogy in modern history.’⁶² When the former Algerian *député* Felix Dessoliers attempted a systematic comparison of Algeria’s settler demographics with the United States, Australia and South Africa in 1899, he was disheartened. The European ‘element’ in Algeria, he noted ‘doesn’t reach 12%’ of the whole population. ‘There is not in the world a single colony, that is not an *exploitation* colony (*colonie d’exploitation*), but a *settler colony* (*colonie de peuplement*), where the European element is in such a humble posture.’⁶³

Given this prevailing anxiety in the French press and in French publications about the decline of France with compared to the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’, and the decline of Algeria with respect to British colonies, the settler press focused on British missionary misbehaviour to point out how Algeria’s bad government had left it exposed to British takeover.

Blaming the British missionaries was especially important for anti-Jewish settlers because they were accused of separatism and disloyalty to France. Some of the more radical autonomist leaders threatened an autonomous Algeria if the government in Paris was unwilling to listen to their complaints, in particular their demand for the abrogation of the Crémieux decree that had granted the Jews citizenship. Those loyal to the administration counter-attacked by accusing the anti-Jewish agitators of wanting to sell Algeria off to Britain by declaring their independence.⁶⁴ In their opinion, the autonomists’ political ambitions would tear Algeria apart from France and weaken the Republic. Generating news of British takeover, in this context, helped reinforced the shared belief that Algeria should be part of France.

⁶² Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la colonisation*, p.293. Leroy-Beaulieu, *Algérie et la Tunisie*, p.2.

⁶³ Félix Dessoliers, *De la fusion des races européennes en Algérie par les mariages croisés et de ses conséquences politiques*, Fontana: Alger, 1899. Emphasis original. Dessoliers had been deputy to the French Parliament for Oran 1882-1885.

⁶⁴ Pierre Batail in *La vigie algérienne*, 1 February 1899, ANOM/F⁸⁰1689.

Reaching the wrong audience

Anxieties about missionaries reached their anticipated audience in Paris, precipitating diplomatic tension with Britain and greater metropolitan concern over Algeria's woes. However, the press campaign against the British missionaries also had unintentional side-effects. By the late 1890s, as we have seen in chapter 2, the expansion of settler media irrigated the Algerian countryside.

In the winter of 1899, administrative reports complained that the settlers' agitation was spreading. This was especially the case once news started to spread that France had bowed to Britain's claim over the Sudan in Fashoda in the winter of 1899, which risked making France look weak. 'The natives ignore nothing (...) of our difficulties and feelings towards other foreign powers, and of the unfortunate events of Fashoda', wrote one mayor.⁶⁵ A full-scale war with Britain would sever the sea-links with metropolitan France and leave Algerian settlers particularly vulnerable.⁶⁶

'In some conversations amongst themselves in the native language, as they think they are not being understood, they talk of rumours of war with England, and some among them say that England is richer than France, more powerful, that under her rule they would enjoy more freedom, they would be less bothered, less watched.'⁶⁷

Many reports mentioned that natives expressed local economic grievances by saying that they would be better under the British. In Gouraya, west of Algiers, people said that the abandoned mines would be re-opened under the British, giving everyone jobs. In Kabylia, severely affected by land dispossession, settler newspapers claimed the

⁶⁵ Mayor of Blida to colonel in Blida, 18 February 1899, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

⁶⁶ The mobilisation plan from 6 January 1899 foresaw the eventuality in which 'toutes les communications étant interrompues avec la Métropole, l'Algérie serait l'objet d'une attaque inopinée ou de menaces directes de la part d'une puissance étrangère.' Interior to GGA, ANOM/ F⁸⁰1691.

⁶⁷ PA to GGA, 7 March 1899, ANOM/GGA/1H86.

natives were convinced ‘that the English being men of the sea, they would only take the sea ports and give back to the natives the lands that have been taken from them.’⁶⁸

It is impossible not to notice that the French administration and press picked up on rumours circulating among Muslims that refracted their own concerns about the British empire. The alleged Kabyle claims that the British were men of the sea uninterested in land echoed Drumont’s antisemitic tirades against rootless British capitalism. In 1899, a schoolteacher in a school for natives in El Milia, in Eastern Algeria, complained that his young students pestered him in geography class with questions on the English, pointing out that the British had much bigger possessions in ‘Muslim territory’ on the maps than the French.⁶⁹ The rose-tinted swathes on maps of the British empire on the cover of Demolin’s book made a powerful impression throughout Algeria.

The administration and its supporters blamed the settler press for exciting the natives to revolt, and the debate came to a head with events in Margueritte in 1901. On the morning of 26 April 1901, a group of men attacked the little settlement of Margueritte near Miliana and forced its European inhabitants to put on a white *burnous*, pronounce the *shahada* and convert to Islam. They then killed the five men who refused to do so as well as the local European forest guard. By 5pm, the carnivalesque revolt had been crushed.⁷⁰ Despite the small scale of the incident involved, Margueritte hit a nerve and was widely understood as the tip a much wider iceberg of Muslim resentment.

The government’s anti-Jewish enemies accused Protestant missionaries once more of having excited the natives to revolt. English deaconesses had allegedly brought gunpowder to the insurgents and the administration had dissimulated the evidence.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Dépêche algérienne*, 26 March 1899, ANOM/F⁸⁰1689. Nobody at the time seems to have pointed out the bitter irony of this belief that the British were not interested in possessing lands given contemporary developments in East Africa, South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

⁶⁹ CM El Milia to PC, 17 February 1899, 1H86.

⁷⁰ ‘Rapport général sur le mouvement insurrectionnel des indigènes du douar Adélia’, 8 May 1901, ANOM/F⁸⁰1690.

⁷¹ PA to Interior, 4 June 1901, ANOM/F⁸⁰1690.

Anti-Jewish settlers were unable to see themselves as the cause of these ideas. They were convinced that these ideas must be coming from actual, embodied foreigners roaming Algerian territory. But for the government it was the settler press that was to blame:

‘the spirit of revolution and disorder could not reign in Algiers for consecutive years without inserting itself among the tribes that live in permanent contact with Europeans; (...) Most natives now know our language (...) and they read newspapers assiduously, including *L’Antijuif*; they comment all the facts of our political and social life (...).’⁷²

Or, as the newspaper *Le réveil bônois* put it more succinctly some time later,

Margueritte, ‘C’est la faute à la presse!’⁷³

The campaign against the missionaries had backfired. Thus far, it had allowed Algerian settlers to voice their concerns to the metropole, but now, it meant they were accused of inciting the natives to insurrection through their newspapers, even though, in all likelihood, the insurgents in Margueritte were moved to act neither by British missionaries nor by *L’Antijuif*. In the 1890s and up until 1901, the settlers’ complaints about the missionaries carried to the highest level of the government. By 1902, all the anti-Jewish deputies had lost their seats in Parliament. Then, in a famous diplomatic reversal, by 1904 Britain and France had signed the Entente Cordiale and became durable allies. This ended the alignment of the higher levels of the French government with local settlers who complained about missionaries. Missionaries ceased to make headlines. Though local complaints continued, they did not make it to Paris either through the press or through Parliament. Metropolitan politicians and newspapers returned to their usual quiet indifference to Algerian affairs. The years of the autonomist crisis offer a particularly clear case-study of how a foreign threat could become politically useful news and then cease to be so. It was only during the brief period when war between Britain and France seemed imminent that Cambon had to listen because the British were common enemies of both the settlers and the administration. Sometimes,

⁷² PA to PM, 10 May 1901, ANOM/F⁸⁰1691.

⁷³ *Le réveil bônois*, 19 February 1903, in ANOM/ F⁸⁰1693.

the best way of cashing in on Algeria being a part of France was to agitate a foreign threat.

Mirror colony : Italian Libya and the Young Algerians, 1911-1939

In September 1911, Italy declared war upon the Ottoman Empire to seize control of the North African provinces of Tripoli and Cyrenaica, triggering much political activity in Algeria. Much of this activity in 1911, sketched out in the introduction, was similar to what we encountered in chapter 2 with the Greek-Ottoman War: Algerians felt themselves tied to the fate of the former Ottoman Empire and read the Italian invasion as an attack to the local dignity of Islam. Yet there was also a different way of using this news, and it is to this that we turn in this chapter. This approach stressed that Italy was not like France, and very much a foreign power. Using this distinction, because it was Italy doing the dirty business and not France, Muslim activists could criticise the invasion of Libya as an attack against Islam whilst still stressing their loyalty to France. Using the new tools of the press, the emergent group of men known as the 'Young Algerians' pursued this strategy from 1911 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

The Young Algerians, a slick bilingual Algerian Muslim intelligentsia, pushed for greater civil rights for Muslims within the French political system. They walked a tightrope in which they had to appear loyal to France but also deeply involved in Muslim issues. In order to maintain this equilibrium, the Young Algerian newspapers used proxies, using events that they described as foreign to make carefully calibrated points about the political situation in Algeria. Depending on the context, they used Italy to do

so in different ways, and the following section explores three moments: the invasion of Libya in 1911, the new Libyan status of 1919 and the invasion of Albania in 1939. In 1911 newspapers mobilised Algerian Muslims whilst showing their loyalty to France, in 1919 they demanded Algerian reforms on an Italian model, and finally in 1939 they protested against Italian imperialism whilst protesting their attachment to France.

1911: using the Italo-Turkish War to make charitable, loyal, French Muslims

The Italo-Turkish War led to one of the first political mobilisations of Muslims across Algeria tolerated by the French state. The newspaper *El Hack* [al-Haqq] in Oran, (not to be confused with the earlier *El Hack* published in Bône in 1893-4) launched a fundraising campaign in favour of the Muslim wounded in the Italo-Turkish War for an ‘Algerian Red Crescent’. The campaign appears to have been initiated by some notables in Tlemcen, a city well-known for its remaining *kouloughli* families, but its success came from *El-Hack*’s publicising.⁷⁴ At first it started through the donations of small groups of urban businessmen, many of whom both wrote for the newspaper and had ads for the businesses on the back page, a sign of the limited network that made up the newspaper’s editorial team: The vice-president of the subscription committee, Mohamed Bouayad was the owner of an ‘Oriental jewelry’ shop located at the same address as the headquarters of *El Hack*, 3 rue de l’Hôtel de ville, and the first contributors included Ahmed Zerna, owner of a Turkish bath and Stambouli, owner of a café, both of whom advertised in *El Hack*.

⁷⁴ ‘Kouloughli’, in Ottoman Algeria, referred to the child of a mixed Turkish-Algerian marriage. The tendency for Kouloughli families in Tlemcen to follow events in Turkey particularly closely was noted by police reports as late as 1938, ANOM/GGA/3CAB/28, ‘Les Kouloughlis à Tlemcen’, Information note by CIE Oran, 24 June 1938.

The subscription then spread to various minor urban centres through the Oran region, including to rural areas, as certain tribes donated to the campaign (around Nedroma for instance). Local notables, keen to have their name feature on these respectable lists, donated in droves. By printing the growing list of contributors each week, *El Hack* made the act of the charity into a kind of petition for the defence of Muslim rights in beleaguered Libya.⁷⁵ Starting in the pages of the newspaper, subscriptions then led to physical meetings to decide how the money should be administered. The meetings concluded that a small part of the funds should be used to support the continued printing of *El Hack*. They also discussed more local issues, like the suppression of certain of the harsher conditions of the *indigénat*.⁷⁶ *El Hack*'s activity mobilised people for solidarity to a foreign cause, sowing the seeds for other demands for Muslims both here and there.

Following *El Hack*'s initiative, other organising committees sprouted up in the *départements* of Algiers and then Constantine, where the fundraising was by far the most successful: 344,000 out of a total of 410,000 francs were collected in the Constantine département.⁷⁷ It is likely that this greater success came about not only because the Eastern Constantine region was the least affected by settler colonialism and had always retained a politically active urban notability, but also because Constantine was more 'plugged in' to events in Tripoli, both through contacts with Tunis and through the numerous presence of Italians which made events of the Italo-Turkish War seem much closer there. The final sum was wired to the Ottoman ambassador in Paris to the order of the Red Crescent in Constantinople, who thanked them fulsomely.

⁷⁵ The list of subscribers reveals that while the crushing majority were Muslim, some Europeans and not insignificant numbers of Jews donated as well.

⁷⁶ Monthly surveillance report January 1912, ANOM/GGA/11H43.

⁷⁷ Ageron, *Algériens musulmans et la France*, 912. Monthly report, February 1912, ANOM/GGA/11H43 indicates 166,000F collected by March 1912, of which 100,000F came from the Constantinois. See also Koulakssis and Meynier, *Emir Khaled*, p.25.

The entire process adhered strictly to proper administrative and diplomatic channels: *El Hack* insisted repeatedly that the *préfet* had been advised and that following strict conditions, he did not have issues with the fundraising. The fundraising campaign, its organising committees and the role of *El Hack* and a new Muslim press feature in most histories of the emerging Algerian nationalist movement.⁷⁸ However, these histories tend to skate over the fact that it was explicitly for a *foreign* cause that this political mobilisation could happen. For Young Algerians, news of the Italo-Turkish War in Libya was just close enough to mobilise without attracting too much official repression. The mobilisation was doubly innocuous: it did not target France and it was for charity, as its promoters insisted, it will have ‘an essentially humanitarian goal and will in no way take on any political character; or be the occasion of any public demonstration.’⁷⁹ Italians were a great proxy, and the format of the newspaper was ideally suited for this: *El Hack* could present articles on Libya as separate issues from other articles on conscription or abuses within Algeria, yet the two would appear linked on the same page.

France’s official neutrality in the conflict fitted the Young Algerians’ political goals to push for Muslim interests within the French system. While *El Hack* described itself a newspaper ‘for the defence of Muslim interests’ and launched its subscription for the Red Crescent, it was also organising a two-week trip to France for its readers which included Bastille Day in Paris. *El Hack* tied the unequal treatment of Muslims within Algeria to the wider ‘indifference’ with which the West treated Muslims throughout the world: ‘if Bulgarians kill a few Turks at the border, it is an incident with no importance, if the opposite happens, it’s a massacre of Christians.’⁸⁰ Criticising Italians allowed writers to point out this inequity without appearing as anti-French. When in Tunisia, after an Italian tramway driver killed a Tunisian child, nationalist leaders organised a boycott of

⁷⁸ See for instance Ageron, *Algériens musulmans*, Kaddache, *Nationalisme algérien*, Meynier and Koulakssis, *Emir Khaled*.

⁷⁹ *El Hack (Oran)*, n.7, 25 November-2 December 1911.

⁸⁰ *El Hack* N.11, 23-30 December 1911.

the Tunisian tramways and of all Italian-owned businesses in February 1912, *El Hack* approved and considered similar action in Algeria.⁸¹ Events involving France more directly, like the ongoing takeover of Morocco which would be formalised in 1912, or injustices within Algeria, were more difficult to protest.

Even with these precautions, *El Hack* was accused in the settler press of fanaticism and pan-islamism for only supporting a Muslim cause, which was inherently suspicious. Dr Benthami, a prominent Young Algerian in Algiers, counter-attacked with a campaign to fund a French army airplane to prove their loyalty, with limited success.⁸² Authorities were suspicious but uncertain: were Algerian Muslims really only targeting Italians, or was this an indirect way of organising against France?⁸³

Developments in Libya, after all, were not that easy to separate from the French government, as the invasion occurred with tacit French support. Even though it was officially neutral in 1911, since at least 1881, France had encouraged Italy to take control of Libya.

Late nineteenth-century Italian political opinion resented the fact that their country, busy unifying until 1871, had arrived 'late' to the colonial game and missed out on the lion's share of overseas possession that Britain and France enjoyed. Italian projects in North Africa originally set their sights on Tunisia, where a large Italian population resided, but were thwarted by the creation of the French protectorate in 1881.⁸⁴ In exchange, the French government encouraged Italians to pursue their interests in the neighbouring Ottoman province of Tripoli. As the Governor-General of Algeria, Grévy, wrote in 1881, if it were to occupy Libya, Italy would 'face trials of the same nature as those that we underwent in our conquest of Algeria', but if it could 'take

⁸¹ *El Hack* N.18, 10-17 February 1912.

⁸² *El Hack* N.21, 2-9 March 1912.

⁸³ Commissaire central de Constantine to préfet, 14 November 1911, Constantine/B³182.

⁸⁴ This particular conjuncture will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 6, pp.278-281.

advantage of the experience that we acquired in conquering our great colony', then this would be a great thing, for it would

'completely isolate Algeria and Tunisia from any contact with the East with Muslim states and particularly with the Porte. In my opinion, modern civilisation can only gain from the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire and the substitution of European interests to Muslim interests on the Mediterranean's Southern shore.'⁸⁵

The Italian presence in Libya was a win-win: it would distract the Italians from being rowdy neighbours in Tunisia, and offer free insulation from Eastern influence. In 1902, the two governments passed a secret convention whereby Italy would allow France a free hand in Morocco while France would do the same for Italy in Tripolitania. As a crisis erupted between Germany and France over Morocco in 1911, Italy seized the opportunity to declare war upon the Ottoman Empire and invade Tripoli and Cyrenaica. In a final European push for territory in North Africa, the Italian invasion of Libya was rapidly followed by the 1912 Franco-Spanish takeover of Morocco.

1919: using Libyan laws as Algerian reforms

The entanglement of French and Italian colonial projects in North Africa only got stronger as the conquest of Libya progressed, and Italian governments turned to using French models in Algeria. Even before Italians had set foot in Libya, as Federico Cresti has observed, the idea that Libya could become a fertile European settlement colony to solve Italy's demographic problems 'was not based on a deep knowledge of the country, but derived from an analogy with the situation of neighbouring territories already occupied by European powers, in particular the Maghrebi territories of France.'⁸⁶

⁸⁵ GGA to MAE, 22 July 1881, MAE/CP/Algérie/10.

⁸⁶ Federico Cresti, *Oasi di italianità: la Libia della colonizzazione agraria tra fascismo, guerra et indipendenza (1935-1956)*, (Turin, 1996), p.xvii. See also Claudio Segrè, *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya*, (Chicago, 1974).

Libya was probably the foreign colony whose administration drew most on the model of French Algeria. As Italy's only colonies before 1911 had been Eritrea and Somalia in East Africa, officials were quite open in wanting to learn from the largest colonial power in North Africa. One MP, Vincenzo Riccio, in the *Giornale d'Italia*, noted on the eve of the Italo-Turkish War that Italy would be wise to learn from 'nations that know how to colonise more than we do' (*nazione che sanno più di noi colonizzare*), namely the British and the French.⁸⁷ Some Italians thought, nationalistically, that they should elaborate their own colonial policy, despite being 'late'. Much like some Frenchmen were reluctant to borrow straight from the British, nationalist pride made some direct colonial imports from France to Italy controversial, but under the radar much colonial policy was drawn wholesale from British and French precedents.⁸⁸ In 1913-14, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were organised into two colonies with separate civilian and military territories, each with a governor-general with both civil and military powers 'according to the French model.'⁸⁹

At numerous points in their occupation of Libya from 1911 to 1940, Italian governments referred to French Algeria as a model or counter-model of what they wished to do on their new 'fourth shore' (*quarta sponda*). Policies easily moved across the two 'Latin sister' colonies, and because of this, it was difficult for French authorities in Algeria to maintain distance with their Italian colleagues. The most blatant case of Italians borrowing from French developments occurred in 1919, and a resurgent Young Algerian press pounced on it.

In 1919, both the French and Italian governments were considering new institutional arrangements in their North African colonies. In Algeria, the conscription of

⁸⁷ *Giornale d'Italia*, 19 December 1911, ASMAI, Libia, 172.1.

⁸⁸ On the importance of both British and French colonial theory in Italian colonial policy, see Daniel Grange, 'Emigration et colonies: un grand débat de l'Italie libérale', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 30:3, 1983, pp.337-365.

⁸⁹ Giambattista Biasutti, *La politica indigena italiana in Libia. Dall'occupazione al termine del governato di Italo Balbo (1911-1940)*, (Pavia, 2004), p.81.

250,000 Algerians, some 80,000 of whom died in the First World War, led to calls for political rights in exchange of military service. In Libya, Italians, exhausted by the First World War and having effectively withdrawn from much of the territory, were in a weak position and keen to secure maximum legitimacy at minimum cost.

The French government discussed various ambitious reforms, but eventually the law of February 1919, or Jonnart law, fell short of the Young Algerians' demands for full political rights. It gave Algerian Muslims limited local political rights including, for many, the possibility to participate in local elections for the first time, but it stopped well short of full citizenship. Arguably, it even made naturalisation into full French citizenship more difficult for those who did not surrender their Muslim legal status.⁹⁰

While the French government was preparing this law, officials in the Italian Colonial Ministry asked to receive copies of French parliamentary records.⁹¹ A few months later, when the Italians published their own *Legge fondamentale* (or *Qanun Asasi* in Arabic) for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in 1 June and 31 October 1919, respectively, certain articles turned out to be virtually identical to the French February 1919 law.⁹² Yet the Italian law, unlike the final version of the French one, allowed Libyan Muslims to enjoy full Italian citizenship whilst retaining their Muslim personal status and being governed by Islamic law in matters of private law. Furthermore, these laws established Arabic as a language of primary and secondary education, which the French refused to do in Algeria.⁹³

⁹⁰ Florence Renucci, 'L'accession des indigènes à la citoyenneté entre assimilation et réformisme: les mesures légales prises par l'Italie et la France en 1919', in *Sujet et Citoyen. Actes du Colloque de Lyon 11-12 Septembre 2003* (Marseille, 2004) pp.393-421

⁹¹ The Italian Ministry of Colonies requested three copies on the project reforms in Algeria from French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 26 February 1919, and they duly obliged on 24 March 1919. MAE K/Algérie/1.

⁹² Florence Renucci, 'L'accession des indigènes à la citoyenneté' p.403 and 'La strumentalizzazione del concetto di cittadinanza in Libia negli anni Trenta', *Quaderni fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno*, 33-34, 2005, pp.319-342, 319.

⁹³ Federico Cresti, 'La formation pour les musulmans de Libye à l'époque coloniale ou les supposés dangers de la modernité', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 101-102, 2003, pp.269-304.

While the Italian government was keen to portray the *Legge fondamentale* as coming purely out of its 'generous' and 'liberal' spirit, the truth was that this arrangement was out of necessity rather than choice. Italian sovereignty was formally recognised by treaty in 1912 but during the First World War, it had lost military control of much of the territory. The *Legge* were a concession to local élites to encourage them to govern in cooperation with the Italian government while the self-proclaimed Tripolitanian Republic and the Sanussi in Cyrenaica were already self-governing in practice. Inherently fragile, the *Legge fondamentale* were never applied as Libya descended into another phase of violent conflict.

For the Young Algerians busy asking for more civil rights within the French context, however, the *Legge fondamentale* were convenient even if they remained unimplemented. 1919 was a time of great political opportunity and reorganisation. After the closure of all Muslim newspapers during the war, *L'Islam* (Algiers) and *Le Rachidi* (Djidjelli) united in 1919 to form *L'Ikdam*. In *L'Ikdam*, talking about Libya gave the group a way of couching their criticism of French policies in loyalist language. 'We do not wish, for the good of our country, for its reputation in the world as a liberal power, that unfortunate comparisons could be made between its Muslim policy and that of other nations' noted Ahmed Balloul in *L'Ikdam*.⁹⁴ Would it not look bad for France if Italians, newcomers to the colonial game, were proving better colonisers than the French?⁹⁵

At a time when there was barely any alternative to the absolute consensus that colonialism was a good thing, the best way to solve a problem in colonial rule could only be in making Algeria look like another colony.

While in 1911-1912 Young Algerian newspapers had painted Italy negatively, protesting the Italian aggression of the Ottoman Empire as an attack on all Muslims, a few years later, Italy switched around to being a positive model to put pressure on the

⁹⁴ Ahmed Balloul, 'Nous demandons une représentation au Parlement', *L'Ikdam* 30 September 1921.

⁹⁵ PR, 'Pour l'Algérie majeure, l'exemple tripolitain', *L'Ikdam*, 13 May 1921.

French government. Conservative French commentators accused the Italians of sowing discord in Algeria by throwing glitter in the eyes of the natives with liberal policies of equality that would never work. A newspaper in Constantine was contemptuous of the Young Algerians' use of 'Italian liberalism' to request their own 'Constitution' because later developments in Libya had shown how wrong Italians had been. 'How much more advised and adapted to the true interests of the natives, and how much more liberal, the policy practiced in North Africa by France, a policy of economic betterment, assistance and social protections.'⁹⁶

It was difficult to keep French and Italian colonial developments separate. When Italians did something 'positive' to 'their' Muslims, events in Libya could be used both to put pressure on the French government to grant similar privileges. When Italians behaved 'badly' with 'their' Muslims, events in Libya could be used to mobilise Muslims within Algeria in a way that seemed less directly hostile to France. This is what the Young Algerians' political heirs did most spectacularly against the fascist regime in 1939.

1939: using the invasion of Albania to distinguish between imperialisms

In April 1939, over 25,000 people assembled at the Muslim cemetery in Constantine 'in the most perfect order'. They were part of at least 30 simultaneous demonstrations across the whole *département*, all together by far the largest public demonstrations ever staged by Muslims in Algeria. In the cemetery, the assembly 'mourned' for Albania 'a small Muslim people of 1.25 million inhabitants' recently

⁹⁶ *Dépêche de l'Est* (Bône), 30 March 1921 in ANOM/GGA/29H13.

invaded by Italy.⁹⁷ Once again, the invasion of Muslims by a predatory European power brought unprecedented mobilisation. The demonstration was led by Dr Bendjelloul, head of the Constantine *Fédération des élus*, an organisation of Muslim elected officials that was in many ways the successors to the Young Algerians of *L'Ikdam*. The demonstration had been advertised in Bendjelloul's newspaper, *L'Entente franco-musulmane*. Participants proclaimed their loyalty to France in the face of the threat of fascist expansion, and the demonstration was legal, though once again the ambiguous meaning of the political action made authorities nervous. Were this many Algerians really coming out in solidarity with the little Albania, or was there an 'implicit' analogy, in the words of historian Julien Fromage, between Imperial France and Italy on the one hand, and the Algerian and Albanian peoples on the other?⁹⁸

The point here is not to wonder, as surveillance reports did, what Bendjelloul 'really' wanted to do and whether he was engaging in a form of doublespeak by pretending to care about Albania. Rather, the ambiguous meaning of demonstrating against Italy was the motor of a certain loyalist mode of Muslim politics embraced by Bendjelloul as a successor of the first Young Algerian politicians.

After the brief liberal moment around the Libyan status in 1919, with the rise of the fascist regime from 1922 onwards, the problem brutally flipped over once again, as Italian actions in Libya became a liability for the French government in Algeria. As recent historiography has shown, the fascist government did not mark a change of colonial policy in Libya, only an intensification of methods which became increasingly brutal, culminating with the forced removal of most of the population of Cyrenaica to make way

⁹⁷ Report, 11 April 1939, ANOM/GGA/3R16.

⁹⁸ Julien Fromage, 'Innovation politique et mobilisation de masse en "situation coloniale" un "printemps algérien" des années 1930? L'expérience de la Fédération des Elus Musulmans du Département de Constantine', Doctoral Thesis, EHESS, 2012, p.540.

for Italian settlement.⁹⁹ However, French governments were much more worried about being associated with fascist policy than they had been about comparison with its liberal predecessor.

In 1924, as the heads of the French governments in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia met in Rabat, the governor-general of Tripolitania, count Volpi, planned to travel to Morocco at the same time. Italian newspapers had already celebrated ‘the need for a Franco-Italian moral union as to the duty to civilise Arab and Muslim countries lost in an obscure regression’. The French Resident-General in Tunis, was vehemently opposed to Volpi’s presence, which would taint France by association with the ‘policy of ruthless extermination’ that the Italians were pursuing in Tripolitania, and thus ‘compromise us in the eyes of all our Muslim subjects’.¹⁰⁰

This desire to keep Italian actions in Libya at bay fluctuated with diplomatic tension between France and Italy. Carbillet, the overly pro-Italian colonel posted to the Libyan-Algerian border who opens this chapter, visited Libya in the spring of 1935, during a brief opening in relations. In January 1935, the French and Italian governments had signed the Rome Accords which normalised their relations in an attempt to garner Italian support against German expansion. By the autumn of 1935, however, Italy was toxic again – Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia had provoked widespread international indignation and risked stoking further anti-imperial sentiments in French North Africa. Ethiopia, once again, acted as a proxy for Algerian politics: Muslim politicians organised demonstrations against the invasion of Ethiopia in Paris. The headquarters of the

⁹⁹ Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: colonial legacy, exile and the emergence of a new nation-state*, (London, 2010). For the historiography of Italian colonialism in English see Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (eds.), *Italian Colonialism*, (Basingstoke), 2005. The best summary is Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana*, (Bologna, 2002).

¹⁰⁰ Resident-General in Tunis to MAE, 20 March 1924, ANOM/GGA/29H10.

nationalist newspaper *El Ouma* in Paris even harboured the new *Africa* magazine out of solidarity with Africans under imperialist aggression.¹⁰¹

The problem was that as fascist policies became increasingly extreme, they also tried to make Libya more and more like Algeria. Even more than its liberal predecessor, the fascist regime used Algeria as the principal model for Italian settlement plans. When in 1927 the Minister of Colonies, Luigi Federzoni, brought a settlement project to Parliament, he based his numbers on the Algerian model, alleging that only 300,000 Italians would be necessary to ‘submerge’ the Libyan population ‘just as today 824,000 Europeans appear to submerge 4.5 million natives in Algeria.’¹⁰²

This Libyan-Algerian connection has been completely overlooked in the historiography. Unlike in Tunisia, Italian interest in Algeria was not primarily in order to take it over, but more indirectly as an administrative model for the development of Libya.¹⁰³ In 1934, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan were reorganised into a single colony. Italian authorities wrote to the French government to ask for ‘a complete literature on the organisation of the Algerian Southern Territories’, which they obligingly sent over. Subsequently, ‘largely inspired’ by this literature, Libya was reorganised into four Northern prefectures while the South was placed under direct military administration, following the model of Algeria’s three *départements* and military *Territoires du Sud* in Algeria [Figure 26].¹⁰⁴ In late 1938, Mussolini announced plans to assimilate Libya fully into Italian territory, ending its status as a colony. The law of 9 January 1939 put this into effect, leading the largest newspaper in Algeria, *La dépêche algérienne* to say that Libya had become ‘an Italian Algeria’.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperialist Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism*, (Cambridge, 2015), pp.113, 169-171.

¹⁰² Quoted in Cresti, *Oasi di italianità*, xxiii.

¹⁰³ Juliette Bessis, *La Méditerranée fasciste. L'Italie mussolinienne et la Tunisie*, Paris: Karthala, 1981.

¹⁰⁴ Consul in Tripoli to MAE, 23 August 1934, ANOM/GGA/29H13.

¹⁰⁵ *La dépêche algérienne*, 7 October 1938.



Figure 26 *Administrative map of Libya in Arcangelo Ghisleri's Atlantino storico (1938). The map shows the reorganisation of Libya into four Northern provinces and Southern Military territories.*

The invasion of Albania and Algerian demonstrations against it occurred in a context where French and Italian imperialism were both more antagonistic and closer than ever. In January 1939, Italian authorities repeated their strategy of 1919, borrowing from French laws. They instituted a 'special statute' for Libyans, which in effect deprived them of the possibility of becoming full Italian citizens despite living on what was now fully Italian territory. As people in France and Algeria debated the Blum-Viollette plan that would have seen a small fraction of Algerian Muslims granted full citizenship rights, Italians claimed their new statute was more liberal as it applied to more categories of people than did Blum-Viollette.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ This statute 'extends to categories much more numerous than the Viollette plan, which is not, believe it, a coincidence'. Capitaine Macquart, 'L'Italie en Libye : conférence faite aux officiers de l'Active et de Réserve de Constantine le 11 février 1939', ANOM/GGA/29H/13.

By this stage, with all-out European conflict looming on the horizon, Italian and French propaganda in North Africa were already in open war about who had the most generous policies towards Muslims. Italian propaganda attempted to paint Italy as a friend of the Muslims, with a great show of illustrated pamphlets, radio shows and carefully staged ceremonies, as when Mussolini coaxed Libyans into ‘spontaneously’ offering up the ‘Sword of Islam’ to him in Tripoli.¹⁰⁷ The Italian radio in Arabic, Radio-Bari, which transmitted across the Mediterranean to Algeria, talked extensively about all the privileges enjoyed by Libyans under Italian rule, and Radio-Alger counterattacked with a detailed discussion in Arabic and Tamazight, pointing out that the benefits that Libyans enjoyed were far inferior to those already possessed by Algerians.¹⁰⁸

During the invasion of Albania, in April 1939, Radio-Bari stressed that Albania had already been part of the Roman Empire, that the Italian takeover had been consensual and that Albanians had welcomed Italians gleefully. Radio-Alger counter-attacked by broadcasting the number of Italian and Albanian dead.¹⁰⁹

Bendjelloul and his newspaper *L'Entente* made it clear that in this war, they stood on the French side against Italian ambitions. Bendjelloul sent a telegram to the Governor-General, proclaiming the profound emotion and indignation of Algerian Muslims towards the Italian invasion of Albania, while proclaiming that France remained ‘the first Muslim power’.¹¹⁰ The difference between the funding campaign of 1911 and the demonstrations of 1939, however, was that this time there were more radical organised voices in Constantine. While Bendjelloul and the *Fédération des élus* played the game of praising France against Italy in order to further the cause of Muslim Algerians, others rejected all imperialism equally.

¹⁰⁷ Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*.

¹⁰⁸ GGA to Interior, 3 December 1938, ANOM/GGA/3R16.

¹⁰⁹ 8 April 1939, ANOM/GGA/3R16.

¹¹⁰ 8 April 1939, ANOM/GGA/3R16.

Newspapers affiliated with the Association of the Algerian Muslim Ulama, founded in 1931 by Abd-al-Hamid ibn Badis [Ben Badis], criticised European imperial powers for their attempts to attract Arabs by competing propaganda. After the Albanian invasion, *Al Basa'ir*, repeated this line of argument. On its front page, it claimed that 'in the war of the waves (*al-harb al-athiriyya*), we are in between Radio-Bari and Radio-Algiers':

'They throw in each other's faces the arbitrary acts of oppression that they both perpetrate against nations and peoples under their yoke. (...) What is most surprising is that each one accuses the other of what they themselves do not abstain from doing. Thus colonialism denounces itself (*fa-kashafa al-isti'mar nafsahu bi-nafsihi*) and divulges to weakened and enslaved peoples their common suffering and woes which they would have never noticed if enraged colonialism had not attacked itself.'¹¹¹

For *Al Basa'ir*, competition between colonial powers was a breach through which one could attack the structure of colonialism itself, a structure that was shared by all European powers together. In this new, more systematic analysis of colonialism, differences between European colonialism were merely a narcissism of minor differences, and all its manifestations had to be combatted. In January 1938, *Al Shihab* printed photographs of Moroccan, Libyan, and Palestinian nationalist leaders who had died at the hands of imperialist powers, proclaiming them all equally 'victims of colonialism' (*dahaya al-isti'mar*) whether French, Italian, or British.¹¹² While the Young Algerians' political activity was dedicated to reforming colonialism, and thus drew on other models of colonialism as examples (positive or negative) to change Algeria, *Al-Shihab* and *Al-Basa'ir* proclaimed all forms of colonialism to be one and the same.

¹¹¹ *El Bassair*, 12 May 1939.

¹¹² Respectively Mohammed el Qorri, Omar al Mukhtar and Farhan al-Saadi, *Al-Shihab*, January 1938, 3CAB28.

Conclusion

The settler press and the Young Algerians' press did not have the same audience, and they are rarely written about together. But both groups tried to use Algeria's status as a part of France to gain political advancement. It is in this respect that the two case-studies of 1897-1901 and 1911-1939 are similar. Beyond their readers, they had another audience: the French government in Paris, and the metropolitan public. This was a politics that did not contest colonial rule, and that required metropolitan attention to advance reforms. Both were accused of acting against the interests of France, of promoting separatism and threatening the unity of the Republic, but both used other imperial powers as foils to emphasise their strong relationship to France, in order to push their political agenda within the Republic. Sometimes, they agitated the possibility of foreign takeover. At others, they held up other empires as models for the betterment of France. Newspapers connected events involving other imperial powers to make them 'domestic'. Foreign news took on a very specific meaning, as the kind of news that could score points for Algerians in Paris. Algerians, however, evolved in a world much wider than just France, and never made their political claims in just one arena. To make political claims against each other, they also used foreign news in different ways, to which we turn in the next chapter.

5. Witnessing the World: mobilisation for Spain and Palestine, 1929-1939

Tlemcen, 1938. Local activists received a pamphlet from Cairo, entitled 'Palestine the martyr' (*Filastin al-shahida*). Muhammad Ali Tahar of the Arab Palestinian Committee had sent the tract to some of the most prominent Muslim politicians in Algeria. In Tlemcen, some men tried to get the pamphlet republished but it was seized by French surveillance. In the midst of the Arab Revolt against the British Mandate in Palestine (1936-9), the text justified the resistance of its inhabitants as a case of legitimate self-defence when faced with the possible disappearance of an Arab Palestine. The text mentioned numerous specific acts of violence committed against Palestinian Arabs:

'Have you heard the news of Palestine the martyr? The sacred Arab Palestine, the land of the al-Aqsa Mosque, whose surroundings we have blessed, the first *qibla*, the Third Holy Place and the land of the lord the Messiah, the Prophet of mercy and peace?'¹

In the 1930s, the word 'martyr' (*martyr/e* or *shahid/a*) was one of the most common ones to be found next to Palestine in the Algerian press.² The use of religious imagery to discuss Palestine, land of numerous holy sites, is not particularly surprising. However, many other countries were called 'martyrs' both in Arabic and in French. In 1920, one of the foundational texts of the Tunisian nationalist movement was Abdelaziz Tha'albi's book *La Tunisie Martyre: ses revendications*.³ Libya, whose enduring suffering

¹ SHD Vincennes, 10 January 1938, Moscow files, 7NN/2297. The banned pamphlet is also discussed in ANOM/GGA/15H25.

² *El Ouma*, 'La Palestine martyre', December 1937. *Al Shibab*, 'Filastin al-shahida', August 1938. Préfecture d'Alger, 20 April 1939, 'Répercussions en milieux indigènes de l'agression italienne en Albanie', ANOM/GGA/9H42

³ Abdelaziz Tha'albi, *La Tunisie martyre: ses revendications*, (Paris, 1920).

under fascist rule was of great concern to Algerians, as seen previously, was also dubbed a martyr.⁴

The word 'martyr' is not just a more religious way of saying 'victim'. In both Christian and Islamic contexts, a 'martyr' is, etymologically, a 'witness'.⁵ The martyr is a person whose suffering bears witness to a higher truth. A victim's suffering is meaningless, while a martyr carries truth for the whole community of believers. In death, the martyr shows what is right and wrong and opens a path for salvation for the rest of the community.

At one point, the text of the pamphlet singled out an individual martyr, the 75 year-old *shaykh* Ferhane Essaadi who had died at the hands of the British. It is well known that individual martyrs are an essential feature of modern nationalism. In Algeria as in many other places, the cult of individuals dead for the nation occupies a central role in the national imaginary.⁶ But the text primarily referred to the entirety of Palestine as a martyr, like many others in this period.

What does it mean to refer to a whole country as witness to a truth? No one in Algeria claimed to be Palestinian, only that Palestine's suffering made their own predicaments visible. Before martyrs for the nation could exist, before there could be monuments to unknown soldiers for whom flames would be lit, there were distant places whose suffering made action in Algeria urgent. Before the nation could have its martyrs, there were martyr nations.

Calling Palestine, Tunisia or Libya 'martyrs' meant that news of developments there carried lessons for others. News of foreign places became a way to see political

⁴ *Al-Najah*, 24 January 1939.

⁵ The Greek *martus/marturos* (from which the word 'martyr' is derived) means witness, as does the Arabic *shahid*, linked to such words as *shahada*, to testify, to bear witness.

⁶ In Algeria since 1962, a martyr (*shahid*) is a person who died in the struggle for independence against France. The 'Monument to the Martyr' (*Maqam al-shahid*) built in 1982 for the 20th anniversary of independence, dominates the Algiers skyline. It is the functional equivalent of Tombs to Unknown Soldiers in many other cities across the world. McDougall, *History and the culture of nationalism*, pp.144-184. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp.9-10.

truths at home. This chapter follows a number of activists in interwar Algeria and shows how foreign news fed into their political mobilisation. While the previous chapter showed how Algerians used foreign news to make claims to the French government, here the focus is on foreign news in a pluralistic political environment within Algeria. This is particularly visible in the intense political activity of the interwar period which saw both the emergence of mass politics among Muslims and an increasingly violent polarisation of European politics.

First, this chapter looks at how news contributed to local political polarisation between left and right, using the case of the Spanish Civil War. It then moves on to show that the meaning of foreign events was not always clear, looking at how developments in the British Mandate of Palestine proved ambiguous in Algerian politics. It concludes by re-examining the role of foreign news in the emergence of Muslim political movements and especially in the development of Algerian nationalism.

Gazing at the political landscape of the interwar period is a different exercise to that of the preceding chapters. As a new kind of formalised party politics took over Algeria, sources suddenly become much more abundant and of a different nature. As we have seen in the first chapter, this was a period of rapid changes in the consumption of news with the introduction of the radio and a boom of the Muslim press. Parties themselves played a crucial role in this news ecosystem: partisan newspapers, pamphlets, posters and conferences became important vectors of information. Faced with increasing urban political activity, surveillance changed too. No longer were local administrators solely responsible for producing intelligence reports on their area. After 1934, a new centralised service for each *département*, the *Centre d'Information et d'Etude* centralised intelligence on political activity.⁷

⁷ On changes in policing and surveillance in North Africa during the interwar period see Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918-1940*, (Cambridge, 2012).

Moreover, in this period, the flow of migration definitively reversed. No longer did European settlers come into Algeria, Muslim Algerians now crossed the sea northwards for employment in French factories.⁸ A new group of men gained access to different kinds of news through migration. A new world solidified, a world of single men in the factories of Saint-Étienne and Roubaix, crowded hostels in Barbès and dockyards in Marseille, a world of cafés where men played dominos after a day of work, discussed the victories of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, and sang mournful songs of nostalgia for the mountains of the homeland. Yet this movement did not affect all places the same: over two thirds of workers came from Kabylia, often from a very limited cluster of villages.⁹ In the regions where they were from, the constant to-and-fro of migrant men, along with letters and newspapers from France, made metropolitan news much closer than before.¹⁰

In other regions, however, it was only the outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence in the 1950s, with the return of the French army, that would bring new relations with the outside world.¹¹ The explosion of paper did not mean that the other world disappeared. The majority of Algerians in this period remained rural, illiterate, and not necessarily involved in new political forms, though increasing contacts with the cities and the radio were lessening these differences. Our sources make it look like the world of party competition was the only one that mattered, but this is in some ways an optical illusion. Rumours, prophecies and marketplaces continued to play their part, but they were increasingly overshadowed.

While there was change, part of the reason why this story looks so drastically different is due to the historiography rather than developments at the time. Among all

⁸ The literature on this subject is vast. In English, see Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism: Algerians in France, 1900-1962*, (London, 1997). Rabah Aissaoui, *Immigration and National identity: North African political Movements in Colonial and Postcolonial France*, (London, 2009). For studies integrating Algerians into wider patterns of labour immigration to France see Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity*, (Minneapolis, 1996).

⁹ Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, p.36.

¹⁰ Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*.

¹¹ Fabbiano, 'Pour moi, l'Algérie, c'est les Béni-Boudouane'.

the interwar political activity emerged a small group of activists calling for the independence of an Algerian nation-state from France. Given the subsequent success of this activism, the teleology of an inexorable rise of Algerian nationalism culminating in independence has weighed heavily on this period. The 1930s are probably the best-studied period of Algerian history before the war of independence (1954-1962). Indeed, some of the prominent activists of that period like Charles-André Julien would later write historical works whose impact endures to this day.¹² Recent scholarship has worked against this teleology, producing fine studies of political parties in interwar Algeria, and showing local contacts and political exchanges between European and Muslim spheres rather than an inevitable rise of Algerian nationalism.¹³

There has been a vast debate as to the origins of Algerian nationalism, which is the dominant question in the historiography to this day. For a strand of nationalist historiography, largely written by the *ulama* movement and its supporters, the Algerian nation had always already been there, it only needed to be awakened – French occupation was but a wave, albeit a strong one, that had crashed against but not changed the bedrock of the Algerian people, their fundamental Arab and Muslim identity.¹⁴

By contrast, a French liberal narrative stresses how Algerian nationalism came out of a failure to secure civil rights within the French Republic. This narrative goes

¹² The first major history of modern Algeria in French was written by the communist and later socialist activist Charles-André Julien. On the historiographical consequences of this work see Claire Marynower, 'Être socialiste dans l'Algérie coloniale. Pratiques, cultures et identités d'un milieu partisan dans le département d'Oran, 1919-1939', Doctoral thesis, Sciences Po, 2013.

¹³ Omar Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad: histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens*, (Paris, 1995). In English see Jane Goodman, 'Acting with One Voice: Producing Unanimism in Algerian Reformist Theater', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2013, 55:1, pp.167-197. Joshua Cole, 'Constantine before the Riots of August 1934: civil status, anti-Semitism, and the politics of assimilation in interwar French Algeria', *Journal of North African Studies*, 17:5, 2012, pp.839-861 and Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism: The Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919-1939*, (London, 2013). Recent works in French on this subject include Marynower, 'Être socialiste dans l'Algérie coloniale' and Fromage, 'L'expérience de la Fédération des Elus Musulmans'.

¹⁴ For a critique of this historiography see McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*. On the production of history in independent Algeria see also Hassan Remaoun, 'L'intervention institutionnelle et son impact sur la pratique historiographique en Algérie: la politique "d'écriture et de Réécriture de l'histoire", tendances et contre-tendances', *Insaniyat* 19-20, 2003, pp 7-40 and Malika Rahal 'Fused Together and Torn Apart: Stories and Violence in Contemporary Algeria', *History & Memory*, 24:1, 2012, pp.118-151. For a more updated and sophisticated examples of this kind of narrative see Mahfoud Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien. Question nationale et politique algérienne 1919-1951*, (Algiers, 1993).

something like this: the election of the *Front Populaire* government in 1936 in France led to huge hopes of reforming colonialism and granting Muslims civil rights within the Republic with the Blum-Viollette Plan. The failure of this reform dashed the possibility for Muslims to gain emancipation through the Republic, and set them on a crash-course with France that would culminate in the war of independence. From the rejection of the metropole came the birth of the Algerian nation.¹⁵

James McDougall has pointed out the limitations of this narrative of ‘Algeria-and-France’, namely that it is only through contact with France that Algerian history moved forward. McDougall also criticises the inverse of that narrative, developed by the *ulama*, for whom travel East to the pure, uncolonised central lands of the Ottoman Empire and Arab world offered the opportunity to rediscover the Arab Muslim nation and reimport it back to Algeria. McDougall points out that there was no such pure escape – neither directions of travel could escape the world created by the conquest after 1830. Algerian nationalism, according to McDougall, came out of the world made by colonialism, but not only out of a French refusal to grant certain rights.¹⁶

The present chapter builds on this recent scholarship critical of nationalist historiography in Algeria, and puts it in conversation with another body of scholarship on the rise of the international system in the same period. Dividing news between ‘national’ and ‘international’ has become so fundamental to our way of relating to the world that it is difficult not to use this vocabulary when discussing news, but the division partly dates back to this period.

The settlement of the First World War in 1919 enshrined the principle of a world of independent ‘nations’ with an ‘international’ body arbitrating between them. The works of Susan Pedersen and Erez Manela have made it clear that the League of Nations

¹⁵ The classic is Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*. On this rhetoric of missed opportunities (*occasions manquées*) see Claire Marynowar, ‘Réformer l'Algérie ? Des militants socialistes en “situation coloniale” dans l'entre-deux guerres’, *Histoire@Politique*, 13, 2011, www.histoire-politique.fr, accessed 3 October 2014.

¹⁶ McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*.

and other emerging international institutions spread the concept of national self-determination far beyond its intended audiences in Europe. Algerians were one of those unintended audiences. Unlike the League's Mandates, Algeria was legally a part of France and subject to very little international scrutiny in this period, yet the ideals put forth by the League had an impact there. International historians, looking downward from events in Paris and Geneva, have not paid much attention to this. Instead, the back-and-forth between foreign news and local politics built Algerians' understanding of the world through a national/international dichotomy.¹⁷

This chapter locates the emergence of the nationalist movement in a process of mediation between changes in the international system and political struggles within Algeria, when the new language of national self-determination seemed like an appealing way to solve political problems. As seen in previous chapters, Algerians were never isolated from the world, and they did not suddenly discover outside powers or themselves in this period. Rather, the existing literature on Algerian nationalism has not delved into the fact that an Algerian nation only made sense on an *international* stage. Algerians made many varied claims to political sovereignty throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it was only in the interwar period that these claims took on the form of an Algerian nation existing proudly alongside others on the world stage. If there was an international stage, then Algerians needed to become a nation to play on it. Processes of witnessing other nations were thus central to the emergence of a nationalist movement.

Most accounts of the development of Algerian nationalism, and more broadly, of the development of anti-colonial politics across the world, point to the importance of

¹⁷ Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations' *American Historical Review*, 2007, 4, pp.1091-1117 and 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood' *American Historical Review*, 2010, 115, 4, pp. 975-1000. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, (Oxford, 2007). Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*.

travel and contact.¹⁸ This chapter lays the basis to argue that the circulation of news was at least as important as physical travel, and that distance could be as politically productive as contact.

Bipolar: communism, fascism, and the Spanish Civil War

In 1937, a Spanish journalist named Francisco Aragón Rodríguez, operating under the pseudonym Franquise, created a commotion in the region of Oran by distributing pictures of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. The newspaper for which he worked, *ABC*, had already been banned in Algeria, but this did not stop him from trying to spread the cause.¹⁹ Throughout the Oran region, violent incidents were becoming disturbingly regular. Spanish consular staff and teachers in Spanish schools allied to the Republican side were under attack by sympathisers of Franco's insurrection.²⁰ That same month, a bomb had erupted in front of a restaurant in nearby Sidi bel Abbès where the leftist *député* for Oran, Marius Dubois, was having dinner.²¹ This attack upon a politician representing Algeria in the French Parliament was also connected to events in Spain.

In the 1930s, the violent polarisation of politics between left and right in Algeria was inseparable from events in Spain. Around Oran especially, in the region where Spanish influence was strongest, 'fascism and antifascism fought a concealed war whose

¹⁸ For the French context see Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, Aissaoui, *Immigration and National identity* and Claude Liauzu, *Aux origines des Tiers-Mondismes. Colonisés et anticolonialistes en France, 1919-1939*, (Paris, 1982). The literature on anti-colonial networks in London and the British Empire is especially vast, for a sophisticated argument about proximity see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, (Durham, NC, 2006).

¹⁹ *ABC* had by this stage split into two publications, one, on the Republican side, had remained in Madrid, while a Seville edition worked for the nationalist side. Given his choice of portraits, Aragón Rodríguez presumably worked for the Sevillian edition. MAE, Algérie, K/9, Robert Montagne, 'La fermentation des partis politiques en Algérie', *Politique étrangère*, April 1937.

²⁰ MAE/Algérie/K9. See also Claire Marynower, 'The full place of power: interwar Oran, the French empire's bullring?', *Journal of North African Studies*, 2013, 18:5, pp.690-702 and Jansen, 'Celebrating the Nation'.

²¹ Marynower, 'Être socialiste', p.595.

real stakes was the political regime of the Western Mediterranean.²² News of the Spanish Civil War in Algeria came to be organised according to a certain parallelism: a victory there was a victory here too.

In 1936 there was a rapid synchronisation between events in Spain and in France. In January, Spanish leftist parties announced the *Frente Popular* alliance, which won elections the next month. Tensions grew between supporters and opponents of the *Frente Popular* to the extent that by the time of the French elections in May 1936, Spanish divisions had already become a political argument in Algeria. In May 1936, the far-right in Oran had summoned the spectre of Spain to call upon European Algerian electors not to vote for the French *Front Populaire* which was organised similarly to the Spanish one. When the *Front Populaire* won legislative elections in May 1936, propelling socialist Léon Blum to power, a phase of intense, even festive political activity erupted in Algeria around the possibility of reforms for Muslims. In July 1936, Spanish military forces under general Franco declared a coup against the *Frente Popular* government, launching a bloody struggle for control of Spain that would last until 1939.

The *Front Populaire* is a well-known turning-point in Algerian history, as it led the formation of the first Algerian Muslim Congress (to which we will return later) yet in this literature the wider regional context of this activity often fades away. At the time, however, Spain was quite literally central, lying in between metropolitan France and Algeria. East and West of Algeria, the grip of fascism seemed to be tightening: east lay fascist Italy with its eyes firmly set on taking over Tunisia, west was turmoil in Spain. In the summer of 1936, Italian forces took advantage of disruption in Spain to seize control of the Balearic island of Majorca. As the island lay straight on the sea-route between Algiers and Marseille, it seemed like Algeria might soon be surrounded by fascist forces.

²² Francis Koerner, 'Les répercussions de la guerre d'Espagne en Oranie (1936-1939)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 22 :3, 1975, p.487.

Should the nationalists win in Spain, it seemed to many they would also take over in Oranie, where at least half of the European population was of Spanish descent. In Oran, a war of influence took hold between the Spanish Republican consul and his Italian fascist counterpart who openly supported Spanish nationalists.²³

A new generation of activists came of age in the Spanish Civil War. In particular the French government's decision to remain neutral in the conflict while Italy, Germany and the USSR intervened, heavily outraged a number of leftist sympathisers. Among them was Alice Sportisse, who launched her national political career through solidarity towards Spain. Born to a Spanish family in Lavarande [Sidi Lakhdar] near Mostaganem in Western Algeria, Sportisse would become one of the first French female deputies in 1945, representing Algiers in the French Parliament on a communist list [**Figure 27**].²⁴

Sportisse had joined the Communist Party in 1935, at a time when longstanding political antagonisms were combining with wider geopolitical tension. From 1935 onwards, communism and fascism were engaged in an open battle for the Western Mediterranean. While left and right had long been at loggerheads in Oran, this conflict gave local political divides new meaning. The Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933-4 had caused the Soviet Union to prioritise the struggle against fascism. This 'popular front' policy of alliance with moderate leftist parties against fascism in a range of countries created a transnational struggle against common enemies. Around Oran, this strategy fit into existing political divides that had already led communists to ally with socialists: in 1934, the election of the far-right Gabriel Lambert as mayor had already cleft the political spectrum in half. Political violence had been spreading in France since far-right demonstrations against the government in Paris were repressed on 6 February 1934, provoking a durable crisis in Republican government. Political violence, however,

²³ GGA to MAE, 22 August 1937, MAE/Algérie/K9.

²⁴ Assemblée Nationale database on Members of Parliament, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche.asp?num_dept=6898, accessed 10/12/2015.

became far more prevalent in Algeria than in the metropole. As Claire Marynower has pointed out, while in the interwar period 41 people died in political violence in the entire metropole, at least six died during the same period in the *département* of Oran alone.²⁵



Figure 27 *Alice Sportisse, in her official portrait as députée in 1945*, source : Assemblée Nationale, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche.asp?num_dept=6898, accessed 10/12/2015.

Sportisse's political rise came out of her involvement in solidarity politics with Republican Spain. First, she became involved in relief efforts for Spanish Republicans who had fled to Oran. She rose rapidly through party ranks, being called to Paris to serve in national then international organisations providing assistance to Republican Spain. Like Sportisse, people in Oran became involved in conflict in Spain in very direct ways. As Oran was the closest free port to Spain's southern coast, just over 200km away from Cartagena, the city formed an important transit point to Spain. People mobilised funds: in May 1937, an Algerian Committee to Help Republican Spain was founded, while 25 December 1938 was declared 'National Day of Aid to Spain'.²⁶ Both sides sent volunteers to Spain, including Spanish and French citizens as well as Muslims. Though recruiting volunteers was banned from 1937 onwards, it continued covertly.²⁷ In the later phases of

²⁵ Marynower, 'Être socialiste', 813.

²⁶ Koerner 'Répercussions de la guerre d'Espagne'.

²⁷ 'Affaire du consulat d'Italie', August 1937, ANOM/GGA/3R21.

the war, the flow reversed and floods of refugees came into Algeria through Oran. In March 1939, a final wave of about 7,000 Spanish refugees retrenched in Alicante made their way to Oran, including most famously Dolores Ibárruri, the 'Pasionaria', as well the passengers aboard the *Stanbrook*.²⁸

For Sportisse, events in Spain made the necessity of the struggle against fascism visible to the whole world, compelling her to activism in Algeria. Socialists and communists used nationalist acts of violence in Spain to tarnish their enemies in Algeria. For their opponents on the right, news of Republican atrocities towards priests in Spain performed the exact same role. Longstanding ideologies of *latinité*, of a specific destiny of Latin people in North Africa, pushed far-right activists to call for an alliance between France, Fascist Italy and Nationalist Spain.²⁹ The figurehead of the Algerian right, the defrocked priest Gabriel Lambert, visited Franco repeatedly in Spain.³⁰

There had been outbursts of violence among the European population within Algeria before, for instance during the anti-Jewish crisis described in the previous chapter. But the transnational war between fascism and communism mobilised unprecedented social depths. Both sides turned to evangelising not just those who held citizenship, that is adult French men, but also women, Muslims, and even children. The general meeting of the Algerian Communist Party in 1937, for instance, featured 60 delegates: according to surveillance reports, while the majority of these (around 35) were European men, there were also 5 European women, including Sportisse herself, and 20 'natives'.³¹ Communists pushed their propaganda efforts towards Muslim women, and to

²⁸ Marynowar, 'Être socialiste', 657.

²⁹ Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*.

³⁰ Francis Koerner, 'Les répercussions de la guerre d'Espagne en Oranie (1936-1939)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 22 :3, 1975, p.487.

³¹ Police report on the Second Congress of the Algerian Communist Party, 20 December 1937, ANOM/3CAB42.

the great confusion of authorities, Muslim women participated in marches around the election of the Front Populaire on 14 July 1936 [Figure 28].³²



Figure 28 Stills from documentary film made by French Communist Party, *Le voyage de Maurice Thorez en Algérie* (1939) depicting Secretary Maurice Thorez's trip 29 January-12 February 1939. The second still is from a meeting in Oran, with prominent displays of banners in support of Republican Spain. The third still is from a meeting in Bône, where the camera and commentator lingered on the symbolism of the presence of Muslim women. The film is part of the PCF's audiovisual archive Ciné-Archives and can be watched online <http://www.cinearchives.org/Catalogue-d-exploitation-494-65-0-0.html>, accessed 15 February 2016.

³² Note on the political situation of Algeria, 30 September 1936, ANOM/11H48. On the 14 July celebrations see Jansen, 'Celebrating the "Nation"'.

Both far-right and far-left attempted to woo Muslims with mixed results. By 1937, both Nationalist and Republican Spain were broadcasting radio programmes in Arabic that could be heard in Algeria.³³ While the communist party in Algeria had started as an organisation of the European working class, by 1936 communists were aggressively trying to recruit Muslim members. The new Algerian Communist Party (PCA), having assumed an identity autonomous from the French Communist Party, participated in the first Algerian Muslim Congress. An alliance of groups in favour of moderate reforms to increase the civil rights of Algerian Muslims, the Congress met triumphantly in the summer of 1936 alongside the electoral success of the leftist *Front Populaire* government in France. Aside from the communists, it comprised the Federation of Muslim Elected Officials (the *Fédération des Elus*) led by Bendjelloul and the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulama (AUMA) led by Abdelhamid Ibn Badis who we met in the previous chapter.

Communist links with Muslim politics are better known in the historiography, but French far-right parties like the Croix de Feu and later the Parti Social Français (PSF), as well as the Parti Populaire Français (PPF), also tried to draw Muslims in.³⁴ Their interactions with Muslims are, on the whole, vastly understudied compared to those of parties on the left though there is evidence that they were effective in recruiting Muslim members, in particular among veterans. The PPF was overall a more popular party than the Communists in interwar Algeria. The PPF claimed to have 15,000 members in all of Algeria, and while these numbers were undoubtedly inflated, Communists could only claim a maximum of 5,000 members. The Algerian tour of the

³³ Secret police report, SEA Algiers, 13 February 1937, ANOM/3CAB29.

³⁴ The relations between these were complex, and their ideological relationship to each other is highly contested. Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*. On the ideological foundations of the French far right in general see Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Left Nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France*, (Princeton, 1995).

head of the PPF, Jacques Doriot in November 1936 drew large crowds: 6,000 people in Algiers, 4,000 in Sidi bel Abbès.³⁵

What is significant is not the success or failure of any individual party or group, but rather how their collective rise created a highly competitive environment. Indeed, boundaries between them were more porous and unstable than their bitter rivalry suggests. The PPF, for instance, an anti-Semitic far-right party, was founded by lapsed Communist Jacques Doriot. The head of the Algerian section of the PPF, Victor Arrighi, came to Algeria from Corsica in 1925 as a communist activist to incite strikes. By 1936, however, he had abandoned communism and founded the PPF along with Doriot.³⁶

All parties insisted that they were recruiting members to a global struggle, using outside examples to stress the legitimacy of their positions. In particular, they used foreign examples to bolster or diminish their claims of being better friends to Muslims. Communists used the experience of Muslims in Central Asia under Soviet rule as models. Strategy meetings noted that in order to attract the Muslim masses, activists had to organise talks on Soviet Muslim republics.³⁷ The founding manifesto of the PCA proclaimed that the Algerian people ‘turns its eyes towards the USSR, where Muslim peoples as other peoples, yesterday oppressed by czarism, are now free and happy under the Soviet regime.’³⁸ A list of brochures seized by the *Sûreté* for classes given by the communist party included one on ‘Soviet Turkestan’ by a certain Sorcet: the summary indicated that ‘those that live under a colonial regime, as we do in Algeria, can easily see what Algeria would become if it became, like Turkestan, SOVIET.’³⁹ The PPF counter-attacked, claiming that Muslims would be grateful to France for saving them from ‘the

³⁵ ‘Note on the creation, activity and development of the Parti Populaire Français in Algeria’, ANOM/3CAB100.

³⁶ Surveillance note on Victor Arrighi, 7 December 1937, ANOM/3CAB100.

³⁷ French Association of the Friends of the Soviet Union, May 1937, ANOM/GGA/3CAB42.

³⁸ ‘Manifesto adopted by the Congress of the Algerian Communist Party, 17-18 October 1936, ANOM/GGA/3CAB24.

³⁹ Police report intercepting a letter to the person responsible for literature in each cell, 30 October 1936, ANOM/3CAB42.

fate that Muslims of the Soviet Union have undergone under Russian Communists.⁴⁰

Many officials in the Native Affairs Bureau assented, writing copious reports on how Islam was fundamentally incompatible with Communism based on the experience of Central Asians.⁴¹

By contrast, Italian fascists and their supporters emphasised the benefits Muslims gained under Mussolini. Compared to neighbouring Tunisia, Algeria was much less of a target for fascist propaganda, but still Italian Radio-Bari in Arabic blared forth that Italy was the friend of Muslims against Communism. Mussolini attempted to portray himself as a global champion of Muslims, and in 1937, he made a great show of his trip to Libya in which the ‘Sword of Islam’ was ‘spontaneously’ given to him by Muslim leaders. Italians developed contacts with pan-Arab activists like Shakib Arslan in Geneva, who enjoyed close relations with many nationalist activists across North Africa.⁴² As fascist propaganda towards Muslims in North Africa grew more intense, leftist publications attacked the hypocrisy of Italian pro-Muslim policy given their atrocities in Libya. The Communist-dominated *Oran républicain* denounced the ‘unprecedented bluff’ of fascism’s claim to be the ‘natural defender of Muslim peoples struggling against European colonialism.’⁴³ Each side accused the other of merely being the puppets of foreign powers, of sowing division and working against the interests of France. For those on the left, Algerian fascists and their sympathisers were merely doing the bidding of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. For those on the right, the *Front populaire* and its Republican friends in Spain were propped up by the Soviet Union.

Indeed, while in the West of Algeria around Oran it was Spanish activists who were most prominent, around the Eastern border Italians were the ones mobilising on

⁴⁰ Paul Guitard in *La Liberté*, 15 December 1937, 3CAB100.

⁴¹ This is visible in the lengthy report on the political situation of Algeria after the Centenary of the conquest on 31 January 1931, ANOM/GGA/11H48.

⁴² William Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism*, (Austin, 1985),

⁴³ *Oran républicain*, 22 september 1937.

both sides. In 1935, Italian communists flooded the port of Bône with leaflets encouraging workers not to support the invasion of Ethiopia, while fascist pamphlets and brochures alleged that Italy had freed Muslims in Ethiopia from the oppression of Orthodox Christians.⁴⁴ In 1938 in the mining region around Tébessa a certain Hippolyte Rina, allegedly converted to Islam under the name Mohamed ben Abdallah, was arrested for speaking in favour of Mussolini and insulting the French flag. In the same town, two Italian anti-fascist activists, having escaped deportation in the Lipari islands, were holding a public meeting exhorting Muslims against fascism.⁴⁵

Even children became involved in the struggle between communism and fascism throughout Algeria. For instance, in Bône [Annaba] in 1937, twenty Italian children were about to board the train to Tunis to go away on summer camp to Italy. With the vice-consul present, they bid goodbye to their parents on the station platform, right arms straight out, with the fascist salute. The train conductors, in retaliation, raised their fists high in the sky, shouting ‘down with fascism!’ and refusing to let the train leave.⁴⁶ Incidents involving Italian children on summer camp were recurrent in Bône in the 1930s. In 1933, the head of the local police bureau resorted to interrogating children, hunting down the lyrics of an anti-French song allegedly taught in fascist summer camps in Italy. Eventually, he managed to get a kid to transcribe the lyrics of the rather explicit ‘E di Parigi ce ne fregiamo’, loosely translated as ‘and we don’t give a damn about Paris’.⁴⁷ Yet this was hardly limited to fascists – in nearby Philippeville, communists were running parallel summer camps.⁴⁸

As parties reached both deeper and broader than ever before, the result was a bombardment of political messages about foreign news. In a process similar to the

⁴⁴ Commissaire spécial de Bône to GGA, 4 June 1935, ANOM/3CAB29. List of banned brochures by GGA, 9 June 1939, ANOM/GGA/15H25.

⁴⁵ Civil and military authorities of Tébessa, 24 February 1938, ANOM/GGA/9H39.

⁴⁶ Police report from Bône, 1 July 1937, ANOM/3CAB29.

⁴⁷ Police report from Bône, 8 November 1933, ANOM/3CAB29.

⁴⁸ Note on the political situation of Algeria, 30 September 1936, ANOM/11H48.

increasing importance of pan-Islamism discussed in chapter 2, local polarisation and distant conflict reinforced each other. This time, however, it was not conflict between Muslims and Europeans but the struggle between left and right that brought those events closer. Spain after 1936 became the symbol of this divide, due to both its extreme violence and its close links to many Algerians. Spain seemed clear-cut because there were two sides, each of which had allies in Algeria, mirroring the conflict there. Foreign news from other places, however, was not so clear. Erupting at the same time as the Spanish Civil War, events in Palestine were much more ambiguous.

The Events of Palestine as seen by a North African, 1929-1939

In 1930, a man named Victor Spielmann published a book called *The Events of Palestine as seen by a North African*, from his house on the heights of Algiers. ‘Book’ is perhaps an overstatement, as the work was mainly a collage of various newspaper articles taken from across the French and North African press on the wave of violence that had swept Mandate Palestine in 1929 accompanied by Spielmann’s acerbic comments.⁴⁹ For Spielmann, events in Palestine were on the edge of ‘bursting into a world conflict, like those in the Balkans.’⁵⁰

A series of violent incidents in 1929 and then 1936-39 cemented the central place of Palestinian news in Algeria. One warm August week in 1929, in the face of increasing Jewish immigration, Palestinian Arabs rioted, killing 133 Jews, while the intervention of British police killed an estimated 110 Arabs. Following an uneasy quiet, Palestinian Arabs

⁴⁹ Victor Spielmann, *Les événements de Palestine vus par un Nord-Africain*, (Algiers, 1930).

⁵⁰ *La Tribune indigène algérienne*, janvier-février 1931.

called for a general strike in 1936, leading to a mass insurrection against British rule and Jewish immigration that would last until 1939.

While Spain offered a clear antagonism, the story of the Palestinian revolt seemed far less clear. Events in Palestine under the British Mandate held a mirror up to developments in Algeria, with a cast of actors (a European power, Jews and Muslims, settlers and natives) just familiar enough to be recognisable. Algerians, however, did not just manipulate events in Palestine instrumentally for their own political purposes back home. After all, this would suggest that people in Algeria already had clear political agendas separate from events on the Eastern side of the Mediterranean. Instead, the back-and-forth between events here and there helped actors to define the categories in which they operated and to forge larger political programmes. Palestine, in 1930s Algeria, was good to think with.

Palestine was especially important at a time in which political activism was challenging the internal boundaries of colonial society that divided Europeans, Muslims, and Jews. Alice Sportisse, for instance, born Alice Crémadès to a Spanish Catholic family, took her name from a Jew and fellow communist, Lucien Sportisse, whom she married in 1937. Communists saw Algeria as a ‘nation in formation’ which would emerge out of such ‘fusions’ across communities, but not everyone agreed, and events in Palestine could arguably offer confirmation that such community relations were impossible.⁵¹ Left/right political competition intersected in unpredictable ways with racial and religious community divisions.

Spielmann himself also crossed community boundaries. Born in 1886 in Alsace, he was one of the few Europeans to play an important role in Muslim politics in Algeria

⁵¹ The phrase was most famously used by the head of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, when he visited Algeria in February 1939.

[Figure 30].⁵² The son of small *colons* who were financially ruined like so many others in the economic crises of the late nineteenth century, Spielmann's political radicalisation had begun in early twentieth century anti-Jewish politics. His rather unique political trajectory then pushed him to sympathise with landless Muslim peasants. In 1910, for instance, he wrote a number of accusatory articles attributing the emigration of Muslims to Syria to the harshness of the French colonial system.⁵³

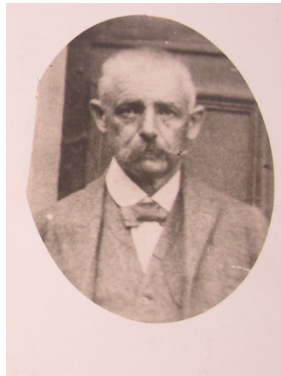


Figure 29 *Victor Spielmann, from his surveillance file*, SHD, Moscow Files, 7NN/3141-17.

In Spielmann's collection of newspaper articles published in 1930, it was clear that there were many different ways of reading events in Palestine, depending on one's ideological preference and on how many actors one thought were involved. *The Events of Palestine* provided a spectrum of different interpretations from across the francophone press in Algeria, France, Morocco, and Tunisia.

As the 1929 riots started over access to the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, the simplest reading of conflict in Palestine was that it was a religious war between Muslims and Jews. In this case the British were left out of the equation and the conflict seemed strangely medieval: 'we thought that civilisation had made religious wars

⁵² Surveillance note on Victor Spielmann, Service Historique de la Défense (SHD) Vincennes, Moscow files, 7NN/3141-17.

⁵³ Ageron, 'L'exode de Tlemcen'. On emigration to Syria see chapter 2, pp.129-131.

disappear forever', noted one newspaper.⁵⁴ However, most commentators at the time dismissed this purely religious explanation, seeing it instead as a 'clash of political and economic interests'.⁵⁵

A lively strand of anti-Semitic commentary blamed the violence in Palestine squarely on Jews refusal to assimilate: 'the situation of Jews, wherever they are, is overall pretty comfortable (...) there will no longer be a Jewish question anywhere, and no persecution, when the Jews will want to be only men.'⁵⁶ A uniquely European Algerian perspective felt sympathy for the 'very beautiful' attempt to establish settler colonialism among the Arabs, but criticised Zionists for doing it with the 'impetuous zeal of neophytes'. The problem was not trying to bring civilisation by kicking people off their land, but only that Jews were in charge of the process.⁵⁷

Conversely, the French Grand Rabbi Israël Levy blamed Muslim fanaticism for the violence, and further accused British imperial policy of pro-Muslim sympathy:

'In Palestine, most of these civil servants have started their career in the Indies. *The Muslim problem haunts them!* In the Indies, it is important for Great Britain to guarantee the sympathy of Muslims. (...) It is this policy that the British High Commission has applied in Palestine and that lies at the root of current events.'⁵⁸

For Levy therefore, British responsibility lay behind Muslim rage. Others went further still, blaming imperial Britain and her 'insatiable appetite' – in this reading, Zionism was 'used' by Britain to satisfy her aims, and both Arabs and Jews were mere pawns in the hands of London.⁵⁹

Yet another line of interpretation attributed events to an economic struggle for land. Violence, in this reading, stemmed from the Palestinian peasants' dispossession by Zionist land acquisition. 'This is a colonial problem' insisted a socialist paper. These

⁵⁴ *La voix indigène* (Constantine, 5 september 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 32.

⁵⁵ *L'Akhbar* (Algiers, 30 September 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 27.

⁵⁶ Christian Houel in *Annales Marocaines* (Tangier, 12 October 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 29.

⁵⁷ *La presse libre* (Algiers, 28 August 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 24.

⁵⁸ *L'Echo d'Alger* (Algiers, 28 August 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 9.

⁵⁹ *La Voix Indigène* de Constantine, 5 September 1929, quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 32.

commentators insisted on the necessity of distinguishing between Jews all over the world and Zionists in Palestine: '[Palestinians] are a peaceful population of small farmers, enemies of violence and who, in the past, have always lived on excellent terms with Jewish elements dispersed amidst them'.⁶⁰

Yet many publications had trouble distinguishing Zionists and Jews. Denunciations of Zionist dispossession frequently melded into a more general denunciation of capitalism, via the role of American Jewish capital in providing the funds to buy Palestinian land.⁶¹ When the ulama's publication *Al-Shihab* called upon Muslims to boycott Zionist businesses in 1932, because supporting their economic activity would help Jews 'reconstruct their homeland and take hold of the mosque in Jerusalem', it was unclear whether this included Jewish businesses in Algeria.⁶²

Leftist commentators in particular often equated colonial domination with capitalist monopoly. According to Lenin's influential analysis, European imperialism abroad was the result of an attempt to maintain economic monopolies and was thus 'the highest form of capitalism'.⁶³ Imperial explanation involving Britain, colonial ones involving Zionists, and economic ones involving a headless capitalism often melded into each other. Spielmann himself was a partisan of these more structural analyses, and particularly focused on issues of land which common to struggles in North Africa and Palestine: 'the Arabs of Palestine and of all colonised countries, are hostile not to Jewish colonisation but to all foreign colonisation which grabs land (*accapareuse de terres*)'.⁶⁴

For reasons covered in the previous chapter, Jews in Algeria had long since assumed a symbolic political importance far greater than their numbers. In the 1930s, the rise of anti-Semitism throughout Europe reinforced the tendency to see Jews as human

⁶⁰ *La presse libre* (Algiers, 28 August 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 24.

⁶¹ *L'Echo d'Alger* (Algiers, 17 August 1929), quoted in Spielmann, *Événements*, 6.

⁶² Quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 333.

⁶³ Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917, but this point was made even more strongly in the preface to the 1920 French and German edition.

⁶⁴ Spielmann, *Événements*, 90.

embodiments of various shadowy forces: capitalism, imperialism or the cosmopolitan forces of liberal democracy. In Algeria, the decade saw the reactivation of anti-Jewish politics that had never dissipated. Around Oran, for instance, the Liges Latines founded by Jules Molle dominated political life, advocating an alliance among the Latin race between Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians against both Arabs and Jews. Molle himself, after having been mayor of Oran, was elected to the French Parliament between 1928 and 1931, and it was the same anti-Jewish politics that would lead the Franco sympathiser Gabriel Lambert to power in 1934.⁶⁵

Spielmann, by 1930, had renounced his earlier anti-Jewish roots, but the influence of these ideas persisted – rootless Jewish money made poor people landless, whether they were European settlers in Algeria or Palestinian peasants. It was difficult to keep economic explanations separate from racial ones, and this was why events in Palestine were so compelling. They seemed to offer a way to disentangle local relationships between Muslims, Jews and European colonialism, but the relationship between events here and there was unclear.

A few years after the 1929 riots in Palestine, a bout of intercommunal violence erupted in Algeria following a disturbingly similar pattern. In August 1934 in Constantine, a Muslim crowd went on an anti-Jewish rampage, killing 23 Jews while in the ensuing maelstrom French police killed three Muslims. Following Hitler's recent takeover in Germany and the rise of nationalist activity throughout the Arab world, the 'pogrom' of Constantine shocked the Algerian press and provoked a flood of commentary. An investigative committee was launched to establish whether the causes were spontaneous and local, or whether the riot came out of a premeditated plot. Authorities were so concerned that they had not anticipated this explosion of violence that they launched a re-structuring of intelligence services. No longer could local

⁶⁵ Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*.

administrators write surveillance reports on top of their other duties. Instead, surveillance was now given over to specialists in the new *Centre d'Information et d'Études*, of which there would be one for each *département*.⁶⁶

Parallel occurrences of local violence on a global scale begged the question of what was connecting events in Jerusalem and Constantine. Many in the Jewish community suspected a plot: the increasingly assertive *ulama* (AUMA) or other Muslim groups must have been conspiring along with Egyptian, Syrian and Palestinian groups and Hitler's Germany against Jews.⁶⁷

On the other hand, *El Ouma*, the newspaper of Messali's nationalist *Etoile Nord-Africaine*, blamed Jews for being everywhere the 'agents of imperialism' against Muslims. In Algeria, Jews were 'friends and servants of French imperialism, [who] have betrayed the Arab people by getting naturalised *en bloc* in 1870'. *El Ouma* was taking up an old Algerian Muslim polemic that Jews, previously just as 'native' as Muslims, were traitorous for switching over to the coloniser's side after acquiring French citizenship under the 1870 Crémieux decree. Yet *El Ouma* also broadened this analysis, arguing that struggling against Jews everywhere was 'struggling against imperialism' which Jews supported.⁶⁸ The analogy with Zionists furthering the work of British imperialism against Palestinians was evident.

However, some Muslims blamed European anti-Semitism as the main cause of the disturbance. Sadek Denden, who had founded one of the first Muslim newspapers *L'Islam* back in 1909, claimed that Muslims in North Africa only felt admiration and solidarity for Jews persecuted by the hatred of Germans for the Semites. To Denden,

⁶⁶ The results of the investigation are in ANOM/GGA/9H52-56. Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Une émeute anti-juive à Constantine (août 1934)', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 1973, 13:1, pp.23-40. On shifts in policing see Martin Thomas, 'The Gendarmerie, Information Collection, and Colonial Violence in French North Africa Between the Wars', *Historical Reflections*, 36:2, 2010, pp.76-96.

⁶⁷ For more on the context leading up to the riots see Cole, 'Constantine before the Riots of August 1934'.

⁶⁸ *El Ouma*, September-October 1934. On Jews 'switching sides' in 1870, see the manuscript by pseudo-Abu Ras in Chapter 3, p.164.

who had spent his long journalistic career combatting European prejudice against Muslims, the main problem was European racism, against which Muslims and Jews were allies.⁶⁹

The political reaction after the Constantine riots laid the roots for intercommunal relations in the French Republic for decades to come. Colonial authorities exploited intercommunal violence to institute blanket repression against Muslim political movements. Governor-General Jules Carde reactivated old panislamist clichés, claiming the ulama were ‘missionaries’ from a Panislamic Committee, ‘corresponding with the Hijaz (...) by a secret system.’ Events in Constantine were a sign of backwardness, of a bygone time of religious violence unfit for colonial modernity. As Carde wrote, the ‘hatred among races and religions that was thought to be definitively extinguished after a century of occupation, is reborn’.⁷⁰ Muslim political movements were accused of racism, one example among many of an enduring French tradition of blaming Muslims for anti-Semitism.

The charismatic head of the Association of the Algerian Muslim Ulama (AUMA), Abdelhamid Ibn Badis, counterattacked, intervening personally to stop the riots and insisting that real Muslims had no problems with Jews. In order for Muslims to be seen as a modern community worthy of being granted civil rights, it was imperative that they appear progressive and capable of alliances across community divides. The AUMA engaged in a deliberate performance of its close ties with Jewish community leaders, to show that Muslims and Jews could work together for a more equal Algeria against the common enemy of settler racism.

This performance reached a climax around the 1936 election of the *Front Populaire*. As Léon Blum, the new French Prime Minister, was Jewish, it was particularly

⁶⁹ *L'Ikdam*, 15 April 1933. Sadek Denden took up the name of the previous *L'Ikdam* which he had edited along with Khaled and his supporters in 1919-1923, but this was in many ways a separate publication. On *L'Islam* see p.72 and p.137.

⁷⁰ GGA to Interior, 3 August 1934, ANOM/GGA/11H48.

important to show that Muslims could be friends with Jews in order to secure reforms in Paris. This was a time when a meeting against anti-Semitism and racism could see *shaykh* Tayyib al-Uqbi of the AUMA share a platform alongside Jewish-Algerian author Sadia Lévy, Muslim socialist Mohammed Kessous and a rising leftist journalist named Albert Camus.⁷¹

While Ibn Badis was outraged at developments in Palestine, he cautiously attributed the Great Revolt of 1936-39 to 'English colonialism', and he conspicuously did not mention Jews. In 1937, Ibn Badis and the Muslim Congress received Bernard Lecache, the founder of the International League Against Antisemitism (LICA), France's first mass antiracist organisation.⁷² In another development which would repeat itself later in the twentieth century, a large Jewish antiracist organisation (in this case, the LICA), sought allies among more numerous but less organised Muslims whilst ignoring their specific demands when they were inconvenient to its own agenda.

By 1937, however, hope in the *Front Populaire* was fading, and the alliance behind the Muslim Congress had failed to secure the moderate reforms of the Blum-Viollette Plan in the face of mass settler opposition. Muslim disillusionment with Blum coincided with the peak of Arab revolt in Palestine and British repression against what was now a widespread peasant insurrection. By 1937-8, events in Palestine were first and foremost in Algerian politics. So concerned were authorities that each monthly surveillance report contained a section dedicated to the impact of Palestinian events.⁷³

Ibn Badis still tried to hold ground between criticising the turn of events in Palestine and not appearing anti-Jewish. He heavily encouraged Algerian solidarity, advocating for mosques to collect funds for Palestine, and criticised 'Arabs' for not

⁷¹ *L'Echo d'Alger*, 24 May 1937 'Un meeting franco-musulman contre l'antisémitisme et le racisme', ANOM/GGA/16H115.

⁷² 8 March 1937, ANOM/GGA/16H115. For more on attempts to create alliances between Muslims and Jews under the Popular Front see Emmanuel Debono, 'Le rapprochement judéo-musulman en Afrique du Nord sous le Front Populaire. Succès et limites', *Archives juives*, 2012, 45:2, pp.89-106.

⁷³ Monthly reports on native activity for 1938 for the *département d'Alger*, ANOM/GGA/3CAB100.

caring about Palestine enough in *Al-Shibab*.⁷⁴ In May 1938 he sent a telegram to the MAE protesting to the League of Nations about the treatment of Arab Palestinians under the Mandate. The ministry replied that such a request could only be presented to the mandatory power, Britain, and thus did not transmit it to Geneva.⁷⁵ Despite this, Jewish anti-racist organisations still called on Ibn Badis to sign vague calls for both sides to cease violence.⁷⁶

Palestine was probably more important to Algerian Muslims than to Algerian Jews. After the abolition of the caliphate and the failure of various attempts to revive it, Palestine was emerging by the 1930s as the main rallying point for global Muslim politics, most evidently when the mufti of Jerusalem and leader of the Palestinian Supreme Muslim Council, Amin al-Husayni, organised the General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem in the wake of the 1929 riots.⁷⁷ Solidarity with Palestine was different from previous solidarity campaigns like that around Libya in 1911-1912, as it carried the added value of the holy sites of Jerusalem as a centre of the Muslim world. In Algeria, this was reinforced by perceived analogies between settler colonialism in Algeria and Palestine. When Algerians listened to the Egyptian singer Mohammed Abdel-Wahab sing ‘the house is our house and the land is our father’s’ (*al-bayt baytu-na wa al-ard li-abina*), they imbued it with different connotations to other places in the Arab world [Figure 30].⁷⁸ As a newspaper from the Mزاب region said, ‘let us take care not to lose the holy Palestine like we lost the paradise of the Maghrib.’⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *Al-Shibab*, February 1938 and CIE Constantine 27 September 1938, ‘Quête dans les mosquées à l’occasion de la fête de l’Ascension du Prophète’, ANOM/GGA/16H115.

⁷⁵ Telegram from Ben Badis to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 May 1938, ANOM/3CAB 28.

⁷⁶ Report, Constantine special police, 12 December 1938, Police spéciale départementale de Constantine, ANOM/GGA/16H115.

⁷⁷ William Cleveland, *Islam Against the West*, p.80. On the abolition of the caliphate see chapter 2, pp.137-9.

⁷⁸ Bachagha Smati ‘Le disque arabe’, lecture given in February 1937, WO I/1/2260.

⁷⁹ *El Ouma* (Mزاب), 1 March 1937, ANOM/GGA/16H115.



Figure 30 Front page of catalogue for Baidaphone record company for Algeria for 1936. Baidaphone was the main purveyor of Arabic-language music records at this time. This catalogue advertised the music of an Egyptian film 'Tears of love' (dumu' al-hubb) performed by the famous singer Mohamed Abdel Wahab. For sale are the best mashhad from the film, a word that could mean 'scene' but can also refer to a place of martyrdom. Some of the disks in the catalogue were banned by French authorities because their titles, like Hubb al-watan [love of the fatherland], though written for an Egyptian context, might give Algerians ideas. ANOM/GGA/15H32.

Of course, Algerian Jews also felt a deep religious affinity for Jerusalem.

Supporting embattled coreligionists in Palestine was considered an important religious and communal duty, and European rabbis toured Algeria collecting funds to support the Zionist effort in Palestine.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Zionism was notoriously less successful among the French-assimilated Algerian Jews than among their Moroccan or Tunisian

⁸⁰ Monthly report on native activity in the department of Algiers, August 1938, ANOM/3CAB100.

brethren.⁸¹ Some Zionist groups had existed in Algeria since the end of the First World War, but they were small, and few Algerian Jews considered emigration. Many more saw Palestine only as a place for less fortunate Jews to emigrate, and to which they should send help, while their own secular salvation lay in France.⁸²

Indeed, Muslim leaders sometimes appeared to exaggerate Jewish mobilisation in Algeria in order to inspire Muslims to unite. An advertisement in *El Ouma*, for instance, stated simply: 'Jews have collected 42 million for their brothers who have emigrated to Palestine. Our newspaper needs money to intensify action, do you understand, Muslims?'⁸³ By contrast, the official Islamic clergy vented carefully at the Palestinian situation without making any connections to France so as to appear loyal. In a Friday sermon (*khutba*) in September 1938, *shaykh* Said Aboulaya said the English were enemies of Islam but claimed 'a similar situation would never have happened in a country under French domination.'⁸⁴

Though relatively limited, Jewish fundraising activity bred frustration amongst Muslims with accusations of unequal treatment. In Bône, Muslims were angered at rumours that Jews were collecting funds in their synagogue while the government had banned a similar Muslim fundraising event for Arab Palestinians.⁸⁵ In yet another early sign of things to come, Muslims correctly pointed out structural inequalities between the French state's treatment of Muslims and Jews, but also blamed Jews for the racial hierarchies of an order in which they were hardly dominant.

The alliances of local Jewish communities with European colonial powers in both Algeria and Palestine strengthened this comparison. The Etoile Nord-Africaine refused

⁸¹ Haïm Saadoun, 'Le sionisme en Algérie (1898-1962): une option marginale', *Archives Juives*, vol. 45, 2, 2012, pp.68-88.

⁸² For instance there was an Algerian 'Chibouth Sion' from 1921 to support 'israelite settlers in Palestine' (*les colons israélites de Palestine*), Wilaya of Algiers, Registry of Associations, 1Z17/806.

⁸³ *El Ouma*, January-February 1933.

⁸⁴ Report, 16 September 1938, 3CAB/100.

⁸⁵ Special police in Bône, 26 July 1938, ANOM/GGA/16H115.

to cooperate with Lecache's League against Antisemitism, claiming that 'Zionism was but a form of racism and imperialism as much as that of Hitler of Mussolini.'⁸⁶

Palestinian news, however, was no straightforward proxy for local intercommunal relations. Part of the reason why events in Palestine took up such space in Algeria is because there was no consensus on what they meant. With the election of Léon Blum (both socialist and Jewish) as French Prime Minister in 1936, the issue of reforms for Muslims, European anti-semitism, Muslim-Jewish relations, left-right polarisation and international politics all became hopelessly confused. Actors tried to explain events as the outcome of economic, religious or racial dynamics depending on their political bent, but none of these explanations seemed entirely satisfactory.

Events in Palestine seemed close enough to be intelligible, but distant enough to provoke uncertainty as to whether the problems were really the same as in Algeria. 'The Palestinian question is too far from us for us to be able to judge it wisely,' wrote Tayeb Djäïdir in *Oran socialiste* in August 1938.⁸⁷ Events in Palestine also sat on an uncertain fence between community and party politics, and between religious and ideological allegiance: it is for this reason that they mobilised so much attention.

Though Palestinian events resonated with local Muslim-Jewish relations, it is important not to reduce them to this. After all, through European anti-Semitism, the situation in Palestine was deeply linked with European politics in Germany, Italy and France. Italian fascist propaganda, for instance, pushed heavily on British acts of violence in Palestine to try to gain wider Arab support. Some Muslims certainly found the new European anti-Semitism appealing. Shakib Arslan, the Syrian émigré in Geneva who was crucial to the intellectual development of North African nationalist movements, flirted with alliances in Germany and Italy. Conversely, accusations of Muslim collusion with

⁸⁶ Quoted in Marynower, 'Être socialiste', p.683.

⁸⁷ *idem*, 683-4.

France's fascist enemies in Germany and Italy were also used to repress political movements.⁸⁸ It was this particularly unstable mix of communitarian and ideological politics that made events in Palestine so important in Algeria.

The Palestinian issue was as much a European issue as a Muslim one. Right-wing Europeans were morbidly fascinated with violence in Palestine, and clearly it sold: in 1938, *Oran-Matin* for instance, the newspaper of the city's right, sent a correspondent to report in Palestine, an unusual expense that showed the importance of events there.⁸⁹ Moreover, Catholics in Algeria were just as concerned with the fate of the Holy Land as their Muslim and Jewish counterparts. Jean and Jeanne Scelles-Millie, for instance, a progressive Catholic couple, founded the Union of Monotheist Believers in 1934 to bring Muslims, Christians and Jews together with *shaykh* Tayyib al 'Uqbi, another Islamic scholar who had founded the AUMA along with Ibn Badis, and the Jewish activist Elie Gozlan.⁹⁰ Despite this, Muslim interest in Palestine was always suspicious to authorities, who thought it was a proxy for Algerian nationalism.

Conclusion: witnessing and nationalism

In 1937, while the Algerian Muslim Congress was having its second meeting, a disagreement opened up between the Scelles-Millie couple and Ibn Badis. On 26 July, either Jean or Jeanne (both were equally prominent and the police report is unclear) put forth a motion to the Congress about Muslim participation in the ongoing Spanish Civil War. The Scelles-Millie, like many leftist Europeans, thought that Algerian Muslims, struggling for greater freedom, were natural allies of Republican Spain. Ibn Badis rejected

⁸⁸ Cleveland, *Islam Against the West*.

⁸⁹ Louis Grandpierre, 'La terre trop promise', ANOM/GGA/16H115.

⁹⁰ Christelow, *Algerians Without Borders*, pp.115-6.

the motion, arguing that the Congress should not get involved in foreign politics. In fact, if and only if the Congress were to intervene in foreign affairs, he said they would have intervened not for Spain but for Palestine, ‘dismembered by English colonialism.’⁹¹

Ibn Badis’ reply was richly suggestive, as it appeared to be saying two things at once. The first half of Ibn Badis’ statement, denying that Algerians should get involved in foreign affairs, distinguished between Algerian ‘national’ interests and ‘foreign’ problems. The second half of the statement, however, directly contradicts this, emphasising the importance of Palestine at the expense of Spain. Algerian Muslims, as Ibn Badis repeatedly stated elsewhere, had an indissoluble tie to the larger Arab-Muslim nation: the founding motto of the AUMA was ‘Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, Algeria is our homeland’ (*al-islam dinu-na, al-‘arabiyya lughatu-na, al-jaza’ir watanu-na*).

While interest in Palestine was widespread across Algerian society, authorities remained convinced that it was a proxy for Muslim nationalism. This would endure beyond the events of 1936-39. In 1948, as conflict heated up once again in Palestine, the main nationalist party, Messali’s PPA, which had succeeded the ENA, launched a fundraising campaign for Palestine. At the same time, it was also collecting money to fund its own electoral campaigns. Surveillance reports were scathing about this combination: ‘One wonders if this duality is not sought to create a confusion between the two products’, mused the intelligence officer, continuing to suggest that Palestine was ‘exploited (...) in an opportunistic sense favourable to each [party’s] ambitions and schemes.’⁹²

A power struggle unfolded between different Muslim parties as to who should lead the Algerian Committee for Help to Palestine. While some parties wanted a member

⁹¹ ‘Proceedings of the 2nd Muslim Congress’ 26 July 1937, WO/I/2260.

⁹² Surveillance note, ‘The Palestinian question – state of mind and activity of Muslim circles in Algeria’, 17 January 1948, ANOM, Oran/Préfet/2432.

of the *ulama* to take the leadership as ‘the Palestinian question is as much religious as it is political’, Messali’s supporters insisted that he should head the committee from his prison cell. Eventually, two separate committees were formed as the issue of leadership over Palestinian solidarity was conflated with leadership of the nationalist movement in general.⁹³ By this stage, even more moderate Muslim parties were claiming that ‘Zionism is nothing else than a form of colonialism, and we have suffered too much from colonialism not to be sympathetic to the brother people of Palestine.’⁹⁴

It is tempting to say that people in Algeria used Palestine for their own aims, that they diverted solidarity for other purposes. Indeed, this accusation has remained important in French politics to the present day. Maud Mandel, for instance, surveying the importance of Palestine in Muslim-Jewish relations in postwar France, has argued that political activism around Palestine was first and foremost a way for both communities to talk about their position in France.⁹⁵

This approach, however, risks naturalising France at the expense of other units, making it seem like people had a clear idea of France that preceded their imagination of other places. Why would ‘Palestine’ be any more or less imaginary to people than ‘Algeria’ or ‘France’? Instead, observing events in Palestine was central to defining the existence of a distinct Algerian nation that should acquire independence from French colonialism. Through observing places like Palestine, some Algerians came to understand their problems as not being limited to obtaining civil rights from France, as we saw in the previous chapter, but as a more systematic problem of European colonialism on the Arab-Muslim world. It is through foreign news that it made sense to demand an Algerian nation. Similarly, political mobilisation within Algeria occurred simultaneously with

⁹³ *Égalité*, 6 June 1948.

⁹⁴ *idem*.

⁹⁵ Maud Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: : History of a Conflict*, (Princeton, 2014), p.21. For a similar point on the interwar period see Ethan Katz, ‘Tracing the Shadow of Palestine: the Zionist-Arab Conflict in Jewish-Muslim Relations in France, 1914-1945’, in Nathalie Debrauwere-Miller (ed.), *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Francophone World* (New York, 2010), pp.18-30..

solidarity for different sides of the Spanish Civil War – one did not precede the other. The links between events here and there through solidarity movements were politically powerful and heavily contested.

While much has been written on the process by which individuals come to imagine themselves as forming part of a national community, the events in this chapter call attention to the practices by which people imagined other nations. One of the defining features of a nation as an imagined community, after all, is that there are always other nations out there, developing in parallel, which is what makes something like the United Nations possible to conceive.⁹⁶ Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the fact that in order for this to work, people have to be able to imagine other nations beyond their own.

In interwar Algeria, news of developments in other places articulated the space between current realities and the desired dream. Political mobilisation was an attempt to bridge the distance between Algeria and other places, as the future was already somewhere else. Algerians longed for other nations, for their leaders, their hymns, their flags, aware of the power that this toolkit had on the world stage. They hung portraits of Mustafa Kemal, hero of Turkish independence in their houses.⁹⁷ French authorities worried an Umm Kulthum song from an Egyptian film, the ‘Hymn to the Flag’ (*Nashid al-‘alam*) was wildly popular in Algeria. It did not seem to matter that the song referred to another flag, and that the Egyptians writing it were not thinking about Algerians.⁹⁸

[Figure 30]

This desire relied on distance, on Algerians frequently misunderstanding faraway places for their own purposes. Typically, most commentators lamented that social

⁹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁹⁷ Collective, *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale* (2012), p.347.

⁹⁸ Affaires Indigènes to Sûreté Générale, 4 December 1937, ANOM/GGA/15H37. This was not the only problem with Algerians singing hymns to other nations: the popularity of hymns to King Faisal of Iraq was mentioned by Bachagha Smati in ‘Le disque arabe’, lecture given in February 1937, WO I/1/2260.

inferiors were incapable of properly understanding the news. *L'ikdam*, writing in 1921, claimed that most Algerians in the countryside had a poor understanding of the contemporary Turkish War of Independence, 'Ask the native mass what is Angora [Ankara], nearly all will answer, unsure, that Angora must be a young daughter of a sultan from the Thousand and One Nights.'⁹⁹

Surveillance reports by the French administration expressed the same skepticism about the possibility of Algerians understanding world events. People were, they argued, insufficiently educated to understand the news. No one saw these misunderstandings as constitutive of the very nature of news itself. It is through this distance, through these misunderstandings, that Algerians developed an understanding of their place within the world.

Most accounts of the development of Algerian nationalism, and more broadly of the development of anti-colonial politics across the world, point to the importance of travel and contact. This chapter has begun to show the importance of the circulation of news and of distance in contrast to a literature that stressed migration and contact. The final chapter delves into this fully by re-examining the relationship between movement of people and movement of information from the perspective of a single man in the late nineteenth century. As we shall see, there was nothing particularly new about politically ambitious Algerians using foreign news to get ahead in the 1930s.

⁹⁹ *L'ikdam*, 'Le vrai kémalisme en Algérie', 28 October 1921.

6. An intelligent man: Messaoud ben Djebari and state surveillance, 1881-1895

Tunis, April 1881. As the French army was just about to spill over from Algeria to invade the neighbouring Regency of Tunis, the French consul to the court of the Tunisian *bey*, Théodore Roustan, came into possession of a stash of bizarre documents. They purported to be the records of the meeting of an Algerian Islamic Secret Society that had sent an envoy to monitor developments in Tunisia.¹

In crisp detail, the debates of ‘The Islamic Secret Society Which Concerns Itself with General Peace in the country of Algeria’ (*al-majmu‘ al-sirri al-islami al-lati min sha’nuba al-raba al-umumiyya bi-iqlim al-jaza’ir*) on the situation in neighbouring Tunisia are trapped in the archive. Members of the society were alarmed at the news about the situation in Tunisia which they had read in the papers, and discussed what should be done next. Some were of the opinion that the society should send a delegate to ‘Tunis the Well-Guarded’ [*Tunis al-Mabrusa*], while others disagreed. Eventually, the society, numbering exactly sixty members, voted to send a delegate to Tunis. Inexplicably, they sent the very man who had dissented, a certain Masa‘ud bin Jabari or, in the French spelling, Messaoud ben Djebari.²

To the historian bored after pages and pages of diplomatic correspondence, the irruption of this document brings a quiver of excitement, a ‘whiff of reality’.³ Over forty years before the emergence of formal political parties for Muslim Algerians, suddenly a

¹ Théodore Roustan, French Consul in Tunis to GGA, 16 April 1881, MAE/CP/Algérie/9.

² ‘Record of the Islamic Secret Society Which Concerns Itself With General Peace In The Country of Algeria’, 29 January 1881 in MAE CP/9. An original Arabic version can be found in ANOM/DC/B25.

³ On archival fatigue and repetition, see Farge, *Le Goût de l’archive*, pp.19-20.

whole world of possibility seems to open up, one of covert but organised political activity in the 1880s. A secret society, a political debate, links between Algerians and Tunisians, even a debate about whether Algerians should get involved in foreign affairs: could it be that Ibn Badis and his friends in 1937 debating involvement in Spain and Palestine were just following a much older tradition? Finally, here is evidence that in secret, far from the eyes of the colonial state, Muslims lived rich, cosmopolitan lives, pure evidence of Algerians dealing with foreign news.

Swiftly, as the pages turn, the historian's excitement is peppered with doubt. The document seems too good to be true. If one were part of a secret society, would one really use the word 'secret society' repeatedly? The debates, the voting, even the number of members – everything appears suspiciously round, suspiciously smooth. In different documents, the society even has different names. As the orderly correspondence continues page after page, taking the threat of this alleged society seriously, something feels off.

This doubt is not unfounded. The document seized by Roustan is most probably a forgery and the Islamic Secret Society probably never existed. Over the course of the next two months, as French soldiers invaded Tunisia, authorities searched, imprisoned and interrogated local notables in Eastern Algeria: to no avail. Eventually, they concluded that the Secret Society all came from the imagination of Messaoud Djebari, stationmaster on the Bône-Guelma railway company in the little village of Bordj Sabath. Djebari, literate in French and Arabic, avid reader of political newspapers, had wound up in Tunis desperately trying to get involved in the action, and produced a complex fiction that captured French authorities' attention. The alleged conspirators denied any involvement, the trial against them collapsed for lack of evidence, and Djebari languished in prison alone.

Past the initial surprise of uncovering a forgery, it is tempting to dump this case. After all, it tells us only about the failures of state intelligence, not about social practices around news. Usually, we assume that ‘news’ is a social phenomenon and ‘intelligence’ is a state one, yet looked at more closely, Djebari’s story reveals that information circulation makes any distinction between those two categories difficult. State information practices fed off other forms of media, and the intelligence system could end up spreading news far and wide. Breaking down the distinction between news and intelligence involves, in turn, breaking down the relationship between the state and society, between secret subversive political activity and the intelligence system that spied on it. Djebari occupied an ambiguous position, sometimes forming part of the administration, sometimes its worst enemy. In turn, this involves reconsidering the idea that the French state in Algeria was ‘foreign’ to Muslims.

Djebari has appeared (briefly) in historical scholarship before, in the work of Allan Christelow.⁴ Christelow, however, was only aware of a limited aspect of Djebari’s illustrious career as a problematic informant. He speculated that Djebari’s radical political ideas seemed to put him as a pioneer of nationalism, a forerunner, some seventy years early, of the FLN’s revolution that would end colonialism in Algeria.⁵ As we shall see, classifying Djebari as a pioneer of nationalist resistance, of the kind of men we met in Chapter 5, is an easy way to dismiss the uncomfortable questions his case raises.

In this final chapter, we return to the beginning, to 1881, to reconsider the relationship between news and the state. Djebari had a habit of turning news into fiction. Because his fictions ultimately failed, precipitating voluminous investigations, Djebari exposes the workings of news circulation better than any other.

⁴ Allan Christelow briefly deals with Messaoud ben Djebari in ‘Intellectual History in a Culture under Siege: Algerian Thought in the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, 4, 1982, 387-399. He also mentions the case of the Secret Society of Guelma in *Muslim Law Courts and the French Colonial State in Algeria*, (Princeton, 1985).

⁵ Christelow, ‘Intellectual History’, pp.396-7.

Going down to the most intimate level, this chapter ties together previous inquiries by investigating the world of a nineteenth-century Algerian stationmaster through microhistory. Carlo Ginzburg's *Cheese and the Worms*, through its 'exceptional' miller Menocchio with his intriguing theories about the world, was an attempt to show that the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture in Early Modern Europe were not always clearly defined.⁶ Messaoud bin Djebari's case will allow us to question the distinction between information and intelligence, between media and surveillance, in brief, between society and state in a place and time where it seemed like one was totally alien and hostile to the other.

Microhistory has in recent years been used by global historians to trace individuals who moved around, allowing for an elegant narrative of a connected world.⁷ As Francesca Trivellato and John-Paul Ghobrial have pointed out, such uses of microhistory can become romanticised celebrations, far from the original aims of Italian microhistory, to use the micro scale to ask big social scientific questions.⁸ Djebari is the inverse of a global microhistory, for he most likely did not go to most of the places he claimed to have been to. In Djebari's eyes, news of the most remote places was an attempt to be seen by the men of power closest to him.

A small player in a big crisis: the Tunisian crisis of 1881

⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, (Turin, 1976), translated as *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. For a colonial Algerian microhistory also starring a miller see Colonna, *Le Meunier, les moines et le bandit*.

⁷ For some North African examples see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*, (New York, 2006) and Lucette Valensi, *Mardochée Naggjar: Enquête sur un inconnu*, (Paris, 2008).

⁸ Francesca Trivellato, 'Is there a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1, 2011. John-Paul Ghobrial, 'The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory', *Past and Present*, 222, February 2014, pp.51-93.

A man from a modest family who was unusually educated, Djebari suddenly found himself thrust into the spotlight in the midst of the Tunisian crisis. Formerly a student of a *médresa*, one of only three schools throughout Algeria meant to train officials in the Islamic judicial system, Djebari had failed to acquire a job in the civil service, and instead, after a brief stint as a teaching assistant, ended up as a stationmaster in the tiny village of Bordj Sabath, on the train line between Constantine and Guelma. Having been fired from his job as a stationmaster after unsuccessfully trying to get employed by a rival train company, Djebari somehow found himself in Tunis in the winter of 1881 with, as we saw, a stash of documents claiming to be from an Algerian secret society plotting with Tunisians and Italians.⁹

Djebari was in Tunis in a tense international juncture. In 1881, as the thirteenth century of the Islamic calendar drew to an end, things seemed to be collapsing everywhere. The main Muslim powers of the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire and its two autonomous North African vassals, Egypt and Tunisia, were all embroiled in financial and political crises and faced increasing European encroachment on their territories. Following a heady period of reforms intended to reorganise the state to compete with European powers (usually known as the *Tanzimat* or ‘reordering’, ‘reform’ period), Egypt, Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire had all declared themselves bankrupt in the mid-1870s. In 1878, the Russo-Turkish War ended a brief Ottoman constitutional experiment, and as Bulgaria became independent and Britain seized Cyprus, the Empire was in a position of weakness. Meanwhile, in Egypt, the establishment of British-French dual control over the country’s government in 1879 led to a revolt led by General Urabi. By the summer of 1882, Egypt would be bombarded and occupied by British troops.

⁹ It is not clear why exactly Djebari was fired. The employee records for the Bône-Guelma Railway company stored in the ANOM frustratingly only start with the letter ‘E’, thus leaving Djebari out.

Tunisia, by the winter of 1881, was in the midst of a deep political crisis, marked by competing French and Italian influence and a declining central government. Following a period of intense liberal reforms under Ahmad Bey and the first Tunisian Constitution in 1861, Tunisia declared itself bankrupt and an International Financial Commission made up of delegates from Italy, Britain and France took control of the country's finances in 1869. When the 1878 Treaty of Berlin recognised a French sphere of influence in Tunisia, competition between French and Italian interests ratcheted up a few notches.

French authorities worried about another European power setting up a colony on the border with Algeria. Italy, especially, freshly unified, argued that Tunisia's large Italian community and geographical position made it naturally Italian. On the eve of the Protectorate there were, after all, c.11,200 Italians in Tunisia compared to only 700 Frenchmen.¹⁰ In the midst of crisis, in the winter of 1881, conflict erupted with the Kroumir (*Kbrumir*) tribes on the Algerian-Tunisian border. Seizing this pretext to declare the Tunisian government incapable of maintaining the security of its border with France, the French parliament voted to send an army to re-establish order on 7 April 1881. Following a brief military campaign in late April, French troops reached Tunis in early May. On 12 May 1881, the *bey* signed the Treaty of the Bardo, which marked the beginning of the French protectorate in Tunisia.¹¹

Such events seem at first irrelevant to Algeria, conquered far earlier. By 1881, after all, the French had been in Algeria for fifty years. At the time, however, events in Egypt, Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire seemed linked to developments in Algeria. Throughout the Tunisian crisis, the three *départements* of Algeria were tense.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Divided Rule*, p.19. See also Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c.1800-1900*, (Berkeley, 2012).

¹¹ On this period in Tunisian history see Kenneth Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*, (Cambridge, 2004), pp.10-37. For more detail on the struggle between the two consuls see the now dated Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie*, (Tunis, 1969).

Millenarianism swept the countryside as the year 1300 of the Islamic calendar grew nearer, leading to popular expectations that the time of the Christians would end soon. Letters circulated announcing the coming of the *mahdi*, who would put the world back in order for the fourteenth century to come.¹²

French authorities, traumatised by the recent memory of the 1871 insurrection which swept most of Eastern Algeria, read this agitation as the inevitable signs of a new upcoming insurrection, particularly as two incidents of violence erupted in Algeria in the spring of 1881. First, members of the the Flatters Mission, an attempt to explore the Sahara and find a connecting path between France's Algerian and West African possessions were massacred by Touaregs. As the massacre occurred deep in the desert in March 1881, news only reached authorities on 1 April when the few survivors had marched back across the desert. The mystery surrounding the incident would capture the popular imagination of Frenchmen for years to come. Second, in the Southwest of Algeria, the lieutenant of the fort of G ryville [El Bayadh] was killed on 22 April 1881 by an attack of the tribal confederation of the Ouled Sidi Cheikh [Awlad Sidi al-Shaykh], marking the beginning of the Bou Amama insurrection, one of the longest in the colonial period.

French authorities felt besieged on all sides in April 1881: from the East by the Kroumir on the Tunisian border, in the deep South by the Touareg and in the Southwest by the Ouled Sidi Cheikh. Surveillance reports anxiously tracked the connections between these incidents, looking for evidence of a giant Muslim conspiracy. For French authorities, there was a 'possible, even probable correlation' of all these incidents, so

¹² The significance of the end of the thirteenth century is evident for instance in the poetry of Si Mhand ou Mhand, *Les Isefra*, which we encountered in chapter 2, pp.125-6. Letters announcing the coming of the *mahdi* in 1881 were found in Batna, PC to GGA, 23 May 1881, ANOM, GGA/9H4.

there must have been, somewhere, a subversive nexus from which these people were getting their instructions.¹³

As troops moved into Tunisia, leaving Algeria undefended, French anxieties reached a fever pitch in April 1881, and authorities struggled to understand the links between Algerian Muslims and the wider world, suspecting a pan-Islamic secret society that tied all Muslims together. Enter Djebari, who concocted the exact dish the authorities were expecting: a conspiracy of almost all the notables in Eastern Algeria with Tunisian authorities, and worse, Italians.

At the peak of the tension, the French consul in Tunis, Roustan, was tipped off to the existence of the documents of this alleged Secret Society, and immediately wired his colleagues in Algeria, thus launching a vast investigation that would culminate with Djebari's interrogation. Despite extensive investigation, the information accumulated could not determine whether or not the Secret Society of Guelma had actually existed and conspired with Tunisian authorities against French rule in Algeria. Djebari dutifully travelled back to Constantine to be interrogated by the *préfet*, Eugène Doucin, in May 1881. What follows is a summary of his version of events, as he told it to the *préfet* of Constantine, which oscillates between the wildly implausible and the disturbingly realistic.¹⁴

According to Djebari, local Muslim magistrates around Guelma start a Secret Islamic Society for General Tranquility in November 1880 out of concern about potential reforms of the Islamic justice system that might affect them. As Allan Christelow explains, the affair of the Secret Society of Guelma came at a time when the office of Islamic judge (*qadi/cadi*) was coming under heavy criticism by settler opinion.¹⁵

¹³ GGA to MAE, 8 April 1881, MAE/CP/Algérie/8.

¹⁴ The narrative that follows comes from Djebari's deposition on 14 May 1881 in ANOM/DC/B25. A summary can be found in the *préfet's* final report on 23 May 1881 in ANOM/GGA/9H4.

¹⁵ On the controversy over the Islamic justice system and the 'war of the *qadi*' see Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, pp. 224-239.

The society, as Djebari described it, involves the *qadis* of Guelma, Bône [Annaba] and Mondovi [Dréan], as well as a score of other minor members of the Muslim judiciary, *aouns*, *adels* and *bach-adels*. These are all respectable people from prominent regional families, employed by the French state to run the Islamic justice system. The society's president, according to Djebari, is Saïd ben Chettah [Sa'ïd Bin Shattah], *qadi* of Guelma. On the second monthly meeting of the society, on 29 December 1880, the members send Djebari under Ben Chettah's orders, to plead for the *qadis* to the Governor-General of Algeria.

Unsurprisingly, Djebari fails to get a meeting with the Governor-General in Algiers, but by the time he returns to Guelma, the society has changed. On 29 January 1881, the society's meeting turns to the deteriorating situation in neighbouring Tunisia, and it is the alleged report of this January meeting that would eventually alert the attention of the French consul in Tunis. In this meeting, Djebari says that these 'these affairs do not concern us.' Other members argue back, outraged: 'Why would we not be allowed to get involved in the affairs of Tunisia while we examine deeply the affairs of Europeans? The affairs of Islam must come first.' According to Djebari therefore, the society's original aims to protect Muslim interests slipped into protecting the independence of 'Islam' from the encroachment of Europeans in neighbouring Tunisia, from protecting the *shari'a* within Algeria to protecting Tunisia from falling out of Islam. They then vote to send a disgruntled Djebari, who disapproves of this involvement in foreign affairs, to Tunis. Djebari leaves by boat from Bône on 5 February 1881, with money given to him by Ben Chettah.

Once in Tunis, Djebari's narrative moves very fast. Introducing himself as the delegate of the Algerian Secret Society, he meets with the Tunisian Prime Minister,

Mustafa bin Isma'îl.¹⁶ There, the rural Algerian railway clerk casually tells bin Isma'îl that he should resign as this is the Tunisian people's will. Bin Isma'îl concurs, but then explains to Djebari his secret plan to overthrow the *bey* and to become president of a Tunisian Republic. Djebari, a convinced republican himself, cautions him that republics are difficult, 'see in France, there are many intelligent and advanced men and yet they do not agree with each other.' Following this surreal exchange of political philosophies, Mustafa ben Isma'îl then whisks Djebari over to the Italian consulate, where he meets Tunis' extremely active and anti-French Italian consul, Licurgo Macciò.

Macciò immediately gives him a job at Rubattino, the Italian railway company in Tunisia. There are good reasons why Italians might have found Djebari a useful agent. French-Italian rivalry before the onset of the Protectorate in Tunisia mainly played out through railway concessions. The Chemins de Fer Bône-Guelma, the company that ran most railways in Eastern Algeria and of which Djebari was a minor employee, had also obtained the concession to build railways in Tunisia, in particular the Algiers-Tunis line built between 1876 and 1881. In January 1881, just before Djebari's arrival in Tunis, Rubattino laid a telegraph cable between the suburb of La Goulette and Tunis, thus threatening the French monopoly on Tunisian communications since 1859. The Rubattino company could have been interested in using an Algerian employee of its French competitor, especially one of dubious loyalty, to obtain information on the Bône-Guelma railway. Funded directly by the Italian parliament, the Rubattino company's activities were highly political.¹⁷

Taken away by his new Italian friends, by 20 February Djebari is allegedly on his way to Rome by boat with 125 francs given to him by Macciò. In Rome, he claims, 'an

¹⁶ A copy of Djebari's letter to Mustafa bin Isma'îl requesting an audience is also part of the dossier.

¹⁷ On the rivalry between Rubattino and the Bône-Guelma company see the recollection of one French diplomat based in Tunis, Paul-Henri d'Estournelles de Constant, *La politique française en Tunisie: le Protectorat et ses origines*, (Paris, 1891), pp.107-8, and Ganiage, *Origines du Protectorat*, p.485.

old man asked me for information about Algeria.’ The *préfet*, suspicious, asked if Djebari remembered the man’s name.

‘No, he lives in a magnificent palace near the Piazza di Napoli, I think; he is tall, thin, has a moustache and must be between 65 and 70 years old. I was followed by a man who did not leave me alone. I answered to this man that I was not a spy.’¹⁸

At this stage, Djebari’s story is so imprecise as to be comical. Undeterred, the *préfet* Doucin was convinced: ‘[Djebari’s] depositions were confused’ but ‘the only facts that are clear here and that are confirmed by the documents seized are Djebari’s relations with Macciò and his trip to Rome’.¹⁹

Djebari claimed to have been sent back to Tunis by early March. At this stage, his narrative is confused. In one version, he claims that he was explicitly asked to serve as an informant on Algeria for Macciò and Mustafa ben Isma‘il on behalf of the Secret Society, and that he refused and was then arrested. In Tunis, he produced a number of documents reporting on political activity in Tunisia, some of which exhorted Algerians to action.

One thing is clear: Djebari really did go to Tunis, and was still there by early May 1881 by which point the French invasion was well under way. It was in Tunis that Roustan discovered his existence and launched the investigation into the Secret Society of Guelma. The investigation struggled to find any evidence linking Djebari to the notables that he alleged were part of the secret society. Upon their arrest on 12 May 1881, the thirteen local notables denied having ever met Djebari, whom they saw as riff-raff beneath their standing. No incriminating papers were found when their houses were searched. Eventually, the trial brought in Algiers against the *qadis* of Bône, Guelma and

¹⁸ Deposition 14 May 1881, ANOM/DC/B25.

¹⁹ 23 May 1881 in ANOM/GGA/9H/4.

Mondovi for forming a secret society and conspiring with foreign powers collapsed due to lack of evidence.²⁰

The *préfet* was unsure of Djebari's story. Could this secret society just be a concoction of Djebari? This was certainly a possibility that he entertained. Djebari,

‘a vivacious, intelligent, ambitious spirit, belonging to the lower Arab class, feeling superior to his compatriots by his intelligence and his instruction, fed with reading political newspapers, could he not have dreamt up the existence of this society that he created wholesale in his imagination?’

According to this interpretation, the quixotic Djebari, high on Republican newspapers like others were high on picaresque novels, would then have invented the society to gain a position in Tunisian politics. Djebari did use newspapers to create the fiction of the Secret Society, but he did so with along with the surveillance system - by blaming newspapers the *préfet* was ignoring how newspapers and surveillance fed off each other.



Figure 31 *Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy in the Western Mediterranean. At a time when most transport was by sea, Bône was closer to Tunis (214km) and Cagliari (283km) than to Algiers (418km). Made using scribblemaps.com*

²⁰ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 234-6.



Figure 32 Detail of roadmap from 1930s showing the region in which the Djebari affair unfolded with added underlining. East is the Tunisian border in dotted lines. All the suspects lived along the railway line between Constantine, Guelma and Bône. Djebari's train station of Bordj Sabath was just outside Oued Zenati, while his father lived in Mondovi.

Newspapers and the conspiracy-form

'Talian and French Papers'

In all his writings, Djebari stated that it was by reading 'Talian [*sic*] and French papers' [*awraq al-talianiyya wa al-faransawiyya*] that were 'difficult to understand' [*sa'iba li-l-fahm*] that the society came to be aware of events in Tunis.²¹ Even if we assume that the society existed only in Djebari's head, this is an interesting statement: Djebari found out about events in Tunisia through European newspapers, not through direct contact with Tunisians. In 1881, Algerians would spot Tunisians on the streets of the port of Bône and ask them 'what news?' to know of events on the other side of border.²² Djebari's news did not come from these channels. Only *after* having found out about these

²¹ Letter from Messaoud ben Djebari to Tunisian Prime Minister Mustapha ben Isma'il, 17 February 1881, ANOM/DC/B²⁵.

²² Police report, Commissaire de police de Bône, 3 May 1881, in ANOM/DC/B²⁵.

troubling events from the newspapers did he travel to Tunis to find out more. Based on the news from these papers, Djebari could have been able to plausibly invent most of the facts he presented in his deposition.

Through Djebari's eyes, we can also see what it must have been like to be on the receiving end of the onslaught of print news that took over Algeria in the late nineteenth century. This whole world of print was confusing, overwhelming and 'difficult to understand'. Like Allane in chapter 2, Djebari was a rare bilingual reader in French and in Arabic and thus unusually positioned to take advantage of the contemporary expansion of both the French Algerian settler press and the wider Mediterranean press in Arabic, whose stories we have traced in Chapter 1.

This new class of men, elevated by their access to print news, was of uncertain social status. When under interrogation for participation in the secret society, the *qadi* of Guelma, Sa'ïd Bin Shattah, of a far more prestigious family but unable to read French, initially denied ever having met him Djebari. Eventually, he confessed that Djebari read French newspapers to him.²³ As Abdelkader Djeghloul has shown, those trained in the official *médresa* like Djebari acted as a bridge between the worlds of those literate in Arabic and in French.²⁴ As a rare bilingual reader, his unusual abilities gave him much more importance than his lowly social status. The boom of French newspapers in Algeria as well as Arabic newspapers in the Mediterranean created a peculiar information order whereby a small literate minority suddenly had access to huge amounts of information about international politics, a minority which irritated both French authorities and the Algerian notability.

What did Djebari mean by French and Talian papers? For the French papers, Djebari would have been spoilt for choice in the winter of 1881.²⁵ At the time, there was

²³ Confrontation between Djebari and Bin Shattah, ANOM/DC/B²⁵.

²⁴ Djeghloul, 'La formation des intellectuels algériens', p.644.

²⁵ See chapter 1.

no newspaper published in Guelma, the nearest city to Bordj Sabath, but it is likely, given his location on the railway track, that Djebari read newspapers from Constantine and Bône. Djebari's writings, as will become clear later, reveal a sophisticated understanding of struggles between Opportunist and Radical Republicans, so it is likely that he read several different political newspapers, possibly *Le Républicain de Constantine* or *La Seybouse*.²⁶

The case of the 'Talian paper' is more intriguing. It emerged during the investigation that Djebari was referring to *Al Mustaqill* ('The Independent'), a newspaper published in Arabic in Cagliari, the capital of Sardinia.²⁷ Given that newspapers in Arabic were not that common in 1881, Cagliari might at first seem like a strange choice for a publishing place, but this reflected the importance of Sardinian business interests in Italian investments in Tunisia. Djebari was at the centre of a French-Italian media war over the future of Tunisia, part of which was waged in Arabic via rival newspapers. Decades before Radio-Bari and Radio-Alger fought the war of the airwaves, imperial rivalry pushed European powers to develop media in Arabic, exposing men like Djebari to competing opinions on world events.²⁸

Launched on 28 March 1880, with at least some direct assistance from the Italian government, *Al Mustaqill* was the Arabic version of *L'Arvenire di Sardegna*. This was the mouthpiece of Italian interests in Tunisia (subtitle *organo della colonia italiana in Tunisia*), founded by Giovanni de Francesco, who wrote most of the articles and hired a Maronite

²⁶ Louis-Pierre Montoy, 'La presse dans le département de Constantine'.

²⁷ I was able to locate a copy of *Al Mustaqill* in the Biblioteca Universitaria di Cagliari thanks to Simone Langui and the digitizing team of the BUC. On *Al Mustaqill* see Ernesto Concas, 'Un giornale arabo pubblicato a Cagliari nel 1880-1881, El Mostakel (L'indipendente)', (Cagliari, 1927) and Francesco Atzeni, 'Italia e Africa del Nord nell'Ottocento', *Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea*, 6, June 2011, pp.785-810. Neither, as far as I can tell, went so far as to read the actual newspaper in Arabic.

²⁸ For a similar observation involving Egyptian nationalists using the European press in this period, see Ziad Fahmy 'Francophone Egyptian Nationalists'.

Christian from Lebanon by the name of Yusif Bakhus, to translate the articles into Arabic.²⁹

The existence of *Al Mustaqill* created a panic among French administrators, and it was promptly banned in Algeria. A newspaper in Arabic, they assumed, could excite the natives' fanaticism and provoke an insurrection in Algeria. In August 1880, administrators tried to find copies of the newspaper being smuggled via the Tunisian border, but with the exception of one bookshop selling it in Algiers, their search was fruitless.³⁰

Administrators vastly exaggerated *Al Mustaqill*'s subversive nature. Though biased towards Italy and against France, the newspaper was a rather sober publication whose articles ranged from news of the Russian tsar's assassination in Moscow to developments in London, Bucharest and New York. Its patron, De Francesco, claimed to want to use the newspaper so that Arabs may 'suck the milk of civilisation and gradually raise themselves up to the level of other nations' (*succhiare il latte della civiltà ed a mettersi grado a grado al livello delle altre nazioni*), objectives that were exactly those of the contemporary newspapers in Arabic sponsored by the French government to spread its influence that we encountered in Chapter 1.³¹ While colonial authorities often equated the spread of foreign Arabic print with anticolonial resistance, *Al Mustaqill* was no more anti-colonial than the French newspapers Djebari read. It was intended primarily to prepare a Tunisian and Libyan audience for the coming of Italian colonialism than to turn Algerians away from France.

²⁹ See the biographical page on Yusuf bin Habib Bakhus and examples of his poetry on the Mu'ajam al-Babtain, Dictionary of Arab Poetry in the 19th and 20th centuries, http://www.almoajam.org/poet_details.php?id=7943 accessed 15 December 2015 and Louis Cheikho, *Al-adab al-'arabiyya fi al-qarn al-tasi'* 'ashir [Arab literature in the 19th century], Beyrouth, 1926

³⁰ GGA to Interior, 20 August 1880, F⁸⁰1729.

³¹ Ernesto Concas, 'Un giornale arabo pubblicato a Cagliari nel 1880-1881, El Mostakel (L'indipendente)', Cagliari: Società Editrice Italiana, 1927.

In fact, the editor of the *Mustaqill*, Bakhus, variously known in European newspapers as Giuseppe Bokhos or Joseph Boghos, jumped ship in May 1881 to work for the French, publishing *Al Bassir* ('The Seer') from Paris. Bakhus, a typical figure of the Arabic literary renaissance, or *Nahda*, was mainly a man of letters looking for a job, now mainly remembered for his poems. He had no particular sympathies for Italy, and easily switched to working for France.³² In the Tunisian invasion, the antagonism between French and Italian imperialisms offered opportunities for ambitious editors like Bakhus, as well as for ambitious liars like Djebari.

Lebanese editors flowed easily between rival powers in this period – banning *Al Mustaqill* in Algeria turned out to be of only limited effect when it transpired that some of its articles were being copied in *Al Jawa'ib*, the newspaper founded in Istanbul by Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq with Ottoman official support and widely read in Algeria, so *Al Jawa'ib* had to be banned too.³³ Al-Shidyaq was from Ashqout, a village less than twenty kilometres away from Bakhus' home village of Ghazir in Mount Lebanon. Al-Shidyaq had edited the official *Waq'a'i al-Misri* in Cairo in the 1830s, then later moved to Tunisia in 1860 to launch the first official newspaper there, *Al Ra'id al Tunsi*, before leaving in 1861 for Istanbul to found *Al-Jawa'ib*, subsidised by the Ottoman sultan.³⁴

Newspapers printed in Istanbul, Cagliari or Paris had more in common than their patrons suggest. *Al-Mustaqill*'s Italian origins do not make it any less of a 'real' Arabic newspaper than Shidyaq's longer-lasting Ottoman-funded *Jawa'ib*. Arabic print evolved in a Mediterranean market which very much included Algeria, moving in and out of the influence of various European and non-European powers.

³² When Bakhus fled to France he allegedly sold incriminating evidence of the links between *Al Mustaqbal* and Italian authorities to the French press, thus leading to a widely-publicised affair. Ganiage, *Origines du protectorat*, 466. Articles in *Le Rappel*, 15 May 1881, *L'Intransigeant*, 2 December 1881, *Le Figaro*, 19 December 1881, *Le Rappel*, 10 September 1882.

³³ GGA to MAE, 5 April 1881, MAE, CP/8.

³⁴ Robert Holt to Mustapha Khaznadar, 24 April 1860, Archives Nationales Tunisiennes [ANT], Série historique/71. On the beginnings of the Tunisian print industry see Kmar Bendana, 'Générations d'imprimeurs et figures d'éditeurs à Tunis entre 1850 et 1950' in Jacques Michon and Jean-Yves Mollier (eds.), *Les mutations du livre et de l'édition dans le monde du XVIII^e siècle à l'an 2000*, (Québec, 2001), pp.349-358.

As Djebari's reading patterns make clear, the newspaper industry, in French and in Arabic, in Paris, Istanbul and Algiers, was all deeply connected. In fact, given that the *Mustaqill* enjoyed only an extremely small distribution in Algeria, it is quite likely that Djebari first found out about it through the French press: from August 1880, *Le Figaro*, *Le Séaphore* and *Le Temps*, all in Paris, lambasted this new pro-Italian Arabic newspaper, which became the centrepiece of growing tensions around Tunisia.³⁵ French newspapers magnified the importance *Al-Mustaqill* to Algerians like Djebari.

Or perhaps Djebari found out about *Al-Mustaqill* through the police investigation itself. In Algeria, officers tracked smuggled copies of the newspaper carefully. In Tunisia, it was reported that the 'suspected readers of the *Mustaqill* continue to be carefully watched' by the pro-French government.³⁶ If anything, this must have made *Al Mustaqill* seem much more important: surveillance created the readers that it attempted to suppress. Djebari hardly needed to have read the *Mustaqill*, given how much information the French press and police provided about it. To a large extent, surveillance created the Secret Islamic Society just as much as Djebari's imagination did.

Conspiracy theories

Much of the evidence for the Secret Society of Guelma was generated by the investigation itself. The *préfet* of Constantine, Eugène Doucin, collaborated with Djebari in making it come true. Doucin, while he admitted the possibility that the society was wholly Djebari's imagining, ultimately did not agree with that skeptical interpretation of events: 'This manner of seeing things, acceptable at first, does not hold up when we descend into the details of the affair.' For Doucin, even though the society may not have

³⁵ Concas, 'Un giornale arabo'.

³⁶ *L'Avvenire di Sardegna*, 1 July 1880, quoted by Concas, 'Un giornale arabo'.

been as developed as Djebari implied in his forgeries, the *qadis* were up to something, as suggested by ‘a whole series of little details and agitations.’³⁷

There were many little details and agitations, but it was unclear if these were the result of a pre-existing secret society, or of the investigation process itself. The whole case came to the attention of the French consul in Tunis thanks to another shady individual, a man known as Chabbi. Chabbi claimed to be a *marabout* of great influence along the tribes of the Algerian-Tunisian border, his influence even extending to his ability to know the *bey*’s wives and the inner gossip of the harem.³⁸ While in Tunis, Chabbi acquired Djebari’s documents on the Secret Society and sold them to the French consul, Roustan, the Italian Macciò’s greatest rival.³⁹ Upon Roustan’s alert, the investigation in Algeria began. Chabbi was summoned to Bône to be interrogated and claimed that he could lead French authorities to a meeting of the secret society.

Chabbi was heavily suspected of being a double agent. The French consul in Tunis, Roustan, sent Chabbi to Bône bearing a letter vouching for his goodwill, but secretly sent a telegram to warn authorities that he was extremely dangerous, knowing that the telegram would reach Algeria first.⁴⁰ In Bône, Chabbi was instructed to contact members of the secret society and find out when the next meeting would happen. Chabbi repeatedly met the local *qadi* and various other notables, but claimed that the meeting was delayed. The *sous-préfet* was convinced that Chabbi was sabotaging the investigation by warning the *qadi* that he was under surveillance, thus eliminating the evidence before the police could get to it.

In a particularly bizarre incident on 21 April 1881, Chabbi burst into the office of the *sous-préfet* in Bône claiming that two doughnut-sellers coming from the Tunisian

³⁷ Report, 23 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

³⁸ Chabbi’s deposition to the préfet of Constantine, 3 May 1881, MAE/CP/9.

³⁹ Djebari claimed that he gave Chabbi the documents in order to secure an audience with Mustafa bin Ismail, while Chabbi claimed that he paid 500 reales for them to the Bey’s Secretary, Bach Kateb.

⁴⁰ Sous-préfet of Bône to Préfet de Constantine, 1 May 1881, MAE/CP/9.

border were spreading false news about French defeats against Tunisian tribes.⁴¹ As the police busied themselves with arresting these two men, the *sous-préfet* noticed that two chief suspects of the investigation, the *qadi* and *shaykh* of Bône, discretely entered into a nearby store, where other prominent local characters filed in one after another. ‘I am convinced that (...) Chabbi came to point out the two natives arriving from [the Tunisian border] and ask me to send a police agent to find them in order to turn away the police’s attention from the actual meeting’, concluded the *sous-préfet*.⁴² Later on, the *sous-préfet* hesitated on whether Chabbi had intentionally deceived him on that day, but remained certain that Chabbi’s contacts with the local *qadi* and *shaykh* had led them to eliminate any evidence.⁴³

The investigation into the secret society thus produced an ‘information panic’, to use Christopher Bayly’s phrase, a moment when the colonial state realised the shoddy basis of its intelligence.⁴⁴ Incapable of finding reliable evidence, administrators went into overdrive. Report after report, useless facts pile up: we learn, for instance, that Djebari bought a notebook from a bookseller named Nataf for the price of 1 franc and 25 centimes, but we do not know if he used it to keep the society’s supposed register of activities as he claimed.⁴⁵ In Bône, the investigation on the alleged incident of the doughnut-sellers runs on for several pages, contrasting witness after witness, to no definite conclusion.⁴⁶ Here, as Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out in *Along the Archival Grain*, it is clear that the accumulation of facts did not make for more effective colonial rule: ‘The quest for affective knowledge - that which moves people to feel and act – was

⁴¹ ‘Vendeurs de beignets’. Judging from other surveillance reports, the profession seems to have been associated with wandering vagrants.

⁴² Sous-préfet in Bône to préfet in Constantine, 1 May 1881, MAE/CP/9.

⁴³ ‘We are deceived by Chabi’ Sous-préfet in Bône to préfet de Constantine, 17 May 1881. See also idem, 3 May 1881, ANOM, DC/B25.

⁴⁴ Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

⁴⁵ Report 23 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

⁴⁶ Police report from Hippolyte Anglès, commissaire de Bône, 3 May 1881 on ‘Seditious speech held by Mohamed el Flairi and Ali ben Hassein ben Zagoua, Tunisian subjects’, ANOM/DC/B25.

the coveted pursuit of state intelligence yet beyond its grasp.’⁴⁷ In particular, it was impossible to know the true motives of the natives. Compiling minor fact after minor fact yet unable to ascertain whether the conspiracy had existed, the affair seems to suggest the poor functioning of the French intelligence system.

However dysfunctional, the system was productive; only it generated unexpected results. Surveillance did not obtain legally valid proof of the conspiracy’s existence, but the investigation itself ended up creating the conspiracy. As news got out that an investigation was underway, local notables started acting suspiciously. In Guelma, the *sous-préfet* noticed that he was himself the victim of surveillance, as the *qadi*’s entourage watched over his office to find out about the investigation.⁴⁸ He was uncertain whether the conspiracy was real. ‘It is difficult to know their intimate thoughts. But there is among them a very active moral effervescence. They are very pale.’⁴⁹ This was enough evidence to suggest that a real plot was at hand. Under investigation, the *qadi* Ben Chettah was deemed suspicious for his face ‘covered up with drops of sweat during the interrogation’.⁵⁰ Given that he faced possible internment, this was perhaps hardly surprising.

Ben Chettah probably did have a few things to hide. In fact, it would be strange if local notables had *not* been up to something. It was common at the time for prominent men of a region to meet to discuss the latest news, and there is evidence of similar practices in Algiers during the invasion of Tunisia.⁵¹ Surely, notables of the Bône-Guelma region, so close to the Tunisian border, would have been heavily concerned with events

⁴⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 8.

⁴⁸ Sous-préfet in Guelma to préfet in Constantine, 30 April 1881, MAE CP/9.

⁴⁹ Sous-préfet of Guelma to préfet of Constantine, 30 April 1881, MAE CP/9.

⁵⁰ Préfet in Constantine to GGA, 3 May 1881, MAE/CP/9.

⁵¹ See Chapter 1, pp.41-3.

in the neighbouring Regency. Contacts across the border were strong, and the Tunisian Prime Minister, Mustafa bin Ismail, had visited Bône recently in 1878.⁵²

A very structured society that kept detailed records of its secret proceedings with formal voting, as Djebari claimed, seems implausible, but a looser gathering of concerned men is to be expected. Such a gathering, rather than an organised conspiracy, may have been there to wait and see: ‘if the French win, the society will be dissolved; if they are defeated, we will act’, as Chabbi summarised.⁵³ The conquest of Tunisia was unusually swift and by the time the investigation really got going French soldiers were already outside Tunis. It is not difficult to imagine that had French troops faced more difficulties, some interests in Algeria might have been keen to take advantage of the absence of French troops. The investigation did turn up some suggestive but inconclusive evidence that the *qadi* of Bône was in contact with Tunisian Prime Minister Mustafa bin Isma‘il, and that in particular his assistant El Aifa was nicknamed ‘the Telegraph’ for his role in transmitting information across the whole region.⁵⁴

The *qadis*’ denials, as French authorities pointed out, seemed too vehement to be true. When pressed during the investigation, the *qa’ids*, *shaykhs*, *qadis*, these respectable figures that were the French state’s trusted intermediaries in dealing with the Algerian Muslim population, denied everything: Ben Chettah, *qadi* of Guelma and principal suspect, blandly said in prison that he knew nothing about secret societies or meetings ‘Arabs do not know of such affairs.’⁵⁵ Yet at another point, Ben Chettah admitted under interrogation that Djebari used to read French newspapers to him and that he had lent 50 francs to Djebari in January to allow him to go to Algiers, suggesting that Djebari

⁵² d’Estournelles de Constant, *Politique française en Tunisie*, p.98.

⁵³ Chabbi’s deposition to the préfet of Constantine, 3 May 1881, MAE/CP/9.

⁵⁴ Report, 23 May 1881 and notes on El Aifa and Djebari’s father’s meetings towards in ANOM/DC/B25.

⁵⁵ Ben Chettah, deposition at the civil prison of Constantine, 14 June 1881. On the role of these prominent notable families in the French colonial system see Peter Von Sivers. ‘Insurrection and accommodation: indigenous leadership in Eastern Algeria, 1840-1900’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6, 1975, 259-275.

must have been somewhat involved in the original lobbying for the Islamic justice system happening in the region.

The point however, it not to speculate on whether the society really existed. In doing so, there is a danger of simply repeating the archive, and rephrasing the questions of nineteenth century administrators.⁵⁶ Instead, looking more critically at the activities of the *préfet*, it becomes clear that Djebari's story fit perfectly around what colonial administrators could not know about Muslim political activity. Djebari's story made sense precisely because this was a place and time where politics for Muslims could only exist on the edge of the visible spectrum. Under the *indigénat*, 'natives' could not meet, move around, print or even talk about politics publicly. Having pushed political life into the shadows, state surveillance scrutinized mysterious billowings of dark smoke, tracking down effervescences and imaginary plots.

Moreover, conquered and sullen, most Algerians did not risk open resistance to French authority, but withdrew into a hostile non-cooperation that included withholding information from colonial authorities.⁵⁷ Ben Chettah's claim to know nothing made him more suspicious, as authorities usually interpreted the silence of the natives as the sign of a coming insurrection.⁵⁸

Incapable of obtaining reliable verbal information, official reports often slipped into hazy assessments of Muslims' physical reactions to discern their true emotions. While the *préfet* was deeply suspicious of Ben Chettah, he ultimately trusted Djebari because 'it is clear from his physiognomy (...) that Djebari was not making it up [*n'a pas*

⁵⁶ Farge, *Goût de l'archive*, 'l'histoire n'est jamais répétition de l'archive mais désinstallation par rapport à elle', 93.

⁵⁷ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, 1990).

⁵⁸ In another case, an administrator would note that 'L'ignorance de certains indigènes (...) peut à bon droit paraître suspecte', Affaires indigènes in Constantine to GGA, 10 avril 1884, ANOM, GGA/1H31.

joué la comédie].⁵⁹ Djebari must have been a skilled actor, adept at giving the *préfet* the performance he expected.

The investigation into the secret society brought forth a host of informants, yet Djebari was by far the most talented of these men, or, to use a pun, the most intelligent. Aside from Chabbi, the pseudo-holy man with salacious information on the inner harem of the Tunisian *bey*, there was a man named Cohen who transmitted news between Djebari, Djebari's father, and the French consul in Tunis - hardly surprising given Jews' intermediary status throughout colonial North Africa.⁶⁰ Cohen too tried to sell exciting information to the *préfet*. He went even further than Djebari, alleging that Ben Chettah had travelled to Italy and met the king, and that there was not just one but three secret societies, 'a kind of freemasonry' one for every *département*, claiming parallel societies existed for the Algiers region (based in Boufarik) and around Oran (based in Tlemcen).⁶¹

Describing the societies as a 'kind of freemasonry', Cohen, like Djebari, played upon European imaginaries of secret societies. Conspiracy theories, particularly Republican ones, had after all been of very real political importance in nineteenth century metropolitan France, precipitating regime change in 1848 and 1870, and it is likely from these stories that Djebari and other informants drew inspiration. In the early years of the Third Republic, Catholic congregations, freemasons and Jesuits were all suspected of conspiring in secret against the State, and to this jolly bunch we can add Algerian Muslims. Conspiracy trials erupted regularly in France: from the grand conspiracy trial against the *bonlangistes* in 1889, to the conspiracy theories that were rife on both sides during the Dreyfus Affair (depending on one's side, either an alliance of Jews and

⁵⁹ Report 23 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/9H4.

⁶⁰ French consul in Tunis to PC, 8 May 1881, ANOM/DC/B25.

⁶¹ PC to GGA, 12 May 1881, ANOM/DC/B25.

rootless atheists or a conjuration of monarchist militaries with the Pope).⁶² In many ways, Djebari's fantasised conspiracy, full of formalised voting and debates, clung close to the French imaginary, though they also had older North African roots. Secret societies had been equally important to politics in the Regencies of Algiers before 1830, and continued to be so in Tunisia until 1881. Plots to overthrow the *beys* through coups were a mainstay of European travellers' descriptions of the region.⁶³

Misleading informants planting false conspiracies are common characters in colonial societies. Thin colonial states struggled to gain accurate information on the society surrounding them, allowing cunning individuals to profit from the clay feet of the intelligence state. In British India too, as Bayly has pointed out, 'aware that money and status awaited them if they could uncover a convincing conspiracy, informants fed misinformation into the British intelligence system'. One shrewd British officer noted that 'disposition to receive such information and the practice of rewarding informants will produce a constant succession of reported plots'.⁶⁴ In the Dutch East Indies too, Stoler notes that 'subalterns tapped into the uncertainties, fears, and fantasies of European hidden scripts by playing them back to planters and officials for their own political purposes'.⁶⁵

Many of these studies tend to look upon these characters from the administrator's perspective: as a nuisance to orderly rule. Men like Djebari became a way to diagnose the weakness of colonial rule, to show how gullible supposedly indomitable colonial administrators really were. However, Djebari's case does not reveal a major dysfunction of the intelligence system: the *préfet* quite coolly came to the conclusion, after much investigation, that Djebari might be lying.

⁶² Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République: stratégies du secret de Boulanger à la Cagoule*, (Paris, 1998). On the Dreyfus Affair see Harris, *The Man on Devil's Island*.

⁶³ Valensi, *Mardochée Naggjar*.

⁶⁴ Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 147-9.

⁶⁵ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p.186. For another very similar case in Russian Turkestan see Alexander Morrison, 'Sufism, Pan-Islamism and Information Panic'.

Moreover, there is nothing particularly colonial about conspiracy theories. In eighteenth century Paris, as described by Lise Jane Graham, gifted people of lowly backgrounds also planted false accusations of seditious activity to attain their own ends: 'Recognizing their heightened importance as purveyors of a desired commodity, individuals produced the very rumors and threats the crown was so eager to track and eradicate.'⁶⁶ Whether in colonial Algeria, India, Indonesia, or in *Ancien Régime* France, the common thread is that in all these places, political activity could only be covert. Parties, gatherings, elections, were all illegal. Consequently, whatever politics there could be were necessarily secret.

Algeria's proximity to the metropole makes it particularly visible that this problem was not uniquely colonial. The man in charge of investigating Djebari, the *préfet* of Constantine, Eugène Marie Joseph Doucin, conducted most of his career in the metropolitan civil service, like most *préfets* posted to Algeria.⁶⁷ His way of dealing with the case reveals both widespread anxieties about Muslims but also more general anxieties of the French state. The integration of Algeria into three *départements* like any other meant that men like Doucin were posted back and forth across the Mediterranean without being part of a specifically 'colonial' track. Born in Avignon in 1844, his posting as *préfet* in Constantine was a brief North African interlude in a steadily progressing career that later led him to be *préfet* of the Pyrénées-Orientales, Orne and Oise *départements*, along with his native Vaucluse.⁶⁸ The 'conspiracy-form', to use Luc Boltanski's phrase,

⁶⁶ Lise Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV*, (Charlotteville, NC,, 2000).

⁶⁷ Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir dans l'Algérie coloniale*, p.211. This was less the case for the lesser echelons of the colonial administration, especially the *administrateurs de commune mixte* which were typically recruited among the local settler population and tended to remain posted in Algeria.

⁶⁸ See the information on Doucin's dossier for the *légion d'honneur* in the Archives Nationales, also available online on the Léonore database <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/leonore/pres.htm>

circulated between Djebari and the *préfet*, and one cannot be understood without the other with whom it lived in symbiosis.⁶⁹

While Djebari's case certainly allows us a window into the functioning of French intelligence in Algeria, it is perhaps too easy to dismiss it as a case of colonial weakness. It is particularly tempting, in a context of imperial rule, to describe this problem as one of a foreign state struggling to keep track of native information circuits. In this reading, problems occurred when the empire's intelligence slipped behind.⁷⁰

Instead of seeing him as a problem to the orderly functioning of the French state, what might happen if we look at this affair from Djebari's perspective? This raises a much more difficult question: why did Djebari lie? As Boltanski points out, fictional conspiracies can be particularly instructive as to how people thought of the state.⁷¹ For all his eccentricities, Djebari was as much a part of the French state as the *préfet* he encountered in Constantine. Occupying a series of undistinguished administrative positions as teacher, stationmaster and later interpreter, Djebari aspired to be a loyal and productive cog in colonial rule.

Don Quixote de Guelma: Messaoud ben Djebari, his politics, his lies

Djebari was a rather prolific agitator, and his traces in the archival record go well beyond the case of the 1881 Secret Society, thus making it possible to reconstitute his thoughts in some detail. Many of Djebari's activities came from a feeling that he did not fit into Algerian society. From a modest family, his father described himself as a 'farmer'

⁶⁹ On the 'conspiracy-form' and the relationship between fiction, the state and the organisation of reality see Luc Boltanski, *Enigmes et complots: une enquête à propos d'enquêtes* (Paris, 2012).

⁷⁰ Bayly, *Empire and Information* and Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*.

⁷¹ Boltanski, *Enigmes et complots*.

[*agriculteur*], and seems to have owned some land just outside Bône.⁷² Somehow, Djebari had managed to study at the *médessa* in Constantine, and was convinced that he was entitled to an administrative job: 'His vanity leads him to believe that he is entitled to a high position and he would stop at nothing to obtain satisfaction of his desire' wrote the closest French official to Djebari's home, who had come to know him well.⁷³ He repeatedly contacted local authorities begging for a position, to no avail.⁷⁴ Djebari's writings reveal a persistent desire to attract official attention. The investigation uncovered a stash of letters that Djebari wrote in the autumn of 1880 as 'secretary of a Republican committee' in Bordj Sabath. In these, Djebari claimed to be merely acting on the initiative of 'a number of Arabs', but the conceit seems clear. He had a penchant for making up societies before events in Tunisia revealed him to the attention of authorities.⁷⁵

Djebari also had his own, highly distinctive political agenda which he did not get from French newspapers around him. He consistently articulated a deep social tension *within* Algerian Muslim society which other sources in this period are silent about. Djebari's political opinions can be found primarily in three texts that were seized on him in Tunis as well as in his various depositions and letters to the administration: the account of the meeting of the secret society, which sparked the investigation, a proclamation to the people of Algeria and a report to Algerians on the situation in Tunisia. In these Djebari expressed frustration with French colonial rule that had not delivered the social advancement he hoped. In a manifesto written in Tunis in his trademark dialect-infused style, he called on Algerians to take 'political weapons' [*al-salaha al-siyasi*, sic] to struggle against French oppression, and to 'pay attention that the Tunisian

⁷² Letter from Djebari's father soliciting a job for his son, 21 November 1880, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁷³ Administrator of the Commune Mixte de Oued-Zenati to préfet of Constantine, 12 May 1881, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁷⁴ The *qadi* of Bône, al Fassi, only remembers ever hearing about Djebari when Djebari sent him a letter begging for a job, al Fassi's deposition in prison, 10 June 1881, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁷⁵ Djebari to Administrator of Oued Zenati, 3 November 1880, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

government [*al-dawla al-tunisiyya*] is not sold like its neighbour the Algerian kingdom [*al-mamlaka al-jaza'iriyya*].⁷⁶ Djebari insisted that this was a 'purely intellectual struggle' to obtain rights for poor Muslims and indeed the préfet was convinced that Djebari was 'more of a politician than a fighter.'⁷⁷

The core problem for Djebari was that France had sold out on its Republican values by reinforcing a feudal system within Algeria. His report on the political situation in Tunisia allegedly filed for the Secret Society of Guelma was tellingly titled 'Exposition of the matters of Tunis to all Muslim natives of the élite and people in Algeria' (*'Ard hal umur tunis al-hadira bi-jami' al-abali al-muslimin min al-khas wa al-'am fi al-jaza'ir*).⁷⁸ Whilst in prison in 1881, abandoned by the local big men who denied ever having met him, Djebari ranted against 'the Arab clergy and nobility' which France protected 'against the lower class'. 'What is the country of the universe that, like Algeria, needs huge reforms, that in the middle of the nineteenth century has lords and slaves?'. The world, for him, was cleft between the Arabs 'with the white *burnous*', lazy and entitled, and the 'miserable Arabs', who toiled hard. These poor men had welcomed the French who had saved them from Turkish oppression only to find the French have not lived up to their Republican ideals.⁷⁹ Djebari's perspective is neither that of the French administrators nor that of the Muslim elite, but explicitly that of the Arab underclass.

For this reason, Djebari consistently sought the assistance of radical Republican politicians in metropolitan France. Before 1880, he apparently travelled to Paris and may have met some politicians there. He sent his petitions to defend the Islamic justice system to Georges Clemenceau, one of the most outspoken critics of the government's

⁷⁶ ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁷⁷ Deposition of Djebari to préfet, 14 may 1881, ANOM, DC/B²⁵. Report 23 May 1881, 9H4.

⁷⁸ If anything, the French translation made the class dimension more explicit by translating as 'société des musulmans algériens *quel que soit leur rang*', the document is part of the dossier ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁷⁹ Djebari in prison to préfet in Constantine, June 1881, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

colonial policy and leader of the far-left in the National Assembly.⁸⁰ Victor Guichard, another prominent Republican politician on the left was offered the honorary presidency of the imaginary secret society of Guelma.⁸¹

His petitions did not fall on deaf ears, and his passage in prison in 1881 did not dampen his activities. It is unclear how long Djebari remained in detention, but by 1884, we find him in Paris, giving lectures on the 'Algerian question' at the Société Française de Protection des Indigènes (founded on the model of the British Aborigines' Protection Society), under the presidency of Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, probably the most influential theoretician of Third Republic French colonialism whom we met in chapter 4.⁸²

Saharan Novels: Djebari's Second Lie

His trail then goes quiet for a few years. Djebari's activities nearly fifteen years after the case of the Islamic Secret Society, however, are most revealing of his mode of action. By 1891, Djebari had become a military interpreter, a job he probably found more suited to his linguistic abilities but, clearly, still unbecoming a man of his importance.⁸³ At this time, he was still based in Duzerville (now El Hadjar), just outside Bône, where his father had also been based. By 1892, it seems he was back in Tunis, where he suddenly emerged to become more prominent than ever before.

In late 1894, a telegram from Tunis took the French press by storm – the men of the Flatters Mission, who had disappeared in 1881 deep in the Sahara, taken for dead for fifteen years, had been seen alive. The disappearance of the Flatters mission had been of

⁸⁰ The *Journal Officiel* of parliamentary debates for 10 April 1881 noted that Clemenceau had deposited a petition from 'M. Djebari, résidant à Tunis'.

⁸¹ Pace Christelow ('Intellectual History', 396), it is unlikely that this is Jules Guichard, who would later become a prominent critic of the government's Algerian policy, because he was not a Senator yet in 1881, but more probably his father, who was an MP for the same Yonne constituency.

⁸² *Le Rappel*, 7 July 1884. While Djebari's trip to Paris before 1880 is somewhat unclear, the one in 1884 is beyond doubt, as an anti-Jewish writer reported having seen him speak in Georges Meynié, *les Juifs en Algérie* (Paris, 1888), p.19..

⁸³ *La liberté de Bône*, 21 July 1891, quoting the nomination decree of 7 July 1891.

huge importance in 1881, stopping French expansion into the Sahara in its tracks. For many French Algerians, as one newspaper noted, finding out that Flatters was still alive was like finding one's father after a long disappearance.⁸⁴ The affair created much agitation, committees organised in France to figure out a way to rescue these poor Frenchmen, captive of the Touareg.⁸⁵

The man who claimed to have seen Flatters, deep in the desert, was none other than Messaoud Djebari, military interpreter for the French army in Tunisia. Djebari, now the darling of the French press, gave talks to geographical societies from Tunis to Toulouse, explaining his journey. According to Djebari, he had been sent on a mission of the utmost importance to West Africa by the Ministry of War and the Paris Geographical Society, to regions still inaccessible to the white man. Travelling by sea to Porto-Novo in Dahomey (now Benin), Djebari claimed to have crossed Yoruba country (very primitive, would greatly benefit from missionary activity, he noted), then up towards what is now Niger, and into the Sahara from the South. There, Djebari claimed that being a Muslim and Arabic-speaking, and of noble prophetic descent (*sharīf*), he was able to gain the Touaregs' trust, where he discovered to his great surprise four Frenchmen prisoners of the men of the desert.⁸⁶ Somehow, Djebari had escaped the attention of French authorities in Porto-Novo, Oran and Tunis, and had only published his itinerary once he was back in Tunis.

Nobody seems to have been aware of Djebari's previous illustrious career in telling lies, so his story was met with a surprising degree of trust. In Toulouse for instance, the secretary of the Geographical Society, Stanislas Guénot, noted that the lack of details in Djebari's itinerary was difficult to explain, especially given his alleged support from the Ministry of War, but insisted that Djebari's 'words seem filled with the

⁸⁴ V. Renaud, *Impartial de Bône*, 16 December 1894.

⁸⁵ *Bulletin du comité de l'Afrique française*, 1898, 180-181.

⁸⁶ Stanislas Guénot, 9 October 1895, *Bulletin de la Société de géographie de Toulouse*, 11-12, 1895, pp.413-426.

utmost sincerity and the most ardent conviction.⁸⁷ Like the *préfet* in Constantine, Guénot fell for Djebari's performances. Nor was he the only one: Djebari had the support of Ludovic de Polignac, prominent advocate of French expansion into the Sahara.

Djebari, once again, had great timing, as French interest in the conquest of the Sahara was expanding. While in 1881, Djebari had attempted to profit from French expansion in Tunisia, this time, he was sensitive to the spread of the French army through West Africa which would culminate with the creation of the colony of French West Africa (*Afrique occidentale française*, AOF) in 1895.

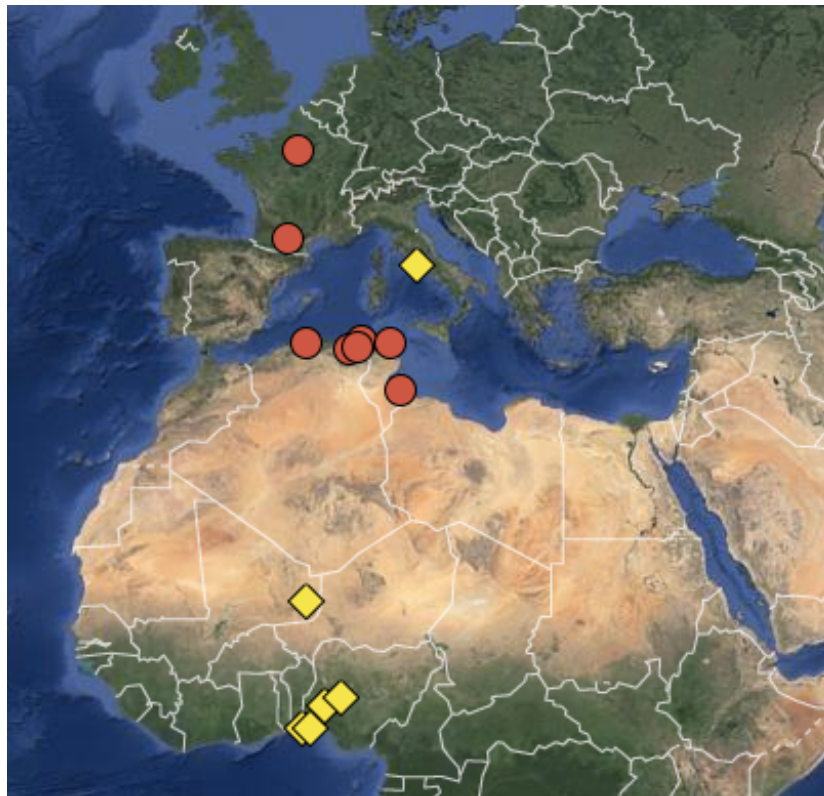


Figure 33 Map showing the places Djebari mentioned in his various affairs. Red circles indicate places where Djebari is attested to have been by outside sources, while yellow lozenges indicate those he claimed to have been to. Made by author using Google Maps.

This time, though, some people found his narrative suspicious from the outset. *L'Impartial de Bône*, the newspaper from his hometown (that seems to have been unaware of Djebari's origins), immediately noted that Djebari's story was bizarre when it came out

⁸⁷ *ibidem*.

in December 1894. It compared it to another ‘extraordinary story’ that had recently come out of the Sahara, that of Juan Cazorla.⁸⁸

Cazorla’s story, which had also taken the French press by storm in 1894, was if anything even more implausible than Djebari’s, though it followed the same pattern. It also took root in events that had unfolded in 1881, this time the Ouled Sidi-Cheikh insurrection that had taken over the southwest of Algeria. A particularly notable incident had been the insurgents’ raid on the town of Saïda, south of Oran, in which they killed many people, mainly Spaniards.⁸⁹ Among the dead were two members of the Cazorla family, poor Spaniards from a village just outside Almería who had come to Algeria in 1870 as agricultural workers.

In 1894, a man came to the *préfet* of Oran claiming to be Juan Cazorla. He came accompanied by his brother, Cecilio, who certified that this was indeed his brother, found at long last after over a decade of captivity. Cazorla had, somewhat implausibly, lost the ability to speak his native language, Castilian Spanish, and could now only speak Arabic. In fact, he did not say much at all, apparently having become a ‘complete savage’ (*véritable sauvage*) after years of detention. Cazorla’s interrogation by the *préfet* led to a story spanning several pages, but essentially he claimed to have been taken by the insurgents in 1881 to Figuig, then contested territory between France and Morocco, and to have lived there as a slave for many years. Among the more surprising elements of his story, he claimed many blonde Europeans wearing three-piece suits lived in Figuig (deep in the Saharan desert), that he saw elephants and panthers there, and that on his way back he crossed great rivers around Ouargla, an oasis town not exactly famous for its water

⁸⁸ V. Renaud, 16 December 1894, *Impartial de Bône*.

⁸⁹ These events precipitated a diplomatic crisis with Spain over compensation for the victims, see Vilar, *Los españoles en la Argelia francesa*, pp.163-4.

flow.⁹⁰ Despite all of these inconsistencies, which the *préfet* duly noted, parts of his story still seemed plausible to those who listened.



Figure 34 Map showing Cazorla's alleged journey. The story was of a slow descent to the South, from Almería to Oran, then Saida, then Figuig. While the map shows contemporary borders, the Southern portion of the Algeria-Morocco border was disputed at the time. Map made by author using Google Maps.

L'Impartial de Bône compared the two stories, wondering if both were fictional: 'are we not currently in the period of the *romans du désert*?'⁹¹ Djebari's tale combined with that of Cazorla to create a media frenzy around the possibility that Europeans were captive deep in the Sahara and should be rescued by the French government, which was

⁹⁰ PO to GGA, 26 September 1894, MAE/CP/NS/30.

⁹¹ V. Renaud, 16 December 1894, *Impartial de Bône*.

ignoring these important witnesses' stories at its peril.⁹² While it is not clear what exactly pseudo-Cazorla and his family were playing at, Djebari's game, at least, is clear. By casting himself as a kind of French Stanley crossing darkest Africa to find the darling Dr Livingstone (Flatters), Djebari hoped once again to assume the prominence he deserved.

In retrospect, Djebari's second grand fiction casts light on his first attempt in 1881. It confirms the impression that the Secret Society of 1881 was largely fictional, even if Ben Chettah and his friends in Guelma may have been up to something less glamorous. Once again, in 1895 Djebari was obsessed with class, claiming to be from an illustrious ancient Muslim family to a French audience who knew no better than to believe him. In the 1881 case it was briefly noted that he had marital problems with his wife. By 1895, a friend of his in Tunisia claimed that he was now married to a French Catholic woman, proof of Djebari's 'moral independence.'⁹³ Mixed marriages were extremely scarce in colonial North Africa, but given Djebari's generally unusual trajectory this seems plausible, and would suggest that he had possibly divorced his first, Muslim wife (easier under Islamic law than under French civil law where divorce was impossible until 1884).

In June of 1895, ruined, fired from his job as an interpreter, and widely mocked in the press, Djebari hit back, publishing a short book explaining his position, *Les survivant de la mission Flatters*.⁹⁴ In this piece of writing, which he claimed was 'not a novel, but a terrible story', Djebari constantly spoke as a defender of national French honour, and of 'our colonial policy', identifying himself squarely with France.⁹⁵

At the deepest level, Djebari was desperate to be seen. He lamented, in his book, that he was described in the press as a simple 'native' (*indigène*) and not by his proper title

⁹² *Messager de l'Ouest* (Sidi bel Abbès), 27 August 1895.

⁹³ *L'Impartial Oranais*, 20 September 1895.

⁹⁴ The *Annuaire de l'armée française pour l'année 1895* gave Messaoud Djébari as second-class auxiliary interpreter in Zarzis in Tunisia. A cabinet decision of 8 May 1895 removed him of his position. Messaoud Djebari, *Les survivants de la mission Flatters*, (Tunis, 1895).

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p.3, 72.

as military interpreter.⁹⁶ Trained to be a servant of the colonial state, he learnt the languages and codes needed to please authorities, yet he was only listened to when he produced the exact opposite. He was only ever described as having a ‘thin lick of education’ (*un vernis d’éducation*), even though his French writing was sophisticated.⁹⁷ Despite their radical political agenda, Djebari’s writings are not acts of resistance. They are the opposite of James Scott’s ‘infrapolitics’, those discrete attempts to show resistance in the teeth of power, like those who sung about *Hajj Guillaume* on the verge of open resistance we saw in Chapter 3. On the contrary, Djebari desperately tried to make himself visible to state authorities by any means possible.⁹⁸

The best way to be seen was to create a story involving distant places. Precisely because it is fictional, Djebari’s story allows us to see the value of foreign news, so valuable that it could bring individuals to the attention of the highest levels of power, so valuable that he made it up to get ahead, so valuable that he did it (at least) twice.

Conclusion

Upon first stumbling upon Djebari and his conspiracy, the instinct is to uncover subversive activity, a political harem hidden away where Algerians plotted world events. The possibility that Algerians, deep in the colonial night, could have thoughts about the world system is somehow always surprising, exciting and slightly implausible, much like the original report of Djebari’s conspiracy. Under the oppression of colonialism, we seek elements of resistance, uncovering a ‘hidden transcript’ that would display Algerians’ true emotions concealed from the French. In the process, we end up replicating the questions

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.108.

⁹⁷ His written Arabic, on the other hand, was considerably influenced by the Algerian dialect and not the literary standard, though this was, perhaps, quite a common style for rural Algerian literacy at the time. Administrator of Oued-Zénati to PC, 12 May 1881, ANOM, DC/B²⁵.

⁹⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

of colonial administrators. These real and important thoughts, this hidden world, did not exist separately from the European authors and administrators that feared them.

Why should Djebari not be an example of Algerian views of the world under colonialism? After all, his political views were certainly more innovative and radical than many of his contemporaries. Yet he was not a pioneer of nationalism either. For all his eccentricities, Djebari was as much a part of the French state as the *préfet* he encountered in Constantine. To take up the sociologist Philip Abrams, we often think of the state as the repressive power that prevents us from seeing the truth, but the state is more of a fiction, 'the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.'⁹⁹

Occupying a series of undistinguished administrative positions as teacher, stationmaster and interpreter, Djebari aspired to be a loyal and productive agent of colonial rule. His writings reveal both a defence of Islam and a sustained advocacy for French colonialism. He saw himself as a co-coloniser, utterly dismissive of sub-Saharan Africans and mortally offended when the newspapers 'reduced him to a simple negro (*un simple nègre*)'.¹⁰⁰

Equally, he also resented the limitations to his advancement, both as a Muslim, and as a socially inferior member of Algerian society, and this led him to champion radical upheavals to the system. Given that the surveillance system was deeply preoccupied with rooting out any trace of foreign involvement, claiming involvement in international politics was the surest way of getting the higher-ups' attention. The colonial state's inefficiency, often pointed out by historians, is not the same as its insignificance. While it was clearly not the rational bureaucratic operation it claimed to be, its presence nonetheless had a deep impact on the society surrounding it.

⁹⁹ Philip Abrams, 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1:1, 1988, p.82.

¹⁰⁰ Djebari, *Les survivants*, p.109.

The French state, then, was not foreign to Djebari. In his 1895 book, he produced a detailed investigation into the causes of the disappearance of the Flatters mission, for 'knowing the administrative cogs, I am well-placed to know how investigations are conducted.'¹⁰¹ Djebari claimed to offer foreign news to the state, that is, news that was unknown and valuable to authorities. Most of his information, however, was spun out of familiar sources and worked in close collaborations with state officials, of which he thought he was one.

Djebari was in many ways exceptional, but his many lies reveal a far broader relationship between flows of information and flows of people. News from Tunisia came to Djebari first, which then gave him the idea to go there himself. The newspapers he read operated on a system of migrating editors, a scarce resource in the booming Arabic publishing industry. News, however, travelled faster and further than people, which is how Djebari could claim to have been to places he most likely never went to, and serve this fiction to hungry French audiences enthralled by the possibility of faraway places.

¹⁰¹ *ibidem*, 'connaissant les rouages administratifs, je suis à même de savoir comment se pratiquent les enquêtes', p.11.

Conclusion

In 1833, in Eastern Algeria, prominent notables of the region of Constantine wrote a petition (*shikaya*) requesting the help of the British Parliament in the face of encroaching French armies, 'having learnt that among the Principles of the Divan of the British Parliament (*divan barlamanat inqliz*) is the maintenance of the rights of mankind (*buquq al-bashr*)'.¹ The petition reveals a detailed understanding of recent developments in British politics. Writing in December 1833, the signatories noted that 'we have heard that you have sent one hundred million Spanish dollars to the [West] Indies for the manumission of the Slaves that are there', referring to the recent British abolition of slavery in August 1833 that did indeed lead to huge compensation for former slave-owners. 'You should hasten to protect our rights before you confirm the liberty of these slaves', it pleads, not showing much sympathy for the plight of people in the Caribbean. The petition was likely influenced by Hamdan Khodja, a man who had travelled to Istanbul, Tunis, and England, where he had met Jeremy Bentham.² It offers a glimpse into a cosmopolitan Algeria switched into the flow of world events before it became a part of France.

This snapshot contrasts strongly with another portrayal, written over a hundred years later by Albert Camus. At the other end of the colonial period in 1960, Camus wrote a largely autobiographical work, *Le Premier Homme*. Camus, the prodigal son, having

¹ Abdeljelil Temimi, 'Réflexions sur les relations d'Abdelkader avec la Sublime Porte et l'Angleterre en 1840-41', *Atti della settimana maghribina, Cagliari*, 22-25 maggio 1969, Milan: 1970. Abdeljelil Temimi, *Le Beylik de Constantine et Hadj Ahmed Bey (1830-1837)*, Tunis, 1978, 142. The original is in FO 77/25, General Correspondence from Tunis. I thank Hannah-Louise Clark for bringing this document to my attention.

² On the environment of the people who wrote this petition see James McDougall, 'A world no longer shared: Losing the *droit de cité* in nineteenth-century Algiers', *JESHO*, forthcoming, and Jennifer Pitts, 'Liberalism and empire in a nineteenth-century Algerian mirror' *Modern Intellectual History* 6:2 (2009), pp. 287-313.

made it big in Paris, comes back him to the provincial backwater of Algiers. He returns to the world he has left behind, the world of his mother, poor, partly deaf and illiterate, struggling to express herself in French having been raised in a Spanish family from the Balearic Isles. Camus' mother, who comes to represent Algeria, is incapable of understanding the world around her. France to her is 'an obscure place lost in an indistinct night (...)' She knows she comes from Spain and that the Germans are enemies, and of the rest of the world – nothing: 'The names of other countries hit her sometimes without being able to pronounce them correctly.'³ She stays away from the radio and the cinema, only occasionally flicking through the illustrations of newspapers before 'she would decide that the queen of England was sad and close the magazine to look out again through the same window to the movement of the same street that she had contemplated half of her life.'⁴ Written at the climax of the War of Algerian Independence, *Le Premier Homme* nostalgically imagines a dying world that never existed, a quiet paradise torn apart by the violence of decolonization that brought Algeria to occupy the bloody front of the international stage.

Taken together, these two snapshots seem to be irreconcilable. Was Algeria *already* connected to world news in 1833 or was it *still* isolated in 1960? As the previous chapters have shown, there is no such contradiction. Places are never wholly switched on or off from world news, and there is no magical moment of opening or closing. Colonialism did not close Algeria off from the world or open it up. In the words of Fredrick Cooper,

'historical analysis does not present a contrast between a past of territorial boundedness and a present of interconnection and fragmentation, but rather a back-and-forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies (...) To study colonization *is* to study the reorganization of space, the forging and unforgetting of linkages.'⁵

³ Albert Camus, *Le Premier Homme* [1994], (Paris, 2013), pp.79-80. Camus died abruptly in 1960 leaving the novel incomplete, and his widow only published it in 1994.

⁴ *Idem*, 111.

⁵ Fredrick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, (Berkeley: 2005), p.92, 105.

Within Algeria, some people had less access to news than others, a poor illiterate woman like Camus' mother, however European she was legally, understandably did not have the same access to news than a elite highly educated man like Hamdan Khodja, part of a Muslim elite which would soon be crushed by the conquest. Who had access to news and what they did with it was an important element of political power.

At the climax of colonial rule from 1881 to 1940, Algerians linked local developments to those happening outside through the news. The consolidation of civilian settler rule and a number of insurrections in 1881 occurred as the invasion of Tunisia put French authorities on edge for possible links between Muslims and the outside world. From 1897-1902 settlers participating in the autonomist crisis against the Governor-General in Algiers felt like their struggle was also a struggle against Britain and Jews. While politicians debated Muslim conscription in the French army in 1910-1914, European powers took over Morocco and Libya while a defensive Ottoman empire pushed pan-Islamism hard to counter its enemies, placing Muslims' connections beyond Algeria once again under scrutiny. In 1914, it seemed like the resumption of Franco-German conflict might also lead to a resumption of the times of insurrection within Algeria. After the First World War, Algerians followed the development of the international system closely, and institutional reforms seemed to be linked to the fate of nearby Italian Libya and other useful examples. Finally, the gradual breakdown of the international order in the Mediterranean from the mid-1930s, led by an expansionist fascist Italy, anti-colonial insurgency in Palestine and left-right conflict in the Spanish Civil War reverberated with increasing mass political mobilisation and violence in Algeria.

News was always important, but it circulated in shifting ways. In the late nineteenth century, a boom in newspapers accompanied a boom of settlement,

precipitating an influx of print news that transformed the media landscape. While authorities thought they could contain the effects of print to French citizens, newspapers became a source of information for all Algerians, though some had to listen to them being read out rather than read them themselves. The new networks of the electric telegraph and later, the cinema and the radio intensified the flow of news, but they did so mainly through the intermediary of an existing dense network of manuscript and oral news circulation. Later, seasonal labour migration to France as well as the extension of the radio, the Muslim press and mass party mobilisation in the interwar period changed these networks once more. News, however, continued to be thickest where it had always been: in the cafés and in the markets, where people discussed competing accounts of recent events and decided whether they warranted political action.

While most new technologies were controlled by the European minority, accounts of recent events constantly escaped their authors. *Pace* Benedict Anderson, in Algeria the same newspaper could lead to the imagination of two very different communities side by side. Conversely, newspapers could fail to find their audience, generating no community at all. Attempts to control news could force it to take unexpected paths, but they could not prevent it from getting across colonial society.

The state apparatus was at least as effective at spreading news as at censoring it. One the most significant sites of information circulation was the offices of the *préfets*, *sous-préfets*, administrators, mayors, police officers, translators and other native agents. At their desks, officials collected a variety of accounts both written and oral, wrote them down, cut them up, glued them and split them up, reworked them and sent them along a communication line to be read by their colleagues across Algeria and in Paris. In these offices, successions of Doucins and Djebaris cross-examined each other. Both the administrators and the people they interrogated attempted to locate the precise and politically explosive point where accounts of distant events transformed into innermost

conviction, and in the process they generated piles of paper. People throughout Algeria shared foreign news knowing full well that the French Republic considered it to be politically explosive, and they made good use of it to frame their enemies.

The reports generated by this administration hide as much as they reveal. Writing on the repercussions of foreign events in Algeria, they assume that there was a self-evident distinction between ‘Algeria’ and ‘the outside world’, that local and global events were fundamentally distinct. By doing so, they dissimulated the real work that they were doing. They were attempts by the state to produce a distinction between Algeria and the outside, a distinction constantly challenged by the circulation of information and the varied uses that all sorts of Algerians made of it. As the colonial state struggled to understand the relationship between internal and external boundaries, this created a politically productive space for all sorts of actors to create links with the outside and to accuse their enemies of having done so.

A history of foreign news under colonialism has no absolute distinction between connection and disconnection. People followed outside events intently, but their understanding of these events was shaped by the peculiarity of living in a divided society administered from Paris. What is surprising is that very little of this activity is to be found in existing historical scholarship on France or its empire. Much ink has been spilt on issues of assimilation, identity, and the inexhaustible contradictions of Republican equality, and this thesis has paid little attention to these questions. This is not because they are not important - these debates were crucial for historical actors at the time. Rather, by focusing solely on these problems historians have risked forgetting that people in the past lived in a vast world, and that the French Republic was never the only arena in which they made political claims.

Debates as to what it meant for Algeria to be a part of France were only one of many problems that troubled Algerians, and their positions within the French Republic

were partly determined from sharing accounts of events elsewhere. These problems of assimilation and difference only seem intractable because historians have adjusted their focal lens to one scale only, endlessly asking the same questions. In the process, they have made this history more narrowly French than the administrators running French Algeria were themselves able to do.

This focus on news is distinct from many existing attempts to write global histories. Many of these focus on contact, by looking for instance at migration or at borderlands. The stories above are not short of people moving around or of contact zones, but the focus here has been elsewhere, on mediation rather than on migration, on distance rather than contact. Instead of trying to prove that Algerians were connected to the outside world, this dissertation has argued that creating distance was one of the most powerful political tools in a society of strangers.

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