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Beyond Assimilation, Before Nationalism: Reformist Ulama and the Constantine Riots of 1934

Rachel Margaret Easterbrook



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BEYOND ASSIMILATION, BEFORE NATIONALISM:
REFORMIST ULAMA AND THE CONSTANTINE RIOTS OF 1934

By

RACHEL M. EASTERBROOK

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

2016

Rachel Easterbrook defended this thesis on April 11, 2016.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Will Hanley

Professor Directing Thesis

Claudia Liebeskind

Committee Member

Corbin Treacy

Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the thesis has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am tremendously grateful for the advice and guidance of my adviser, Dr. Will Hanley. Your wisdom is inspiring, and I am lucky to have worked with you on this project. Thank you for everything, not the least of which was your support and guidance in my Arabic translations. Many thanks also to Dr. Claudia Liebeskind, both for her insight on this work as well as her wonderful graduate courses, which greatly inspired my third chapter. And thank you to Dr. Corbin Treacy for his close reading and invaluable structural and substantive feedback. I am very proud to have had the opportunity to learn from you all.

I would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Zeina Schlenoff and my other Arabic professors here at Florida State. I thoroughly enjoyed being a student of your program, and without your diligent instruction I would have not have been able to incorporate vital Arabic sources into this study.

Thank you also to the Department of History for providing me with financial support during my time at Florida State.

And finally, thank you to my family and friends for supporting me in this latest endeavor – and all others.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the outbreak of violence between Muslims and Jews in the city of Constantine in August 1934. What has been termed a riot or a pogrom was, for the reformist ulama arguing for association with the French colonial state, a tragic rupture in the colonial civic order. By examining the Arabic and French language rhetoric of the ulama in the aftermath of the violence, one can elucidate not only the sociopolitical context of the riots, but also the political agenda of the reformist ulama. Their attempts to rationalize the violence and avert culpability from the Muslim population of Constantine should not be understood as evidence of their inchoate Arab nationalism and latent anti-Semitism. Rather, their rhetoric revealed the historical and political underpinnings of their reformist platform, which was rooted in a conception of Algerian history galvanized by wider narratives of Islamic reform. Thus the reformers believed that for Algerian Muslims, the French themselves and their Jewish neighbors were not their enemies but rather their allies. Their enemies were ignorance itself and the alleged propagators of such ignorance, those who practiced and promulgated sufi Islam, which the reformers saw as antithetical to modernity and progress. But in August 1934, Constantine's Muslims perpetrated attacks against these ostensible allies, and the reformist ulama were left to rationalize this transgression in the wake of the riots. An analysis of this rhetoric reconstructs the politics of belonging at play in the interwar period, deepening our historical understanding of the evolution of the platform of the reformist ulama, many of whom in 1934 still imagined a positive future for *French Algeria*.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years after the French invaded Algeria, Napoleon III's Sénat voted on and passed the Sénatus-Consulte of 1865. Its first article read, "*L'indigène musulman est Français; néanmoins, il continue à être régi par la loi musulmane,*" followed by the second article: "*L'indigène israélite est Français; néanmoins, il continue à être régi par son statut personnel.*"¹ The stipulations for each native group were identical; they could each serve in the army and work as civil servants and, should they so choose, relinquish their *statut personnel* by applying for French citizenship. Five years later, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War, Minister of Justice Adolphe Crémieux conferred full French citizenship upon all 35,000 of Algeria's native Jews. No longer *indigènes israélites*, Algerian Jews became *citoyens français*. Left behind by their *confrères algériens indigènes* and by the Crémieux Decree, over two million Algerian Muslims and their progeny would be compelled to occupy the tenuous category of *indigène* for nearly a century.

Over this tumultuous century of occupation and colonization emerged a dynamic discourse surrounding the categorization and stratification of French Algerian society. As the *régime du sabre* gave way to the *régime civil* of the Third Republic, European settlers streamed into Algeria. With rapidly rising native and settler populations, increased contact between Muslims, Jews, and Europeans generated a web of interconnections cutting across racial, linguistic, cultural, and religious divides. Nonetheless, settler and administrative paranoia about Arabo-Islamic culture, as well as native wariness of the foreign occupier, encouraged protectionist measures that sustained a barrier between the colonist and the colonized. Despite

¹ J.E. Sartor, *De la Naturalisation en Algérie (Sénatus-Consulte du 5 juillet 1865) Musulmans, Israélites, Européens* (Paris: Retaux Frères, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1865): 61-62.

the extant asymmetric power imbalance, the French decision to incorporate Algerian Jews into the Republic in 1870 and to exclude Algerian Muslims was as revealing a decision as the widespread refusal by Muslim families to send their children to Arab-French primary schools.

By the early twentieth century, the educated upper classes of Algerian Muslim society desired to bridge the cultural gap between the French and the *indigènes*. These *évolués* espoused the French policy of assimilation, arguing that the adoption of French culture and education would bring the native Muslim population closer to political equality within the colonial state. Such efforts buckled in the postwar economic climate, with administrators and politicians working to protect the interests of the European *colons*. By the advent of the Second World War, narratives of cooperation with the French colonial state collapsed under the intense socioeconomic and political pressures of the interwar period. The appeal of the nationalist narrative had long since taken hold within Algerian society.

But, as James McDougall writes, this history of Algerian independence sets up “the proverbial meeting of an immovable object (the intransigence of the European colonial settlers) with an irresistible force (the manifest destiny and will of the Algerian nation).” Such an approach not only removes agency from the Algerian people, but also effaces the dynamic and multifaceted narratives of belonging that were circulating the political landscape of Algeria, particularly in the interwar period. Moving beyond “simple schemata” and uncovering these narratives allows one to, per McDougall, uncover the “shifting patterns of resistance and strategies of negotiation, of social conflicts and cultural change, of attempts to assert authority and speak for one’s community,” that have oft been overlooked.²

² James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 30-31.

And so following the lead of McDougall and other historians, such as Julia A. Clancy-Smith and Allan Christelow, who each shed new light on the relationship between religious notables and the colonial state, this thesis investigates the pro-association narrative of the reformist ulama in the interwar period.³ Specifically, I focus on an instance of violence between Muslims and Jews in the city of Constantine in August 1934. Working outward from Joshua Cole's re-examination of the causes and politics behind these riots, I focus instead on the reaction of the reformist ulama to the Constantine violence.⁴ Using the French-language periodical *La Défense*, which was associated with the reformist ulama's *Association des Oulémas Musulmans Algériens*, I analyze the reformers' narrative in the aftermath of the violence. In doing so, I attempt to overturn misconceptions about the AUMA's alleged nationalist bent in this period by rooting their rhetoric in their espoused political platform. Furthermore, I incorporate Arabic language periodicals into my analysis, an endeavor which historians have not yet attempted in the context of these riots.

My thesis first demonstrates that the Constantine riots represent a rupture in the colonial civic order – that is, in relationships between Jews, Muslims, *and* colonial actors – as a result of long-term sociopolitical tensions and short-term catalysts unique to the interwar period. In this context, I argue that for the reformist ulama, the violence constituted a breakdown of the relationships upon which their political project depended. As such, their rhetoric in the riot's aftermath reveals their tenuous attempts to rationalize – on their terms – an event which exposed a fracture in their claims to speak on behalf of the Muslim community. By incorporating the reformist ulama's place within the Islamic modernist movement into my analysis, I demonstrate

³ Allan Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts and the French Colonial State in Algeria* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴ Joshua Cole, "Constantine before the riots of August 1934: civil status, anti-Semitism, and the politics of assimilation in interwar French Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies* 17.5 (2012).

that their rhetoric is reflective of their “strategy of negotiation,” rather than refusal or revolution, with the colonial power.⁵ In this context, their appeals for educational reforms thread together the many facets of their reformist message in a manner they supposed the French colonial state would find tolerable.

This thesis is not a critical investigation of the riots of Constantine themselves. A few historians have tackled that project, including Charles-Robert Ageron, Robert Attal, Sophie Beth Roberts, Rochdi Ali Younsi, and, more recently, Joshua Cole.⁶ While these scholars have accessed and utilized archival sources that shed much light onto the violence itself, from the perspective of the French administration, I have incorporated both French and Arabic language periodicals so as to analyze how the reformist ulama were spinning their narrative of the violence to their various constituencies. As such, I offer only an outline of the weekend’s events, relying upon facets that have largely been agreed upon in the historiography. Rather than focus on the riots, I have understood them as a political instrument in the hands of the reformist ulama, who when faced with the political crisis of the violence attempted to spin the narrative to fit their own objectives. I thus incorporate many aspects of the ulama’s version of events that are unsubstantiated claims but that nonetheless reflect their political aims. It is also critical to note at this juncture that the men whose articles this thesis examines were not the individuals participating in the violence; thus, their take on how and why the riots broke out is an outside perspective. While Abdelhamid Ben Badis boasted great influence among the Muslims of

⁵ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 65.

⁶ Charles-Robert Ageron, “Une émeute anti-juive à Constantine (août 1934),” *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 13, no. 1 (1973): 23-40; Robert Attal, *Regards sur les juifs d’Algérie*, L’Harmattan: Paris, 1996; Sophie B. Roberts, “Jews, Citizenship, and Antisemitism in French Colonial Algeria, 1870-1943.” PhD. diss., University of Toronto, 2012; Rochdi Ali Younsi, “Caught in a colonial triangle: Competing loyalties within the Jewish community of Algeria, 1842-1943,” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2003.

Constantine, his word was of course not their own, despite his own endeavor to speak on their behalf.

Nor does this thesis attempt a sweeping assessment of the reformist ulama in general or the AUMA in particular. McDougall, Ali Merad, Michael D. Driessen, and John Ruedy have attempted this in the Algerian setting, and a host of other scholars have treated the subject of Islamic reform in North Africa more generally.⁷ A small sample of these whose work has influenced this thesis includes Dale F. Eickelman, Fanny Colonna, Hugh Roberts, and Ricardo René Larmont.⁸ Rather, in focusing in on a particular moment in time – the Constantine riots and their immediate aftermath – this thesis offers a reassessment of our historical understanding of the reformist ulama’s political platform. The tendency has been either to analyze this group as simply Algerian actors – and thus to conclude that they were merely the cultural enlighteners of the nascent independence movement – or to see them as Muslim actors in the context of Islamic reform, and thus to divorce them from their colonial context and speak of them just as neo-Wahhabites and salafists.⁹

It is my contention that the Algerian reformist ulama should not be divorced from either context, but rather understood in relation to both. Such an approach allows one to analyze their

⁷ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*; Michael D. Driessen, *Religion and Democratization: Framing Religious and Political Identities in Muslim and Catholic Societies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940: essai d’histoire religieuse et sociale* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1967); John Ruedy, “Continuities and Discontinuities in the Algerian Confrontation with Europe” In *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

⁸ Fanny Colonna, “Cultural Resistance and Religious Legitimacy in Colonial Algeria,” in Ahmed and Hart, *Islam in Tribal Societies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984): 106-126; Dale F. Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 1976); Ricardo René Larmont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance in Algeria, 1783-1992,” (PhD. diss., Yale University, 1995); Hugh Roberts, “Doctrinaire Economics and Political Opportunism in the Strategy of Algerian Islamism,” in *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994): 123-147.

⁹ Mahmoud Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien: question nationale et politique algérienne, 1919-1951*; Samir Amin, *Maghreb in the Modern World: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970); Vatin, Jean Claude. *L’Algérie politique histoire et société*. Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politique, 1983; and Tariq Ramadan, “Relations Between Europe and Islamists,” in *Islam, Modernism, and the West: Cultural and Political Relations at the End of the Millennium*, ed. Gema Martin Munoz (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999): 136-152.

rhetoric with a larger web of reference points and thus to more accurately reconstruct their political worldview. The riots of Constantine mark a unique moment in time for studying this worldview, as they occurred just a few years prior to the reformist movement becoming more explicitly political. Furthermore, because the repercussions of the violence impacted relationships between Muslims and Jews *and* Muslims and colonial actors, Lamine Lamoudi, Mohamed Benhoura, and Abdelhamid Ben Badis – three journalists whose writings this thesis examines – were addressing in the riot’s aftermath an entire range of issues pertinent to the reformist movement’s interests. Situating their dialogue in both the particularities of the Algerian (and *Constantinois*) context, as well as in the historiography of colonial incursions into Muslim majority countries, allows one to better understand the political strategies of accommodation these actors were pursuing in the interwar period.

To this end, Chapter One offers an historical overview of the French colonial state’s policies toward the Jewish and Muslim communities of Algeria, exposing the long-term tension created by its policies of inclusion and exclusion toward each. It then contextualizes the outbreak of violence in the city of Constantine, examining the socioeconomic underpinnings of political tension between Jews, Muslims, and Europeans in the interwar period. Chapter Two offers an analysis of *La Défense*’s coverage of the Constantine riots – in conjunction with Arabic language periodicals – exposing the reformist ulama’s attempts to rationalize the violence to fit the needs of their political project. In so doing, I reconstruct the meaning of the riots in their terms. Chapter Three continues this project by examining the longer history of the relationship between religious notables and colonial officials in Algeria, with a particular focus on educational reforms. By placing the reformist ulama not only into the context of interwar Algeria but also into their larger milieu of twentieth century Islamic reformers, it becomes clear that the

Constantine riots represented for these men a critical juncture. Containing and controlling the post-riot narrative was a strategic political necessity, integral to the propagation of the reformist platform. Such a multifaceted contextualization of the reformist ulama's take on the violence allows for a resuscitation of the politics of belonging at play in interwar Algeria.

CHAPTER ONE

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN FRENCH ALGERIA

Constantine, Le Vieux Rocher

Situated in the northeast of the country near the Mediterranean coast, Constantine is the third largest city in Algeria, behind the capital, Algiers, and Oran. Beginning in 1848 under French occupation, these three coastal cities were the respective and titular capitals of French Algeria's three administrative departments. From the mid-eighteenth century and with the creation of the civilian administration in 1870, northern Algeria was politically assimilated into France via the creation of governing bodies in these regions. As an extension of France proper, rather than a colony, Algeria lay under the purview of a governor, who reported to the French Interior Minister. Under the authority of the governor and at the head of each administrative district was a prefect, who oversaw a diversified bureaucratic structure within his own department consisting of *sous-préfectures*, districts, cantons, and communes. Within this administrative structure in each department were elected representatives sitting on the provincial and municipal councils (*Conseils Généraux* and *Conseils Municipaux*).¹⁰

On these bodies sat representatives of both the European *colon* and Muslim populations. Settlers elected their representatives based on universal suffrage, while Muslim representatives were either appointed by the administration or elected by the small body of Muslims who possessed the right to vote. These men were usually *évolués*, "either notables or former officers of the French army, who acquired French citizenship and served as intermediaries between the colonial state and the Muslim masses."¹¹ Before the passage of the Jonnart Law in 1919, which

¹⁰ Younsi, "Colonial triangle," 19.

¹¹ Younsi, "Colonial triangle," 20.

expanded the Muslim electorate, there were only 5,000 Muslim electors for the *Conseillers Généraux* and 57,000 for the *Conseillers Municipaux*. In addition to their limited electorate, Muslims were restricted to minority representation on the councils so as to better protect settler interest; in 1874, Muslims accounted for only a quarter of the members of the *Conseil Municipal*.¹²

The *Délégations financières*, established in 1898, were a colony-wide assembly that served both as a consultative body to assist the governor in the implementation of local policy and as the principal director of budgetary affairs in Algeria. According to Phillip C. Naylor, the *Délégations financières* were “an institutional check protecting colonial interests and tempering overzealous (or reforming) governors-general.”¹³ The assembly’s influential control over budgetary matters and fiscal policy “gradually turned it into a powerful institutions coveted by the local politicians.”¹⁴ As such, the body was another tool to protect the political interests of the *colons*. Membership on the *Délégations* consisted of three sections; 48 Europeans sat in either of two sections (half representing agricultural interests and half representing urban interests), and 21 Muslims composed a third section. Like on the *conseils*, Muslim representatives here were either appointed or elected by a body of 5,000 Muslim voters. Because these sections typically convened and voted separately, Naylor contends that, the Muslim “voice was muted regarding allocations” and the *Délégations financières* exemplified settler political dominance.¹⁵

Constantine itself makes for a compelling case study of the colonial relationships that developed within this political system, in large part due to the particularity of the city’s social fabric. With approximately 100,000 total inhabitants in 1931, Constantine was home to a

¹² Phillip C. Naylor, *The Historical Dictionary of Algeria* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, 2006): 176.

¹³ Naylor, *Historical Dictionary*, 192.

¹⁴ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 20.

¹⁵ Naylor, *Historical Dictionary*, 192.

proportionally larger Jewish population than either Oran or Algiers. Constituting 12 percent of the population, Constantine's Jews inhabited not only an historic and vibrant Jewish quarter at the center of the city but had also integrated into European and Arab quarters. Fifty-one percent of the population were *indigènes* (natives), while 36 percent were European. By contrast, Jews constituted only three percent and eight percent of the populations of Algiers and Oran, respectively.¹⁶ With such a comparatively small settler population, Constantine's European *colons* were not only guarded of their own privileges but also wary of the sociopolitical status of both the Jewish and Muslim populations of the city. The economic hardship of the interwar period exacerbated *colon* protectionism, making it difficult for political leaders to mobilize support "outside of the dominant categories of 'Muslim,' 'Jewish,' and 'European.'"¹⁷

While the demographic makeup of the city laid the groundwork for political volatility in the uneasy period between the wars, the social and religious characteristics of Constantine's Jewish and Muslim communities were also particular. The two groups had cohabitated peacefully for centuries in Constantine, as they had in cities throughout Algeria, yet both communities were markedly conservative compared to their Algerian co-religionists. Furthermore, the city was an important and vibrant center for intellectual and political life, as Muslim and Jewish religious leaders were particularly active in Constantine. It was in this local context that Jewish citizens were negotiating and Muslim colonial subjects were *re*-negotiating their relationships with the colonial state. In the interwar period, the misery of the native population led Muslim leaders to ask vexing questions about the role of religious and cultural identity in determining sociopolitical rights. Such questions necessarily exposed the fact that while certain Muslim leaders were largely pursuing the path of association to attain political

¹⁶ Kaddache, 303, and Cole, "Constantine," 840.

¹⁷ Cole, "Constantine," 840.

citizenship, Algerian Jews were dependent upon the mutually exclusive policy of assimilation to retain and define their own rights.¹⁸ Historian Joshua Cole explains that, while the Jews of Constantine embraced assimilation as an “escape from the prison-house of a minority identity,” Muslim leaders appealed to the egalitarian and republican rhetoric of the French regime, arguing that they could be granted “the same rights as citizens while keeping their legal status as Muslims.”¹⁹

With such a sociopolitical context in mind, we must examine the violence that erupted in Constantine on the weekend of 3 August 1934. Sparked by a rather insignificant tiff between a Jewish man and Muslims at prayer in a neighborhood mosque, the riots saw a mob of Muslims *Constantinois* storm the Jewish quarter of the city, killing dozens. In the aftermath of the violence, a heated debate took place on the pages of the local, regional, and metropolitan press about who was responsible for the riots and why they broke out in the first place. Even the facts of the case – who was murdered and by whom – were under dispute. Turning to one of these regional papers, an Algiers-based weekly entitled *La Défense*, one can examine how this debate played out in the immediate aftermath of the riots and what was at stake politically, in this case for reform-minded Muslim scholars.

This chapter aims to contextualize not only the riots themselves but also the position taken and staunchly held by the editors of *La Défense* in the weeks and months after the weekend of 3 August. By examining the longer history of the French colonial government’s policies toward Algeria’s religious communities, the First World War appears as a breaking point both socially and economically for Algerian Muslims. The failure of the assimilation policies of the early twentieth century, as embodied by the Jonnart Law of 1919, helped change the course of

¹⁸ Cole, “Constantine,” 843.

¹⁹ Cole, “Constantine,” 850.

political activism in the colony, paving the way for the increasingly vocal nationalism of the late 1930s. Yet the particular demographic makeup of the ancient city of Constantine meant that in August 1934, this antagonism toward the imperial authority expressed itself in violence against the seemingly privileged Jewish community. The violence against the Jewish population was in part the result of recently intensified and increasingly visible and sociopolitical disenfranchisement of the Muslim population of Algeria in the interwar period. By examining the evolution of the colonial state's policies toward religious communities, this chapter reveals the socioeconomic and political situation of the interwar period, so as to increase understanding of the post-riot narrative put forth by the editors of *La Défense*, final stalwarts of *l'Algérie française*. I argue that, rather than an episode of virulent anti-Semitism, spurred by inchoate Arab nationalism, the Constantine riots were evidence of a long-term, large-scale breakdown of the communal harmony between the Jews, Muslims, and Europeans in the city.

French Colonial Policies on Algeria's Religious Communities

When the colonial conquest of Algeria began in 1830, the French army faced strong and protracted resistance from indigenous leaders. One of the most famous of these resisters was a military commander named Abd al-Qadir, who used Islamic rhetoric “to unite and rally tribal groups as ‘Muslims’ in the war against ‘the French,’” the foreign adversary.²⁰ The history of this Islamic resistance and the French military response over the ensuing decades is well documented, and scholars note that by 1856, the invading power had subdued the last remaining opposition – centered in Kabylia – and that the French “military presence [was] firmly established.”²¹ The French conquest elicited a varied response from the Algerian Jewish

²⁰ Lizabeth Zack, “Early origins of Islamic activism in Algeria: The case of Khaled in Post-World War I Algiers,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 11.2 (Aug. 2006): 208.

²¹ Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000, A Short History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 4-5, and Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 42.

population, which had largely assimilated into the Berber population by the time of the French conquest.²² Most Jewish communities tended to be more neutral toward the occupier than their Muslim counterparts, and many sought to develop trade relationships with the French soldiers.²³ Throughout the ensuing period of military rule in the colony, “Muslim and Jewish populations were incorporated as formal political ‘subjects’ (*sujets*), with their interests represented by advisory *Conseils Généraux* made up of indigenous elites, and their tribal (*arch*) landholdings protected by senatorial decree.”²⁴ While as colonial subjects both Muslims and Jews were denied French citizenship, this was a parallel exclusion. Despite French determination “to eliminate traditional economic and political ties,” the two religious groups at that point enjoyed most civic rights.²⁵ Louis-Napoleon’s dreams of an Arab Kingdom in Algeria were reflected in efforts at assimilation – promoting the development of the colony and fostering “the prosperity of ‘that [Arab] race.’”²⁶ However, with the fall of Louis-Napoleon and the Second French Empire in 1870, a series of administrative changes redefined the colonial state’s relationship to the indigenous peoples of Algeria.

In the nascent period of the Third Republic, the administration of Algeria shifted from the hands of the military to the hands of the European settlers themselves – the *colons* – who, with

²² Taoufik Djebali, “Ethnicity and Power in North Africa: Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco,” in *Race and Nation: Ethnic Systems in the Modern World*, ed. Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2005): 142. Djebali states, “There is no denying that the mistreatment of Jews was a common practice in North Africa before the arrival of the French in 1830, but their integration into the political, economic, and cultural spheres of North Africa was concrete.”

²³ Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000*, 10. There is a rich historiography on the experience of Algerian Jews during the colonial period. For example, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Joelle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim household in colonial Algeria, 1937-1962* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010); and S.B. Roberts, “Jews, Citizenship,” to name but a few.

²⁴ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 42-43.

²⁵ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 5, and Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 43. As of 1865, both groups had the choice to opt into French citizenship only if they were willing to abandon their Muslim or Jewish civil status.

²⁶ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 5.

the institution of a new constitution in March 1870, established a civilian regime.²⁷ Louis-Napoleon's determination to civilize and incorporate the Arab population into the French empire had agitated the *colons*, whose "aim was to ensure the absolute and complete subjugation of the population to the needs and interests of colonization."²⁸ It was through this process of indigenous subjugation that the civilian regime in Algeria institutionalized exclusion along religious lines:

Within Algeria the French authorities operated a divide-and-rule policy, making judgments, based upon ethnography and anthropology, as to which parts of the populations were more open to French culture. The Jews were seen as the group that would be most easily assimilated, and they were given full citizenship in October 1870, one of the first acts of the Third Republic.²⁹

The rhetoric of the colonial regime was rooted in this conception of the Jewish population as allies to the French republican cause as well as in the effort to spread French culture.³⁰ As Joshua Schreier highlights in *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria*, this colonial rhetoric regarding the ability of the Jewish population to adopt French culture was negotiated with specific reference to – and in opposition to – the perceived inability (or unwillingness) of the Muslim population to do the same. Of particular importance to the colonial conception of the “Jews as closer to the French” were stereotypes about family life and the domestic sphere, and particularly regarding the role and treatment of Muslim and Jewish women:

Descriptions of Muslim gender roles and marital behaviors fed into French arguments about Arab suitability for French citizenship. The existence of prostitution, polygamy, and divorce among Algerian Muslims not only distinguished them from the French, it was claimed, but these 'traits' were also used by many French observers as indices of Muslim intellectual, cultural, and moral degeneracy. Such pejorative depictions served as powerful arguments to maintain the colonial hierarchy that relegated Muslims to an

²⁷ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 43.

²⁸ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 6.

²⁹ Martin Evans and John Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2007): 35.

³⁰ Evans, *Algeria*, 22.

inferior social and legal status. Conversely, French reformers used these negative evaluations of Muslims to highlight the moral superiority of Algerian Jews.³¹

Armed with such prevalent racial and religious stereotypes – and facing a desperate need for military conscripts in the French army – on 24 October 1870, the imperial government signed into law the Crémieux Decree, granting full French citizenship to all 33,000 of Algeria’s Jews.³² In practice, being granted French citizenship meant Algerian Jews would no longer be governed by Jewish personal status and would be required to perform contractual marriages, before an officer of the civil state.³³ While the passage of this law did not mark an unequivocal change in the relationship of the Jewish population to the state, as they continued to negotiate “their relationship to their religion and cultural traditions” within this new legal framework, it ushered in a new era of discrimination against and exclusion of Algerian Muslims from the colonial administration.³⁴

The legal enfranchisement of Algeria’s Jews during the French Third Republic was coupled with repressive measures that would effectively legalize the now third-class status of Algerian Muslims. The new civilian government instituted a series of laws that sought to eradicate what influence Muslim elites had obtained in the preceding period. These measures took the form of “suspending the protection of tribal landholdings, expanding the territory under direct French administration, dismantling the *Conseils Généraux*, and instating a special ‘Arab tax’ (*impôt arabe*) on Muslim subjects.”³⁵ While colonial officials sought to emancipate and civilize the Jewish population, Muslim exclusion from the process of state building was observed “at all levels of political representation,” as “Elected settlers made up four-fifths of the

³¹ Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*: 145-147.

³² Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 174, and Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 43.

³³ Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 156.

³⁴ Cole, “Constantine,” 842, and Djebali, “Ethnicity and Power,” 142-144.

³⁵ Silverstein, *Algeria in France*, 43.

membership of the three departmental councils established in 1875, whilst the Muslim contingent was composed of landowners hand-picked by the French authorities.”³⁶ These are the “blameworthy...clums[y], weak, and dishonest” representatives *La Défense* criticized in their mission statement.³⁷ On the other hand, French and non-French European citizens valued the population of Algerian Jews as important political actors, as they represented a “major source of electoral competition.” This intense and vocal struggle for control of the electorate was a public spectacle from which Algerian Muslims, as non-citizens, were notably excluded.³⁸

The changes ushered in by the Third Republic stirred discontent among the Muslim population, and the inclusionary measures offered to the Jewish population were particularly inflammatory. But despite the widening gap in equality between the two religious groups and Muslim resentment of the visible enfranchisement of the Jewish population, Muslim agitation rarely targeted Jews themselves. As Taoufik Djebali explains, “overall, the Muslims of Algeria refused to be drawn into anti-Jewish manifestations and riots.”³⁹ Rather, the status of Algerian Jews served as the tangible impetus for resistance against the colonial state. Following the passage of the Crémieux Decree, “One local leader by the name of El-Mokhrani, a hitherto loyal Muslim, angrily declared, 'I will take orders from a French officer but from a Jew never,' and on 16 March 1871 he proclaimed a jihad against French rule.”⁴⁰ The issue of equality between the native populations was clearly in play. Nearly one million Algerian Muslims answered El-Mokhrani’s call to jihad, forcing the colonial power to conduct large-scale military campaigns to suppress the armed resistance. The French had crushed the largely uncoordinated rebellion by

³⁶ Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 33. More on these “hand-picked” landowners will follow.

³⁷ “Notre Programme,” *La Défense*, 26 January 1934.

³⁸ S.B. Roberts, “Anti-Semitism and municipal government in interwar colonial Algeria,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 17.5 (Sept. 2012): 822-837.

³⁹ Djebali, “Ethnicity and Power,” 144.

⁴⁰ Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 31.

1871.⁴¹ Resistance to the French colonial state toward the end of the nineteenth century was thereafter characterized by small-scale, episodic violence, and would not again grow to a significant scale until the mid-twentieth century.

In 1881, the colonial administration further institutionalized the inferior status of Algerian Muslims with the introduction of the now infamous *Code de l'Indigénat*, which, according to Benjamin Stora, institutionalized this existing pattern of repressive measures.⁴² Essentially a set of discriminatory legislation, the “Native Code” sought to closely monitor and control the colony’s Muslim population and “imposed harsh penalties for a multitude of infractions, including vague crimes such as being rude to a colonial official or making disrespectful remarks about the Third Republic.”⁴³ The code developed out of the idea that Muslims in Algeria – unlike the native Jewish population – presented a law-and-order problem for the colonial administration, and one that must be dealt with through harsh punitive measures.⁴⁴ Alluding to this discrimination, a Frenchman wrote in *La Défense*: “The term ‘subject’ is not without some connection to the term ‘slave.’ As such subjects, Muslims of Algeria are mostly burdened with duties without enjoying the rights conferred with citizenship. Are they not subject to the same taxes that we are, including blood?”⁴⁵ Although the vast majority of Algerian Muslims lived in the Saharan hinterland and remained under the *régime du sabre*, the urban Muslim population – particularly the Algerian born, French-educated Muslim *évolués* – loathed the imposition of the *Indigénat*. For the *évolués*, the native code made tangible and visible their inferior status.⁴⁶ Coupled with the legal and civil advancement of the indigenous

⁴¹ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006): 30.

⁴² Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 6.

⁴³ Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 33.

⁴⁴ Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 33.

⁴⁵ Henri Bernier, “Les Dernier Evénements,” *La Défense*, 14 September 1934.

⁴⁶ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 90.

Jewish population, this increased exclusion from the colonial state inspired among the Muslim elite both resentment at the wholesale naturalization of the Jewish population and criticisms of the colonial administration for its issuance of such arbitrary and unjust legislation.⁴⁷

Economic Disenfranchisement and Communal Tensions in Interwar Algeria

From the late nineteenth century through to the interwar period, the economic disenfranchisement of the native populace contributed to difficult communal relations in colonial Algeria. With the rise of French Third Republic in 1870 and simultaneous to the institution of the aforementioned policies of religious discrimination, the imperial power set out to officially colonize Algerian territory. French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 had brought about the loss of the territory of Alsace-Lorraine, leading “several thousand faithful Alsatians to seek new lands to farm.” Meanwhile, peasants from the south of France and émigrés from around the Mediterranean, facing increased poverty in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, looked to Algeria as a new frontier.⁴⁸ Reaching its peak at the end of the nineteenth century, this wave of emigration brought an influx of labor to both the countryside and to the coastal cities of Algeria. In 1889, the colonial administration conferred French citizenship upon all of these European migrants.⁴⁹

With this influx of European farmers looking to settle in Algeria, discrimination against the Muslim population took on a new dimension in the agricultural sector. The hunt for arable land to cultivate led the colonial administration to offer preferential treatment to the increasing population of Europeans. They suspended existing laws that protected tribal landholdings for the native population and manipulated the economic sector:

⁴⁷ Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 35.

⁴⁸ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 8-9.

⁴⁹ Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000*, 9.

Differential access to credit was a glaring source of discrimination in colonial economies. Borrowing money to fund the purchase of additional land, livestock or equipment presented insuperable problems for peasant cultivators from Tonkin to Morocco. Usury rates were prohibitively high. And French agricultural lending agencies, such as the *Crédit agricole*, lent almost exclusively to settler farmers.⁵⁰

With preferential access to credit came priority access to the best farmland, and as European settlers took advantage of this discrimination, Muslim rural society suffered in tandem. As the numbers of European settlers seeking land in Algeria continued to increase – reaching 900,000 in the 1920s – their privileges were becoming harder to ignore.

Settlers established large, export-driven, mechanized farms that drove a huge profit, and by 1930 nearly 75 percent of available agricultural land was consolidated into these settler estates. Meanwhile, the native population survived on a subsistence economy, fueled by small, family-run farms. “Forced to make do with the worst land and reliant upon traditional methods that were highly inefficient,” Muslim farmers were nonetheless responsible for feeding over 55 percent of the colony’s population.⁵¹ As *La Défense* highlighted in their 24 August 1934 issue, four of six million native Muslims worked on agricultural land that did not belong to them but to settler *colons*. Those *petits fellahs* who managed to cling to their territorial possessions would eventually fall victim to “outrageous expropriation,” as the administration sought to make them “real agricultural serfs reduced to miserable wages on the settlers’ land.”⁵² Not surprisingly, this system “began to buckle in the face of a demographic curve that...saw the population triple to 6 million between 1871 and 1936. Just for a family of six to exist they needed an area of 10 to 30 hectares and in the Constantine department in 1914, 54.7 per cent of the peasants worked on

⁵⁰ Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005): 116.

⁵¹ Thomas, *French Empire*, 117.

⁵² Jules Moch, “Le feu qui couve...,” *La Défense*, 24 August 1934.

areas under 10 hectares in extent.”⁵³ And for the colonial administration, during times of economic crises, the needs of *colons* always took precedence over those of Muslim farmers, and so Europeans were given preferential access to state resources. For example, the limited available state funds set aside to assist farmers during poor harvest years were reserved almost exclusively for settler farmers.⁵⁴

In the years following the end of World War I, this pattern of institutionalized discrimination against Muslims and continued exclusion from access to state resources converged with increased economic pressures to create increased socioeconomic pressures throughout Algeria and most of the Maghreb. A declining mortality rate in the interwar period raised the Muslim population to over 6.2 million, and a majority of these individuals were still tied to and dependent upon the land. Many Muslim families in the hinterland, unable to survive on or continue operation of their small farms, were forced to sell their property and seek work on the settler farms or flock to the cities. This process swelled the cities with what Mahmoud Kaddache called “masses of misfits without jobs and without job prospects,” numbering in the hundreds of thousands, many of whom were seething with resentment toward the colonial power and its settler population.⁵⁵

By the end of the First World War, the *colons* had dispossessed the native populace of over 2.5 million hectares of cultivable land. This was a seizure of land unprecedented throughout the French Empire.⁵⁶ According to Martin Evans, the “land question was an open wound in French Algeria. It created a fundamental conflict between the European landowners and the

⁵³ Evans, *France's Undeclared War*, 35.

⁵⁴ Thomas, *French Empire*, 116.

⁵⁵ Evans, *France's Undeclared War*, 35, and Mahmoud Kaddache, *Histoire du Nationalisme algerien: question nationale et politique algerienne, 1919-1951* Vol. 1 (Alger: Societe Nationale d'Edition et de Diffusion): 272. In Algeria's major cities, the population of Muslims grew by 130,168 individuals between 1931 and 1936.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *French Empire*, 68.

dispossessed.”⁵⁷ Indeed, in the aftermath of the Constantine riots, *La Défense* did not hesitate to identify the land issue as a fundamental factor in the outbreak of violence. They identified “the big landowners” as “enemies of the native” who in all cases attempted to “denigrate” the indigenous population.⁵⁸ Representatives of the native population understood that the flight to the cities did not merely represent a labor migration, but rather a migration of hunger and survival; the European’s massive seizure of land made rural subsistence impossible. Thus the populations of Muslims swelling the streets of Algiers, Oran, Constantine, and other cities of northern Algeria were resentful not only of the European populations but also the administration for the massive dispossession.⁵⁹

Once the effects of the global economic depression began to hit the French economy in 1930 and 1931, the situation facing Algerian Muslims heightened already fraught political tensions between Muslims, the Jewish community, and colonial officials. With the region facing both falling market prices for traditional crops, like soft wheat, and recurrent harvest failure, the colonial administration heightened their protection of settler farmers, further marginalizing the Muslim peasantry and driving them in even larger numbers to the coastal cities.⁶⁰ On 24 August 1934, *La Défense* published a reprint of an editorial written by Jules Moch, a French member of Parliament who had advocated on behalf of Constantine’s Muslims in the wake of the riots. Throughout his column, Moch addressed the disheartening economic situation: “The Arab proletariat is horribly exploited. The salaries, from the conquest until 1914, did not exceed 1 fr. 50 *per day*. They vary today between 5 and 8 francs. Very exceptionally, we noted some that reached 11 francs...Unemployment is endemic in the state, without there being a single

⁵⁷ Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 36.

⁵⁸ Veritas, “Les évènements[sic] de Constantine,” *La Défense*, 10 August 1934.

⁵⁹ Kaddache, *Nationalisme*, 271, and Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 36. From the 1920s onwards, land became a rallying cry for Algerian nationalism.

⁶⁰ Thomas, *French Empire*, 117, and Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 38.

unemployment fund. Zero social legislation is applied; the work days last 12 to 16 hours.”⁶¹ As explained by Martin Thomas, “Decades of French pressure had radicalized the rural poor,” and in the interwar period, this radicalization heightened in tandem with the influx of destitute peasants to the colony’s urban centers.⁶² Said influx in many ways violated the delicately balanced system of ethnic segregation that had come to structure colonial society: “Under this unwritten schema Muslim space was comprised of the Casbah, the mountains, the interior, and the east, while that of the settler was made up of the coast, the city, and the west.”⁶³ Algerian Muslims, and their political leaders, were forcibly re-negotiating space and access to the colonial state, with volatile consequences.

As Muslims flocked to the cities, the socioeconomic and political balance between Muslims, Jews, and Europeans was disrupted. For their part, the Jewish minority occupied a tenuous political position between Europeans and the Muslim natives in colonial Algeria. In the decades following the passage of the Crémieux Decree, many Algerian Jews had come to embrace aspects of assimilation to French culture, including dress and language, and had distanced themselves from the Hebrew language and Arabo-Berber ways of life. As previously discussed, the visibility of Jewish enfranchisement had, for the Muslim population, “reinforced their own lack of rights.”⁶⁴ But while Jews in Oran had “totally assimilated to the West,” according to Moch, the more conservative Jews in the Constantine region, “remained faithful to their religion and relatively *arabisés*.” Moch reasoned that for the Jews of Constantine to “clothe and dress like Arabs, while enjoying the rights of conquerors,” it might inspire resentment in Algerian Muslims. But this resentment had not traditionally resulted in violence targeting the

⁶¹ Moch, “Le feu...”

⁶² Thomas, *French Empire*, 252.

⁶³ Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 34.

⁶⁴ Evans, *France’s Undeclared War*, 22.

Jewish population. As Moch proposed: “Anti-Semitism does not yet seem to us ‘natural’ to the acute state of the Arab...That jealousies can arise between the Arab stripped of all rights and the Jew, French citizen, this is no doubt...But these clashes do not degenerate into massacres if deeper causes were not involved.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the broader anti-Semitism of the interwar period had made its way to the colony, but fomented among the European settler population almost exclusively. According to Djebali, Muslim unwillingness to become involved in anti-Semitic activities ran counter to the “the hopes and expectations of anti-Semitic European ideologists in Algeria.”⁶⁶ Moch asserted that “We reap what we sow,” and that certain powerful anti-Semitic agitators contributed to the outbreak of violence between Muslims and Jews.

Moch elaborated upon the problem of anti-Semitism in Algeria, explaining that “The anti-Semitism was cultivated in Algeria by reactionary French politicians: Régis in Algier, Molle and his current successor in Oran, still by others who – even in Constantine – appear to deny their ‘racism’ [*racisme*] of yesteryear.”⁶⁷ He was referring here to the anti-Semitic and extreme right-wing mayors of Algiers and Oran, Max Régis and Jules Molle. Moch also named the far-right French political organization Croix de Feu as a “quasi-official support[er]” of these reactionary anti-Semitic groups, which helped them remain powerful in North Africa.⁶⁸ For the minority population of *colons*, the enfranchisement of one “native” group represented a dangerous precedent for the others, and anti-Semitism usefully augmented this paranoid rationale. In order to understand the rise of Algerian nationalist sentiment in the interwar, depression years and the Muslim population’s changing relationship to the state and the Jews of

⁶⁵ Moch, “Le feu...”

⁶⁶ Djebali, “Ethnicity and Power,” 144.

⁶⁷ Moch, “Le feu...”

⁶⁸ Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism: The Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 5 and 18. Max Régis was mayor of Algiers at the turn of the twentieth century and notorious for his virulently anti-Semitic platform. Jules Molle was another French anti-Semitic politician, who was elected mayor of Oran in 1921 only to be beaten in 1924. He blamed the Jews of the city for his defeat. For more on these individuals and the Croix de Feu, see Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*, 32.

Algeria in this period, one must consider the early twentieth century proto-nationalist attempts at political reform.

Promises of Reform on the Eve of the Great War

With the turn of the century, episodic instances of violence against French authorities became increasingly infrequent. It was during this time period that “a small group of French-educated and well-to-do native Algerians were developing a new mode of challenging the system of colonial rule.”⁶⁹ Led by Sheikh Khaled, grandson of the famous opponent to French encroachment in Algeria, Abd al-Qadir, the movement was known as the *Jeunes Algériens* (Young Algerians). Building upon the as yet unrealized French ideal of assimilation, these men formed political associations aimed at incorporating “native” Algerians into French society. Assimilation was a colonial policy whose primary goal was the transformation of Algerian Muslims into proper Frenchmen. It was both a political and cultural project that insisted upon the repudiation of Arabo-Berber culture and the complete administrative incorporation of the colony into the métropole.⁷⁰

To this end, rather than challenging French authority violently, from outside the system of colonial rule, the Young Algerians “forged working ties with... ‘liberal bourgeois and progressive republican intellectuals’ within” the European settler population.⁷¹ It was through the forging of such alliances that the Young Algerians fought “to demand assimilation, objecting to the *Indigenat*, *internement administrative*, and unequal political representation in the *Conseils régionaux* and *Délégations financières*.”⁷² Moch characterized these men in his 24 August editorial as a group of “indigenous intellectuals” who had made a “remarkable human

⁶⁹ Zack, “Early origins,” 209.

⁷⁰ Naylor, *Historical Dictionary*, 88-89.

⁷¹ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 38.

⁷² Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*, 54.

emancipation effort” and, in the words of another columnist, who were contributing to the “formation of...’*la France totale*.”⁷³ Largely French educated and with many of its members trained in the French military, the Young Algerians were theoretically well placed to bridge the gap between native Algerians and the European administration while advocating for increased civil and political rights.

While the Young Algerians did not explicitly object to imperialism, the platform of these new reformers was rooted in a sense of mutual obligation between a state and its subjects and citizens, a tenet that is particularly evident in their stance on military service and civil and political rights. Prior to World War I, the Young Algerians sent a delegation to Paris to confer with Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and offer their support for discussions of opening the French military to native participation. According to historian Patrick Weil, the movement “hoped to be able to obtain...gradual equality of public freedoms and citizens’ rights” in exchange for military service. They argued that should the French government deem military service compulsory for Algerian subjects then those natives who serve should be rewarded with requisite civil rights.⁷⁴ Hoping to work with administrators in Paris, the group issued in 1911 “a 12 point list for the government which included demands for an end to corruption, unfair taxes, and special tribunals, access to government jobs, and a consultative role in Parliament,” and condemned the continuation of the *Code de l’Indigénat*.⁷⁵ However, when military service was made compulsory for Algerian ‘Muslims’ in January 1912, no such exchange accompanied the decree.⁷⁶

⁷³ Moch, “Le feu...” and Aboulhak, “L’heure n’est pas au desespoir,” *La Défense*, 10 August 1934.

⁷⁴ Patrick Weil, *How to be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 220

⁷⁵ Zack, “Early origins,” 209.

⁷⁶ Weil, *How to be French*, 220

For the Young Algerians, the discrimination institutionalized by the *Code de l'Indigénat* was particularly resonant when considered in tandem with the French policy of mandatory conscription for natives; how could an “un-French French” Algerian male be expected to willingly offer himself “up as cannon-fodder in defence of the republic” when at the same time he was “subject to a massive system of special repressive legislation...[that] criminalised a potentially limitless series of activities not considered infractions of the French penal code and applying only to ‘natives’?”⁷⁷ Laying the rhetorical groundwork for the reformist ulama in this regard, the Young Algerians continually appealed to “*la France démocratique*” as an idealized protector against the “tyrannical France” of the colonial state.⁷⁸

French intransigence on the matter of obligatory conscription inspired the Young Algerians’ first major manifesto, which they submitted to Clemenceau in Paris in June 1912. Although spurred by the decrees of early 1912, the manifesto represented a synthesis of earlier positions put forth by the group on questions of political and military involvement of native Algerians. It began by re-stating their belief in mutual obligation, that the “natives of Algeria are ready to fulfill vis-a-vis the mother country all their patriotic duties, but they believe that this new burden (conscription) should be matched by an improvement in their lot.”⁷⁹ Among the reforms the movement deemed necessary were not only specific adjustments to the conscription policy, such as an increase in the minimum age from 18 to 21 years and the reduction of the term of service to two years to match that of the French soldiers, but also larger “actual compensations.” Harkening back to the systemic inequalities imposed upon the populace by the colonial state, they listed these compensations as such:

⁷⁷ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 90.

⁷⁸ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 76.

⁷⁹ *Le Manifeste Jeune Algerien.* Document. Paris: 1912. From *Le mouvement national algerien, Textes, 1912-1954*: 23-24.

- 1) Reform of the repressive regime
- 2) Serious and adequate representation in the assemblies of Algeria and the metropole
- 3) Fair distribution of taxes
- 4) Equitable allocation of resources between the *various elements* of the Algerian population.

The manifesto elaborated on these broad compensations, enumerating how the indigenous population should be represented not only on local and national councils but also in Paris, with seats in Parliament, or via the creation of “a board in Paris...where Muslims of Algeria would be elected representatives” of the indigenous population.⁸⁰ In calling for an expansion of elected representatives, the Young Algerians offered an alternative to the “government-appointed native representatives” of whom they were particularly critical and disparaged as the “Beni Oui Oui” (literally, ‘yes men’).” They saw these men as the old order – the *vieux turbans* – who had compromised with the French by offering deference to the colonial administration in exchange for respect (i.e., inequality, in the eyes of the Young Algerians) for Muslim religious and cultural traditions.⁸¹ For *évolués* like the Young Algerians (and later, the AUMA), the *vieux turbans* had not only sacrificed equality for subjugation, but as members of “old warrior and *marabout* families” that practiced spiritual and ritualistic customs, they had promulgated an inaccurate picture of Islam in the eyes of their European occupiers. As will be discussed in the third chapter, with the evolution of Algerian national consciousness in the interwar years came a heightened criticism of these Beni Oui-Oui’s who had vacantly filled the seats of Algerian councils since the late nineteenth century.

⁸⁰ *Le ‘Manifeste Jeune Algerien.’*

⁸¹ Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*, 54. Julia A. Clancy-Smith’s work, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)*, offers a critical analysis of the complex relationship between sufi saints and colonial officials in the early period of the French occupation. Her conclusion that the tacit agreements made between local and colonials were not only pragmatic and flexible but ensured survival is not rejected here. Rather, as she also concludes, it was rejected by nationalists as collaboration, and in my view, also by reformists such as the AUMA. See also Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, for a discussion of generational differences of religious notables’ cooperation with the French administration.

The most poignant of the compensations requested in the manifesto, and that which gained the most political traction and debate by 1919, was that “those who have satisfied the obligation of military service by appeal or voluntary undertaking shall have the right to opt for French citizenship without being subject to current formalities and through a simple declaration.”⁸² Despite misgivings on the part of European settlers, who mobilized in opposition to the possibility of extending the rights of native Algerians, World War I ushered in an era of renewed possibility for those seeking reforms in French Algeria. When the great powers declared war in July 1914, Algerian Muslims supplied nearly 175,000 soldiers to the battlefields of Europe and another 120,000 workers to factories in France.⁸³ These numbers eclipsed those raised by any other colony that fought on behalf of any country in the entire war.⁸⁴ According to Lizabeth Zack, “Clemenceau was already sympathetic to the demands of the Young Algerians,” and in November 1915, in recognition of the service of Algerian Muslims, he “asked for ‘the admission of natives to the benefit of a new regime of naturalization not implying the renunciation of personal status.’”⁸⁵ Two years later, when Clemenceau became president of the Council of State, a series of negotiations began and at least two proposals were drafted, all aiming “to make access to full nationality easier” for Algerian Muslims.⁸⁶ Over the entire course of the war, full citizenship rights were nearly within grasp.

But the rapidly deteriorating landscape of Europe had dramatically altered geopolitical realities within Algeria itself. Between 1914 and 1920, over 150,000 Europeans had immigrated

⁸² *Le ‘Manifeste Jeune Algerien.’* Critical to this phrasing is that the Young Algerians did not think Muslims should be required to voluntarily renounce their religious civil status in favor of French citizenship but rather preferred that should Muslims choose to become French citizens, it would be put on the books via governmental decree – not voluntary renunciation of Muslim civil status on the part of individual Muslims. This is a stance the AUMA and the reformist ulama would later share.

⁸³ Weil, *How to be French*, 220.

⁸⁴ Thomas, *French Empire*, 68.

⁸⁵ Zack, “Early origins,” 210.

⁸⁶ Weil, *How to be French*, 220.

to the colony, a process which heightened the division between *colons* and Muslims and strengthened the “*colons*’ determination to reserve the instruments of colonial power to themselves.” Thus, the Young Algerians’ desire to extend citizenship rights to Algerian Muslims met with bitter and obstinate “*colon* obstructionism,” and by the end of 1918, the *colon* population had fully “mobilized against what looked to them like the ‘tomb of French supremacy in Algeria.’”⁸⁷ Settler politicians offered staunch and vehement opposition to proposals in favor of native citizenship, flooding Paris with motions pointing out “the certain danger there would be...in allowing thousands of natives to exercise the rights of French citizens, to participate in making laws to which they would not be subjected, and one day to submerge under their votes those of the French people of Algeria.”⁸⁸ Yet support for the measures did exist, and not only among Algerian Muslims. As a French politician plead in his 14 September 1934 editorial: “Did they not make war with us, and they are not afflicted, as a reward, to two years of compulsory military service, instead of one? Are they governed by a special code, called ‘rights of citizenship,’ which is not, you suppose well, a monument of tenderness towards them?”⁸⁹ Seeking middle ground, Clemenceau tasked the governor of Algeria, Charles Jonnart, with negotiating a compromise – one which would seemingly embody the Young Algerians’ notion of assimilation by taking into consideration “the enormous sacrifice made by Algerian ‘Muslims’ during the Great War.”⁹⁰ Yet with the passage of the Jonnart Law on 4 February 1919, the Young Algerians and their notion of assimilation were dealt a crippling blow.

At first glance, the Jonnart Law expanded the Muslim electorate drastically, enfranchising approximately 420,000 Muslim men. But to those who had negotiated for reform

⁸⁷ Thomas, *French Empire*, 69, and Weil, *How to be French*, 221.

⁸⁸ Zack, “Early origins,” 210, and Weil, *How to be French*, 221.

⁸⁹ Bernier, “Les derniers événements.”

⁹⁰ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 38.

on the basis of equality, the new law was a weakened and watered down version of earlier proposals and one that “set such conditions that it appeared in certain respects more restrictive than the Senatus-Consulte of 1865.”⁹¹ Nonetheless, the reforms did address some concerns of the Young Algerians. A number of native seats on the *Délégations financières* were converted from appointed positions to elected posts, thereby tackling the issue of “administration-friendly” appointed Beni Oui-Ouis. With the expansion of the native electorate also came exemption from the *Indigénat* and increased access to civil service jobs. However, on the critical point of French citizenship, the French administration – bolstered by the unanimous opposition from the *colon* population – had not budged. In order to enjoy the rights of citizenship, Algerian Muslims would still be required to give up “allegiance to Islam in private matters.”⁹² And those Muslim electors who did not exchange Muslim personal status for French citizenship “were placed on a separate electoral roll from settlers voters,” wherein their votes only counted in the election of the second, and less influential, of the two electoral colleges.⁹³ Overall, the Jonnart Law “affected the vast majority of Algerians very little,” serving primarily as a calculated deception to maintain the status quo and preserve the inequalities of the existing system.

Despite the fact that the Jonnart Law did arguably nothing to improve the sociopolitical situation of Algerian Muslims, historian Charles-Robert Ageron argues that “the 1919 reform bill ushered in an electoral revolution in Algeria, giving many natives the chance to participate in the official political structure, as voters or candidates, for the first time.”⁹⁴ Whether legitimately or symbolically, the bill marked the opening of access to the political administration for Algerian Muslims as a religious community for the first time since Crémieux. Rather than inspire further

⁹¹ Weil, *How to be French*, 221.

⁹² Zack, “Early origins,” 210.

⁹³ Thomas, *French Empire*, 71.

⁹⁴ Zack, “Early origins,” 210.

desire for reforms within the existing system, however, these developments further catalyzed an evolving political awareness of the institutionalized inequality embedded into the French colonial administration.

Ageron's analysis of the effects of the Jonnart Law reflects a wider division in the historiography of twentieth century Algeria over the long-term implications of the reforms. In the short-term, however, the perceived overwhelming failure of the Jonnart Laws to usher in tangible reform was interpreted as a larger failure of not only the Young Algerians themselves, but also their policy of assimilation. The end of the First World War inaugurated an era not only of reform, but also of increased political consciousness, particularly among subject peoples who had served their mother countries. For Algerian soldiers and those who worked in French factories abroad, "war-time experiences and the exposure to a more liberal French society opened their eyes to an alternative to the harsh and unequal conditions of life in French-ruled Algeria."⁹⁵ These personal revelations coupled with an increased awareness that the times had indeed changed: "[World War I] had internationalized the right of nations to dispose of their own lands."⁹⁶ The "half-measures" which the Jonnart legislation put in place served only to emphasize more clearly the boundaries between citizens and subjects.⁹⁷

It was with the failure of these postwar political reforms and the ensuing socioeconomic decline of the postwar years that there emerged increasingly separatist demands from Algerian Muslims that, "focused on obtaining real rights for subjects who had not had them – abolishing the 'native code,' establishing fiscal equality, ensuring the right to vote – *without the attribution of French nationality.*"⁹⁸ It was in this political and socioeconomic atmosphere that the proto-

⁹⁵ Zack, "Early origins," 210.

⁹⁶ Weil, *How to be French*, 223.

⁹⁷ Cole, "Constantine," 842.

⁹⁸ Weil, *How to be French*, 222.

nationalist precursors of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) emerged, as well as the pro-association political movement behind *La Défense*, the *Association des Oulémas Musulmans Algériens* (AUMA). While the AUMA evoked many of the precedents set by the Young Algerians, for this group, the importance of Arabo-Islamic culture would take center stage.⁹⁹

Constantine, 3-5 August 1934

The rioting that took place in Constantine in the first week of August 1934 should be understood in this long history of religious, social, and economic tension in Constantine itself as well as Algeria as a whole. Existing scholarship has often overlooked the extent to which through a century-long process of exclusion and inclusion along religious lines (i.e., varying access to the colonial state for Jews and Muslims), the French administration contributed to the rise of ethnoreligious nationalism among Algerian Muslims. This sense of exclusion and intensified economic disenfranchisement during the interwar period gave rise to a variety of movements that expressed opposition to the colonial power in the 1930s. While this growing radicalism largely targeted against the state itself, the ongoing process of negotiating access to political and governmental spaces pitted Jewish and Muslim Algerians against one another, as seen in Constantine in August 1934. This was not, as Joshua Cole explained and the editors of *La Défense* argued, a result of “age-old tensions between Muslims and Jews.”¹⁰⁰ Rather, the communal violence resulted from the long-term process wherein the colonial state had asymmetrically offered a sense of national belonging (to the French Third Republic), thus fostering opposing justifications for gaining access to the state that were rooted in communal identity.

⁹⁹ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Cole, “Constantine,” 849.

Despite the fact that discrimination against the two religious groups was rooted in “a parallel set of prejudices” against certain religious practices, French belief that Jews were more able and willing to assimilate to French culture led to the application of asymmetric laws. In fact, “Muslim legal exclusion appears to have rested, in part, on the legal logic that emancipated colonized Jews.”¹⁰¹ This asymmetry in the *mission civilisatrice* is in part rooted in the resonance of revolutionary era ideology, as “Jewish emancipation had been a cornerstone of the French Revolution, going hand in hand with the values of republicanism.”¹⁰² By this universalist logic, Algerian Jews could embrace French citizenship and the rights it entailed, while attempting to relegate problematic questions of religion to the private sphere. On the other hand, the French did not consider Algerian Muslims willing or capable of overcoming the dissonance between French republican citizenship and the Islamic faith. In many ways, this can be considered an ethno-cultural discrimination, rather than a religious one. This analysis is supported by the fact that, in the wake of World War I and with the rise of the Zionist movement, the French were increasingly hostile to “political claims made in the name of religion” by the Jewish community, as the conflation of ethnicity and religion were seen to violate republican ideals.¹⁰³ As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, it is to these republican ideals the editors of *La Défense* so thoroughly appealed in their explanations of the riots and their calls for reform.

The violence in Constantine in August 1934 represents a visible rupture not only of the relationship between Jews and Muslims, but also of each group’s relationship to the colonial state. By imposing a communal system that was contradictory and hypocritical in its justification for exclusion and inclusion along religious lines, the colonial state inadvertently relied upon a

¹⁰¹ Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 147 and 179.

¹⁰² Evans and Phillips, *Anger of the Dispossessed*, 35.

¹⁰³ Todd Shepard, “Algerian Nationalism, Zionism, and French Laïcité: A History of Ethnoreligious Nationalisms and Decolonization,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 446.

communal restfulness to maintain its carefully crafted societal hierarchy. For decades, this balance held; Algerian Jews remained largely “apolitical – loyal French citizens, who due to their sympathy with the Muslim plight and fears about endangering their delicate position, declared neutrality in the conflict” between settlers and Muslims.¹⁰⁴ And when large-scale resistance failed for the Muslim population, many of them chose to turn inward by “taking solace in religion,” with their Islamic faith serving as a bulwark against colonialism.¹⁰⁵ With the unique political and economic pressures of the interwar period, however, the balance tipped, as both Jews and Muslims were renegotiating their sense of belonging to the colonial state. In Constantine, as these groups came face to face with the mutually exclusive definitions of citizenship they had been offered by the French, violence broke out along communal lines. Elsewhere in Algeria, these communal definitions of identity and belonging would be reflected in the evolving nationalist movement, as Algerian identity eventually came to be identified hand-in-hand with adherence to the Islamic faith.

The editors of *La Défense* effectively demonstrated the role of the French administration, as well as European *colons*, in creating a tense sociopolitical atmosphere by the interwar period. Analyzing their rhetoric further will reveal the role of the colonial state in fomenting communal violence, as well the political position of the AUMA *évolués* who despite their profound understanding of the failures of French imperialism, nevertheless believed in the French Republic and its colonial project. The following chapter will analyze the reformist ulama’s coverage of the Constantine riots, with particular attention to representations of the role that the colonial state – and its failures – played in the breakdown of relations between Constantine’s Jewish and Muslim communities.

¹⁰⁴ Maud S. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014): 43.

¹⁰⁵ Evans and Phillips, 41.

CHAPTER TWO

COMMUNAL TENSION AND THE RIOTS OF CONSTANTINE

Eruption in *Le Vieux Rocher*

On the evening of 5 August 1934, dust settled on the wreckage of apartment buildings and storefronts in the Jewish quarter of Constantine. Over the course of twelve hours on that Sunday, nearly thirty *Constantinois* were killed and over 200 more were wounded. Despite conflicting data published in the immediate aftermath, records and histories of the violence indicate that there were 25 Jews and three Muslims killed in the riots.¹⁰⁶ Five days after these events, on 10 August, the Algiers-based newspaper *La Défense* published their weekly Friday issue. As was customary, the paper prominently featured three stories above the fold: “*L’heure n’est pas au désespoir*” ran parallel alongside “*Les Leçons d’une Tragédie*,” and “*Les événements de Constantine*.” All three headlines evoked the same piece of news – the riots that occurred in Constantine the preceding weekend. Yet there is little factual or visual evidence within the newspaper that any violence had occurred. The columns of text stood in stark contrast to the front page of the *Dépêche de Constantine*, which featured blurry images of destroyed storefronts and grotesque photos of the eternal sleep of riot victims, lying lifeless side-by-side in their beds. Rather than explain the details of the riots themselves, *La Défense* offered instead contextualization for the violence and an exploration of the political motivations of the perpetrators, provocateurs, and commentators. Turning to the article, “*Les évènements[sic] de Constantine*,” we see an initial picture of the organ’s interpretation of the violence.

¹⁰⁶ Initial reports from Jewish leaders and publications indicated that 28 Jews had been killed, one of whom remained unidentified.

The article, signed Veritas, ran with a prominent sub-headline, stating “Jews (*Israélites*) and Muslims are brothers by affinity as well as through shared ideals.”¹⁰⁷ While this sub-head emphasized fraternity between Jews and Muslims, it also implied an existing tension that needed to be addressed and refuted. The opening paragraphs explained this tension, informing the readers that “serious events” had taken place in the city of Constantine, the capital of the eastern department of Algeria, and that Jews and Muslims were “the two forces which were fighting.”¹⁰⁸ Notably, the article avoided detailing the character of the riots themselves in these opening paragraphs. It simply stated, “There were dead and wounded, not to mention stores sacked and buildings burned.” The tone from the outset was apologetic, and emphasis was placed on the tragic nature of the “horrible slaughter” and regret for the lives lost. The editors coupled their recognition of the weight of the tragedy with astonished curiosity at the violent deterioration of what they portrayed as a healthy communal relationship between Muslims and Jews in the city: “So how was it that those which seemed united by so many strong bonds and common memories (*de liens solides et souvenirs communs*), were thrown one against the other, giving free rein to their unbridled instincts?” The article then responded to this question in the following section by identifying causal factors for the violence: “One immediate, the other remote.”

As for the immediate cause of the outbreak of violence, the article pointed to the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque incident. During Friday evening prayers on the night of 3 August, the paper claimed, “A soldier of Jewish origins entered at nightfall the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque and while the faithful were praying, began his ‘joke’ (*blaguer*), ridiculing the worshippers and, to give more relief to his offensive sentiments, taking down his trousers and proceeding to...piss on them.” The word *blaguer* was in quotations, as the article expressed disdain toward those papers which

¹⁰⁷ Mohamed Benhoura, AUMA member and later president, wrote under the pen names Aboulhak and Veritas.

¹⁰⁸ Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.”

had “euphemistically qualified [the incident] as a ‘prank’ (*encartade*).” The article went on to explain that while the soldier himself was allegedly inebriated, he was accompanied by a “group of comrades who, without the excuse of being drunk, nevertheless found legitimate the attitude of their friend.”¹⁰⁹ Though the article did not explicitly detail how, this “provocation” led to the outbreak of violence between Jews and Muslims over the weekend, culminating in rioting and widespread violence against Jewish civilians on 5 August 1934.

Al-Shihab – a Constantine-based, Arabic language newspaper associated with the AUMA – published a similar version of events in the aftermath of the violence. Editor Abdelhamid Ben Badis claimed that “the Jew Eliaou Khalifa” stuck his head into the ablution room of the mosque, surprising the worshippers (who numbered about twelve). Ben Badis too put forth that the man was drunk and claimed that he did not urinate on the worshippers, but rather “called on them to expose their genitals during ablution” and insulted their prayers, religion, and mosque.¹¹⁰ While he spoke nothing of Khalifa’s alleged “group of comrades,” he claimed that Khalifa and his wife continued insulting the crowd of Muslims that gathered in the courtyard between their home and the mosque after the initial incident took place and said “others may have participated in the insults.” It was only with police intervention, which Khalifa allegedly resisted, and the help of the mufti that the crowds were initially quieted. Like the editors of *La Défense*, Ben Badis also blamed the outbreak of violence on continued provocations by the Jewish community, despite

¹⁰⁹ Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.”

¹¹⁰ Abdelhamid Ben Badis, “Faij’at qusintina,” *Al-Shihab*, 11 September 1934. Reprinted in Ammar al-Talibi, *Kitab athar Ibn Badis: i’dad wa-tasnif*, part 2 of volume 2. Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1983. The reprint offered the date of original publication corresponding to both the Hijri and Gregorian calendars, as it was *Al-Shihab*’s standard to do so. The dates given are Jumada al-thani 1353 and 11 December 1934. However, the given months do not correspond. Jumada al-thani 1353 corresponds accurately to 11 September 1934. Because I do not have access to this particular issue of *Al-Shihab*, it is not clear whether the error can be attributed to *Al-Shihab* or to the reprint, or for that matter whether the Hijri or the Gregorian date is incorrect. But considering the subject on which Ben Badis was writing, it seems more likely that this was originally printed in September 1934, a month after the riots, rather than in December. I thus have cited it as such.

the best – and sustained – efforts on behalf of the Muslim community leaders to ease tensions over the course of the weekend.

Histories of the Constantine violence have since established a narrative of events somewhat different from those put forward by *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab* in the aftermath. Indeed, even the government report that stemmed from the official investigation into the violence offered a version of events that has since been questioned and whose contents are now presumed unreliable. Scholars have since agreed that an inebriated Jewish tailor (not soldier) name Eliaou Khalifa was returning to his home on 3 August 1934, when he had a confrontation with a group of Muslims performing their Friday evening prayers in the mosque near his home. Despite allegations that Khalifa entered the mosque and either assaulted the supplicants themselves or urinated inside the mosque, it is undisputed that he verbally abused the men. It remains unclear whether he insulted the Prophet Muhammad or Islam directly, as Ben Badis claimed, but his comments were enough to provoke the men into physical retaliation. Khalifa took shelter inside his home, and later that evening a violent demonstration formed outside. It was during this time that the first person fell victim to the violence; a Muslim man was shot in the stomach and later died in the hospital.

Over the course of the next twenty-four hours, city officials called upon both Muslim and Jewish leaders to quell the disquiet in their respective communities, and efforts were made on both sides to re-establish peace.¹¹¹ However, for reasons that remain unexplained, in the early hours of Sunday morning, a large group of Muslims gathered in a local pine forest (an established community meeting place), allegedly awaiting the arrival of a renowned local leader, Mohammed Bendjelloul. Bendjelloul himself was unaware that his presence was expected at the

¹¹¹ Both *Al-Shihab* and *La Défense* detailed the efforts of Muslim leaders to quell the anxiety of the community, and Ben Badis lent much praise to his own and Dr. Bendjelloul's efforts in this regard.

meeting, and was in fact attending the funeral of a local Jewish leader at the time. A rumor of unknown origins then began spreading throughout the crowd that Jews had in fact killed the much revered Bendjelloul. It was this piece of traumatic news that incited the crowd to storm the Jewish quarter of Constantine, sacking businesses and destroying storefronts. When the neighborhood took up arms against the invaders and began shooting at the crowd from windows, the Muslim rioters retaliated by killing men, women, and children. Police officers and other city officials were notably and suspiciously slow to attempt to put an end to the violence.¹¹²

In its articulation of the incident at the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque, *La Défense* clearly distinguished itself from the position of the “daily press,” whose articles seemed to easily dismiss the precipitating incident as a prank and thus criticized the Muslim response as overzealous. In the 10 August 1934 issue, the editors of *La Défense* included an excerpt from *La Dépêche algérienne*, whose correspondent admonished yet excused Khalifa’s behavior, reminding its readers that ““he was drunk!!!””¹¹³ Despite the fact that Khalifa was drunk, *La Défense* did not let him or his comrades off the hook for the provocation. Rather, they defended the reaction of the Muslims: “Thus one profanes a sacred place, sprays the faithful with urine and when [the worshippers] protest and react against such defilement, not only does one mock them for their whining, but coldly kills with a revolver one of their own.”¹¹⁴ This characterization contrasted with one that ran in *La Dépêche algérienne*: ““There was dispute on both sides. Revolver shots were fired. A Muslim is dying in the hospital.””¹¹⁵

The stark difference in language is apparent even from this brief excerpt. The passive language of the *colon* paper seemed to diffuse both the gravity of and responsibility for the

¹¹² Ageron, “Une émeute anti-juive,” 24-26, and Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 144-154.

¹¹³ *La Dépêche algérienne* was a widely circulated *colon* newspaper.

¹¹⁴ It is unclear who shot and killed the Muslim on the night of 3 August, and there is no clear evidence that it was Khalifa himself.

¹¹⁵ Cited in Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.”

violence: gunshots “*furent tires*,” but the editors offered no identity for the shooter(s); a Muslim “*est en train de mourir*,” but was not “injured” or “killed” by any particular actor; and what has been described as a riot or pogrom was here merely a “*dispute*.” *La Défense*, on the other hand, sought “to clearly establish the responsibilities” by contextualizing the incident as blatant provocation on the part of the tailor. In so doing, the paper rationalized rather than problematized the Muslim response: “We wonder what Catholics or Jews would have done in similar circumstances in which Muslims had so deliberately defiled a church or a synagogue?” Perhaps in reaction to four days of dismissive press coverage such as this, *La Défense* intended to demonstrate an analytical, cause-and-effect relationship between the “provocation” at the mosque and the Muslim response, arguing that “Obviously such a ‘prank’ could not go unanswered.”¹¹⁶

Historians of Algeria have tended to reference the 1934 riots of Constantine in passing in wider histories of the rise of nationalist sentiment, typically as evidence of growing enmity between the Jewish and Muslim populaces.¹¹⁷ Charles-Robert Ageron, echoing the analyses of the colonial administration whose reports he drew from, concluded in a 1973 article about the riots that the events were purely local, spurred only by the Muslim “underclass,” agitated both by economic discontent and “seized by the hope of a national revival.”¹¹⁸ The violence itself he considered sporadic, even coincidental. While Ageron pointed to the deteriorating economic situation for Algerian Muslims as a causal factor of general unrest in the interwar period, his generalization about the rise of nationalist sentiment among the Muslim populace does not allow for a more detailed analysis of the social and political factors underlying the outbreak of violence in Constantine. As Joshua Cole has articulated, Ageron “downplays” the fact that many Algerian

¹¹⁶ Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.”

¹¹⁷ See Robert Attal, *Regards sur les juifs d’Algérie*, L’Harmattan: Paris, 1996.

¹¹⁸ Ageron, “Une émeute anti-juive,” 40.

Muslims and Jews alike in the interwar period were as of yet still committed to negotiating a “more inclusive definition of citizenship.”¹¹⁹

While the so-called ‘Muslim response’ to the riots of Constantine has garnered some mention in histories such as Ageron’s, the narratives published in *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab* immediately following the violence deserves a deeper look, as do the men behind these newspapers who were responsible for crafting their political messages. By analyzing the narratives put forth in these publications, I intend to expose the ideological and, at times, violent struggle to define Algeria and Algerian identity that was taking place in the interwar period. In 1934, members of the *Association des Oulémas Musulmans Algériens* (AUMA) were advocating for policies of association with the métropole. In contrast to the Young Algerians’ policy of assimilation, which was ultimately a transformative project rooted in the adoption of French culture, including dress and language, association emphasized interaction rather than integration.¹²⁰ For the AUMA, this meant maintaining a difficult balance between criticizing the colonial administration, praising the French republican project, and insisting upon the preservation of Arab and Muslim cultural identity. As mouthpieces of the organization, *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab* represented critical tools in espousing its position on political happenings both in Algeria and abroad, and as such serve as indispensable sources of inquiry into the AUMA’s “struggle to represent their community’s past and future.”¹²¹ Because their rhetoric in the aftermath of the riots has not been closely analyzed, the reformist ulama’s understanding of the violence has not been fully explored.

An analysis of the AUMA’s reaction to and interpretation of the violence between Jews and Muslims in one of Algeria’s biggest cities reveals several ideological platforms that

¹¹⁹ Cole, “Constantine,” 842.

¹²⁰ Naylor, *Historical Dictionary*, 88-89.

¹²¹ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 5.

complicate the accepted narrative of their response. The dominance of the nationalist narrative in Algerian historiography has obfuscated the meaning of the riots to those who witnessed and experienced them. As McDougall put forth, it is the duty of the historian to investigate the “social conflicts expressed as struggles over the cultural and political power of authoritative representation” so as to identify the social-historical location of particular worldviews. In so doing, one is attempting to “reveal the suppressed alternatives effaced or condemned by authoritative histories.”¹²²

In the instance of the AUMA in colonial Algeria, historiographical master-narratives of the evolution of the nationalist movement in the interwar period have taken for granted that these religious scholars understood their project in nationalistic terms. Indeed, many of the men who commented on the riots rose to prominence as leaders of the separatist movement within the next five to ten years. And so analyses of their immediate responses to the Constantine riots have thus presupposed that because some of them later advocated for Algerian independence, that their pro-French language was feigned and their criticisms of the Jewish community categorically anti-Semitic.¹²³ It is my argument that this determinist mode of thinking has prevented historians from investigating, understanding, and transmitting the worldview of men like Lamine Lamoudi, who in appealing to Marianne for the help and protection she promised may have envisioned a future for *sa belle Algérie* within the framework of the French Republic, quite unlike the one that coalesced around the forces of the *Front de Libération Nationale* twenty years later.

La Défense

Director and Editor-in-Chief of *La Défense*, Lamine Lamoudi was a French-educated scholar and prominent leader in the AUMA. Lamoudi was born in 1891, in Oued Souf, a city

¹²² McDougall, *History and Culture*, 5.

¹²³ Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*, 66, and Richard Ayoun, “À propos du pogrom de Constantine (Août 1934),” *Revue des études juives* 144 (1985): 181-186.

approximately 300 miles south of Constantine near the Tunisian border. He received a traditional Quranic education before attending French secondary schools in both Biskra and Constantine.¹²⁴

An intellectual, Lamoudi became acquainted with the leading writers and scholars of the Constantine region and became an active participant in the religious, cultural, and political debates taking place in colonial Algeria. Among his compatriots was the renowned Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, of Constantine, who founded the AUMA in 1931. From the Association's founding until 1935, Lamoudi served as the General Secretary, and in 1934, he launched the weekly newspaper, *La Défense*.¹²⁵

While *La Défense* was not the explicit mouthpiece of the AUMA, the newspaper shared the organization's reformist message, and many Association members contributed content to the paper during its five-year run.¹²⁶ On 26 January 1934, *La Défense* published its first issue, premiering its tagline: “*DES DROITS ET INTERETS DES MUSULMANS ALGERIENS*,” and putting forth its editorial platform. *La Défense* established that its raison d'être stemmed from the lack of periodicals that represented and defended the “indigenous question” in Algeria, claiming that despite constituting “a community of six million souls,”¹²⁷ Algerian Muslims would be ashamed to answer the question, “How many newspapers do you have to make your voice heard, to formulate your claims to protect your rights, to make known your grievances and your aspirations?” This shameful fact was particularly “regrettable” in light of the “pitiful condition” of the native population, which faced “the increasingly inescapable need to unite, organize ourselves, and work with method and perseverance” to raise themselves out of their miserable state. *La Défense* thus took up the paternalistic torch of defining and defending the “common

¹²⁴ Muhammad Al-Akhdar Saihi, *al-Amin al-Amudi: al-shakhsyah al-muta'addidah al-jawanib* (Algiers: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1988): 19-21.

¹²⁵ Merad, *Réformisme*, 129.

¹²⁶ The paper ceased publication in 1939.

¹²⁷ “Notre Programme.”

cause” of Algerian Muslims, who had thus far been subject to “a perpetual enslavement policy” that actively impeded their “union and organization.”¹²⁸

Although the program did not state explicitly who these enslavers were, one might infer that it was accusing either all Frenchmen or “some” indifferent, careless, spineless, and cowardly French officials who were the “worst enemies” of the native population. However, *La Défense* was in fact careful to avoid criticizing the French en masse or even France itself. As either *élus musulmans* or their allies, the editors of *La Défense* had a vested interest in not compromising the political legitimacy of local Muslim representatives who were working toward reform. Rather, the program criticized the purported leaders and allies of the native population for having allowed these “enemies” to keep them subordinated: “We are still at the moment what we were in the very early days of the conquest and what we have always been since: a disorganized mass...the prey of all the exploiters and all shameless profiteers, resembling perfectly what one Arab poet called ‘sheep without a shepherd, abandoned in open desert.’” The program commended “the few good French” who “raised their voices” in defense of native Algerians, but accused “our qualified representatives” of engaging in “blameworthy conduct” that discouraged and paralyzed the action of this “small number of men of heart.” Here the editors of *La Défense*, speaking with a unified voice, were blatantly alluding to the Beni Oui Oui’s – representatives complicit in the subjugation of the Muslim population – and *marabouts* responsible for the corruption of Islam. Despite its official position as an apolitical organization, the AUMA through its members and associated publications voiced institutional criticisms with tremendous political implications. The AUMA was castigating the administration’s approach to governance via its native middle men.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ “Notre Programme.”

¹²⁹ “Notre Programme.”

According to the editors of *La Défense*, within Algeria a number of forces had “coalesce[d] to oppress the native, reduce him to misery, crush and annihilate him.” While the force of French colonialism was the implicit force at work, the program forcefully denounced the role of leaders serving “the interests of certain *puissants du jour*” rather than working to cure the ills suffered by the native population. The newspaper added to this category elected officials who were nothing more than “small employees of the Administration,” who would only speak up to praise their “beloved *patronne*, the Administration” and to reassure it that Algerians “are the happiest people on Earth and that if other nations lack many things, we, Algerian Muslims, lack nothing.”¹³⁰ *La Défense* conveyed in these criticisms that the array of injustices the native population faced was a product of a corrupt system in need of “repair.” Critical in this language was the organ’s belief in reconcilability and its openness to negotiation within the existing system.¹³¹

The program then moved into an explication of the forms that injustice against the native population had taken in French Algeria. Primary among these were issues related to “violations...[of] religious freedom.” Referring to the forced closure of Quranic schools and the restriction of access to mosques for preachers and *moudarrés*, *La Défense* questioned the legitimacy of these administrative measures, as well as the maneuvers of the administration to suppress individuals who reported them: “a ruthless hunt is made if any of us dare to report a fact detrimental to our interests, to denounce an official guilty of breaches of his professional duty, or to demand reform or granting of a right.” Here the allegations of violations against religious freedom were coupled with accusations of institutional encroachment on individual freedoms. The paper claimed that “reprisals are taken against officials...merely suspected of having ideas or

¹³⁰ “Notre Programme.”

¹³¹ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 65.

opinions contrary to those of their...*maîtres* who then call these ideas subversive and the opinions of revolutionaries.” The administration would then declare such men “a public danger,” castigating them as agitators and “anti-French.”¹³² The irony implicitly that *La Défense* implicitly put forth was that despite the ongoing smear campaign against Islam and Algerian Muslims, as fundamentally anti-French, the administration itself and its collaborators were the ones violating the tenets of the French Republic. Speaking the language of their colonizers, the reformist ulama would continually invoke the ideals of the Republic to condemn discriminatory colonial policies.¹³³

Indeed, reacting against the increasing popularity of the AUMA’s reformist message, French officials in the early 1930s attempted to curb the organization’s influence through repressive legislation. Marcel Michel, the Secretary General of Algiers, passed the first series of measures, known as the *Circulaires Michel*, in February 1933. These policies sought to weaken the AUMA and isolate its members from the Muslim population. To that end, the *circulaires* banned reformist preachers from entering and preaching in official mosques, and instituted surveillance mechanisms against its members. While these policies were initially isolated to Algiers, they “were followed by many Arab school closures [throughout Algeria]...the refusal to open new schools under reformist leadership, the deprivation of freedom of movement [for AUMA members], and even prison sentences for a number of agents of the reformist propaganda.” Ensuing repressive measures were not confined to the realm of religious practice, but rather attempt to “deal a blow to [Ben Badis’] written propaganda, especially in the press of the AUMA.”¹³⁴

¹³² “Notre Programme.”

¹³³ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 76.

¹³⁴ Merad, *Réformisme*, 149.

Having established the institutional violation of religious freedoms, *La Défense* turned to the suppression of Algerian cultural heritage embodied by the progressively strict censorship of the Arab press.¹³⁵ The program decried the “outrageous” treatment of the Arab press, claiming that over the course of six months, the administration had abolished “without cause” eight of ten Arabic language newspapers, including another ulama publication, *Al-Sirate*: “We may be wrong in saying without cause because *Dame Administration* always finds one, and for the *Al-Sirate*...it is this: ‘[because] this newspaper reveals patterns contrary to public order!’”¹³⁶ *La Défense* ran a full-length article on the suppression of the Arab press on the front page of this first issue, and in their program focused not on the specifics of this suppression but rather its implications: “But what is even more outrageous is that the Arabic language, our mother tongue, is considered a foreign language! So we are the foreigners in our own country!” Here *La Défense* laid another cornerstone of its agenda – the protection and proliferation of the Arabic language – and used it to transition into its most fundamental contention: that the political status of Algerian Muslims remained “bizarre,” “incomprehensible,” and “illogical.”¹³⁷

La Défense explained that a system of inequality had existed in the colony since the passage of the Senatus-Consulte of 1865. Per this legislation, Algeria’s Jews and Muslims who did not opt to abandon their personal status for full French citizenship were categorized as native subjects and thus not privy to the “rights and prerogatives associated with the status of citizen.” That system of inequality became all the more incoherent with the passage of Crémieux in 1870, when Algerian Jews no longer had to voluntarily abandon their personal status, as they were naturalized en masse. Yet “*l’indigène musulman français*” was not afforded this same

¹³⁵ Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2002): 76.

¹³⁶ Ben Badis was associated with *Al-Sirate* as well, and excerpts from this journal will be examined below.

¹³⁷ “Notre Programme.”

opportunity.¹³⁸ *La Défense* asserted that this inequitable system remained in place “under the fallacious pretext that the Algerian Muslim continues to be governed by its laws and customs...and thus enjoy what our detractors impudently call ‘a privileged situation.’” Thus, “We are French without being so, incomplete Frenchmen, as stated by some of our friends, ‘second-class’ Frenchmen.” The singularity and particularity of this second-class status reinforced the need for an organ such as *La Défense*, as the newspaper intended to serve as a platform for those wishing to engage in serious discussion about the “political and administrative reforms” that were necessary to better represent the “distinct interests...and...aspirations” of Algerian Muslims. The paper pledged to serve as an open forum, with their only concern being “to meaningfully serve the cause of our co-religionists.”¹³⁹ Again, the desire for change existed alongside a willingness to “acced[e] to French citizenship within the framework of the French Republic.”¹⁴⁰

As Veritas elaborated upon in his front-page article, “*La Suppression de la Presse Arabe en Algérie*,” the Minister of the Interior banned the production, sale, and distribution of the Arabic language newspaper *Al-Sirate* on 23 December 1933. The decree also prohibited the creation of “any new newspaper of the same language and the same tendency in Algeria.” *Al-Sirate* was at the time the primary publication of the AUMA and under the directorship of Abdelhamid Ben Badis. The gag order on *Al-Sirate* seemed to be a turning point for Lamoudi, who by publishing in French sought to expand the audience of AUMA’s reformist message to include French-educated Muslim youth. According to historian Ali Merad, the reformist propaganda up to that point was almost exclusively transmitted via Arabic language periodicals, making it “practically inaccessible to the [Muslim] youth” who had not received an education in

¹³⁸ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 60.

¹³⁹ “Notre Programme.”

¹⁴⁰ H. Roberts, “Doctrinaire Economics,” 135.

formal, non-colloquial Arabic.¹⁴¹ Lamoudi's choice to publish in French was thus not only a means to avoid the increasingly strict censorship of the Arab press, but also a deliberate choice to appeal to a wider audience that would be receptive of his agenda. As made clear by the program put forth in January 1934, Lamoudi sought to negotiate a line between defending Algeria's cultural integrity – "*la personnalité algérienne arabo-islamique*" – and its continued political union with France.¹⁴²

"Les évènements de Constantine"

La Défense had much at stake in the feverish press campaign that followed in the wake of the Constantine riots of August 1934, both as a mouthpiece for the AUMA and also, more broadly, as a mechanism for propagandizing to a French-educated audience. Thus in the weeks and months following the eruption of violence, the editors of *La Défense* attempted to promulgate not only their version of events, but also their interpretation of what the violence meant for Algeria as a whole. While editor Lamine Lamoudi took up the pen to offer specific breakdowns of the paper's arguments, the editorials published on the front pages of the first three issues after 5 August offer insight into the political framework in which these men understood the violence that took place in Constantine.

On 10 August 1934, *La Défense* published its first editorial after the riots front and center on the first page. More boldly headlined than the flanking stories attributed to Aboulhak and Veritas, the article was titled: "*Les Leçons d'une Tragédie*," and indicated that what followed was an analytical response to an emotionally charged phenomenon. The article immediately engaged with other press accounts of the riots, stating: "The tragic events of which Constantine has just been the theater did not reveal the existence of an 'old hatred of Muslims to Jews' as

¹⁴¹ Merad, *Réformisme*, 110.

¹⁴² Merad, *Réformisme*, 111, and Gosnell, *Politics of Frenchness*, 74.

insinuated by M. Carde, nor that of ‘*l’antisémitisme*’ as was alluded by some papers and is nonsense for us Algerians Muslims, who are *des sémites authentiques*.”¹⁴³ It was the first priority of the editors to distance Algerian Muslims from notions of anti-Semitism, and then to insist on the fraternal bond shared by these two Abrahamic groups.

They defended the purportedly amicable nature of relations between Jews and Muslims by reminding readers that “IN NO ERA IN ITS HISTORY, HAS MUSLIM ALGERIA been the land of pogroms or explosions of *fanatisme anti-juif*.” The reference to Muslim Algeria is notable here as it was conspicuously absent from other articles in the newspaper; usually, self-reference was simply “Algeria.” Distancing “Muslim Algeria” from anti-Jewish fanaticism and pogroms implied that the violence in Constantine was an historic anomaly brought about by external forces. Their insistence on printing the term anti-Semitism in quotations – implying it was a reprint or adopted term – even served to immediately call into question the legitimacy of the notion itself. An explicit connection with European influences was then made, as the editors stated: “Was it not in Muslim Algeria that the Jews, expelled from Spain, repulsed and hounded by most people, found welcome, in refuge, comfort and safety?”¹⁴⁴ The implication of this creative historicization is obvious: anti-Semitism was a European product that had been imported into Algeria by Europeans themselves.

Here, the editors of *La Défense* were not only responding to direct accusations of anti-Semitism after the riots, they were also engaging with contemporary local and regional political discourse. The rise of right-wing anti-Semitism, particularly among the *colon* population, was a feature of interwar Algeria. Richard Ayoun and other historians attest to the impact of European anti-Semitism in Algeria, arguing that the extreme right in France and the rise of German anti-

¹⁴³ “Les Leçons d’une Tragédie,” *La Défense*, 10 August 1934.

¹⁴⁴ “Les Leçons d’une Tragédie.”

Semitism had troubled relationships in the colony.¹⁴⁵ In Constantine specifically, attempts by Jewish leaders to form political alliances with settler elites and assimilate into the French nation as a bulwark against spreading anti-Semitism led to conflict between the two religious communities. Muslim intellectuals, particularly members of the AUMA, sought to achieve equal political rights for their community without compromising their religious identity. But such an improvement of the status of the majority native population posed a threat to the authority and privileged status of the *colons*, who vehemently opposed the reformist agenda. It was to these “*gros colons*” that *La Défense* attributed attempts to incite conflict between Muslims and Jews, as it was seemingly in their interest that Muslims be represented as fanatical, violent, and anti-Semitic, and thus unfit to be citizens. Indeed, during this period, anti-Semitic settlers were actively attempting to “create and maintain tensions” between these communities. As Rochdi Ali Younsi concluded, “In their mind, as long as Jews and Muslims clashed, there would be no immediate threat to the French presence in Algeria. They therefore engaged in numerous acts of provocation in an attempt to trigger clashes between the two groups.”¹⁴⁶

These editorials made clear that *La Défense* interpreted the violence – the anti-Semitism, as the paper’s opponents labeled it – of Constantine as the byproduct of the subordinate position of the native population and as the reaction against incendiary rhetoric intended to pit Jew against Muslim. That is, two different narratives of violence were at work; one rooted in self-defense and another rooted in reactionary violence. A combination of these two narratives was evident in the paper’s discussion of the causal factors of the violence. On the one hand, the editors of *La Défense* claimed that these riots “show that if the Arab knows to submit, to resign and to suffer, he also knows, like any human being, to show his discontent and even, if

¹⁴⁵ Ayoun, “À propos,” 181, and Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 118.

necessary, *SE DEFENDRE*.” The native who was daily subject to “injustice, abuses and harassment” would understandably have become “increasingly sensitive to...these abuses and this bullying.” On the other hand, they also asserted that violence was “provoked” by words “of hatred and revenge” that served to “compromise the good neighborly relations and human brotherhood” shared by Algerian Muslims and Jews.¹⁴⁷ These two narratives are not mutually exclusive but are in fact linked. As Lamoudi made clear in his assessments of the riots, the violence was animated by a reaction against injustice and alleged provocations by the Jewish community, and in both instances could be rationalized as an exercise in self-defense.

For the editors, whether the violence was construed as self-defense or as reactionary, both this sense of injustice and the real or rumored actions of Constantine’s Jews were responsible for inciting the riots. In either case, in the next two editorials, *La Défense* pinpointed much more significant and deep-seated mechanisms at work in producing this violence. On 14 September 1934, dialogue about anti-Semitism was replaced with an appeal to readers to no longer ignore the aforementioned injustices faced by the “nation of six million souls” on “this side of the Mediterranean Sea.” The editorial asked how long people would continue to “ignore or pretend not to know” about the “distressing Algerian problem.” The symptoms of this problem were made explicit, and again reinforced the AUMA’s calls for reform: five out of six of these six million are starving and “9/10 children of both sexes do not find places in public schools.” The responsibility for the violence on display during the Constantine riots was placed upon “the hateful regime of injustice, oppression and repression that weighs on” the natives and which “provoked, by the abuse of the revolver, the terrible scuffle.”¹⁴⁸ By accusing the regime of

¹⁴⁷ “Les Leçons d’une Tragédie.”

¹⁴⁸ “Au Secours!” *La Défense*, 14 September 1934.

purposefully inciting violence, they dismissed the notion of Muslim anti-Semitism as a root cause of the riots and simultaneously voiced a major political grievance.

As members of the AUMA and propagators of the pro-association message, the editors of *La Défense* were necessarily critical of the colonial administration. It was their mission to reform the civil status of Muslims and their relationship to the state without compromising the legitimacy of the French nation and its fundamental principles, with which they were in ideological accord. Indeed, for the AUMA, “the original sin of the French...was not French colonialism itself, nor France's liberal, democratic political ideals,” but rather the administration’s unjust policies and interference with Muslim institutions.¹⁴⁹ As evidenced in the preceding editorial, *La Défense* interpreted the violence of Constantine and the miserable state of Algerian Muslims as symptomatic of a failing and “incapable administration,” one that was not in adherence with its own espoused tenets. If the riots were the symptoms and the administration the ailment, the editorial then clearly identified the cure: “A policy of wisdom and understanding, based on full respect for the rights and freedoms of everyone, this is what it takes to ensure in a serious and definitive way the agreement desired by all honest people.”¹⁵⁰ On 24 August, this was made clear not only by the title of the editorial – “*Le Seul Remède*” – but also by its concluding remarks: “The only remedy to the current situation, of which everybody acknowledges the seriousness, is the establishment of an egalitarian regime that grant full rights to all those who fulfill their duty.”¹⁵¹

If the editors of *La Défense* constructed their narrative of violence around the Constantine riots so as to expose the failings of the colonial administration, their political project did not stop

¹⁴⁹ Michael D. Driessen, *Religion and Democratization: Framing Religious and Political Identities in Muslim and Catholic Societies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 140.

¹⁵⁰ “Au Secours!”

¹⁵¹ “Le Seul Remède,” *La Défense*, 24 August 1934.

there. They did not ground their calls for an egalitarian regime merely in ideological appeals to notions of fair (French) governance, but also in rational and far more tangible conceptions of citizenship. That is, they asserted that “those who fulfill their duty” deserved equality before the law. They reinforced their appeals – addressed to “the French of France and here” – in concrete examples that demonstrated the extent to which Algerian Muslims were worthy of full citizenship: “We remind them all of the services and sacrifices that we have made, and of all the suffering we have endured for them, to prove our sincere desire to live in peace and maintain the best relations with those who are our neighbors in peacetime and our brothers in arms during war.” Marked by service, suffering, and sacrifice, French citizenship was understood as fraught with responsibility. Harkening back to the disappointment embodied by the Jonnart Law, *La Défense* argued that Algerian Muslims had long since taken on these duties but were nonetheless left in a “lamentable situation” at the hands of an inept and “selfish” administration. They concluded these remarks about this in their 14 September editorial with a final appeal: “We say this and we cry HELP!”¹⁵²

The narratives put forth in these articles are useful in constructing the political framework in which the entirety of the response of the reformist ulama to the Constantine riots can be understood. *La Défense* was able to isolate the colonial administration as the root cause of the riots and thus the target for larger criticisms. They did so by pinpointing instances of violence and anti-Semitism as symptomatic of injustice and provocation on the part of an ineffective administration, rather than latent anti-Semitism among the Muslims of Constantine. In so doing, both Ben Badis and the editors of *La Défense* could shift focus away from the culpability of the Muslim community. These criticisms dismissed the authority of the current administration and its policies but did not reject or call into question the legitimacy of the French project in Algeria

¹⁵² “Au Secours!”

but rather its execution. Indeed, the cure for all ills was identified as the rightful implementation of an egalitarian regime which Algerian Muslims (who were represented as *not* guilty of this violence, in many ways) overwhelmingly deserved.

Within this framework, the editors of *La Défense* repeatedly emphasized their criticisms of the colonial administration, using the violence in Constantine as lens through which to understand the oppression Algerian Muslims faced; namely, the lack of equality embodied by their status as indigenous subjects and the lack of religious freedom and education as a cause of moral corruption. By examining the dialogue of *La Défense* in the immediate aftermath of the riots it is possible to understand the trilateral colonial relationships between French officials, Muslims, and Jews, and also to more thoroughly understand the significance of the riots for the reformers, who desperately sought to control the political narrative of the violence.

Supplementing *La Défense*'s narrative with excerpts of coverage from *Al-Shihab* extends this project, demonstrating that members of the AUMA were calling for continued cooperation with the French state to both their French and Arabic speaking audiences.

Establishing Innocence and Culpability

Because the editors of *La Défense* used the riots as a catalyst for examining the status of Algerian Muslims, their rhetoric following the violence reflected a range of attitudes toward Algeria's Jewish population, against which they examined the condition of the native population. It also revealed a complex relationship between the Muslim elite and the Jewish community of Constantine in particular. As Joshua Cole demonstrates, political relationships between notable Jewish and Muslim leaders in the city became increasingly strained as a direct result of the riots and their political consequences. As such, it is critical to examine the language used in the immediate aftermath of the riot, taking into consideration that leading up to August 1934, "there

was no programmatic campaign of public anti-Semitism on the part of Muslim officeholders or religious leaders.”¹⁵³ Much of the heated language that appeared in *La Défense* in the months after the riots was thus part and parcel of the deteriorating relations between these communities.¹⁵⁴

An important mission for *La Défense* was to establish the relative innocence of the Muslim population of Constantine in the outbreak of violence. This task was in effect an extension of the organ’s wider project to defend the interests of all Algerian Muslims. Should the reputation of this group suffer or become smeared, the AUMA’s and others’ attempts at political reform and the achievement of citizenship for Algerian Muslims would be greatly hampered by settlers, who would exploit such violence to its limits as evidence of violent fanaticism. In the context of the riots, the task of defending the innocence of the Muslim population meant demonstrating the guilt of the other parties involved in the violence – the Jews of Constantine and their political representatives, anti-Semitic settlers, and the colonial administration at large. Thus *La Défense* was negotiating an onerous balance between refuting allegations of anti-Semitism and criticizing the actions of the Jews involved in allegedly inciting the violence and their leaders who, in the aftermath, vocally condemned the Muslims as violent anti-Semites.

Turning to Lamine Lamoudi’s articles on the riots, then, one discerns that he sought to invalidate accusations of anti-Semitism among the Muslim population while simultaneously emphasizing the culpability of the Jewish community in provoking the violence. Beginning on 24 August 1934, Lamoudi spent several weeks delineating the events of *la tragédie Constantinoise*, first outlining *La Défense*’s version of events before engaging in a prolonged

¹⁵³ Cole, “Constantine,” 847.

¹⁵⁴ By November of 1934, Lamine Lamoudi was less complimentary toward the Jewish community and less careful to ground his criticisms of Constantine’s Jews in their behavior immediately prior to the riots. Rather, as Haley describes, he became vocally critical of their political maneuvering and economic prosperity relative to the Muslim community of the city.

dialogue with the Jewish community, its leaders, and other French officials about the meaning of the violence. Alongside his righteous indignation toward the drunk Eliaou Khalifa, and his accompanying band of sober hooligans, who allegedly lashed out against Muslims at prayer in the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque, Lamoudi voiced both a history of and continued desire for friendship and alliance with the Jews of Constantine, if not their political representatives.

Lamoudi condemned “the leaders of Jewish society,” whom he claimed had been “seeking to create and maintain between a conflict between Muslims and Jews,” which “could cause the worst misunderstandings, the worst disasters.”¹⁵⁵ Here Lamoudi was referring to Jewish notable and *Conseiller General*, Henri Lellouche, who in the weeks after the riots had offered injurious statements to colonial officials conducting an investigation of the violence. In these statements, Lellouche accused the Muslim rioters of having mutilated women and slit the throats of children.¹⁵⁶ Lamoudi considered these statements to be vicious, untrue rumors, and he condemned their promulgators, who he believed were actively disrupting attempts at re-establishing harmony between the religious communities by spreading “false and tendentious reports like those.”¹⁵⁷

Unlike these “agitators,” *La Défense* claimed to seek nothing but “a return to normal life and peace among all races living on our soil.”¹⁵⁸ The organ’s continued commitment to “a real and sincere desire for peace and understanding” motivated its decision to *not* publish certain gruesome details about the violence in its immediate aftermath. Lamoudi explained that he and his compatriots “would have liked to see our neighbors, *Israélites et autres*, strive to do their best to forget to the extent possible the regrettable incidents that bloodied Constantine and deeply

¹⁵⁵ Lamine Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part III, *La Défense*, 28 September 1934.

¹⁵⁶ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 168.

¹⁵⁷ Lamine Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II, *La Défense*, 14 September 1934.

¹⁵⁸ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part III.

moved the entire Algerian population.” But Lellouche and others – such as the editors of *Dépêche de Constantine* – had sacrificed “healing and reconciliation” in favor of continuing to “exacerbate and dramatize” the “sad events.”¹⁵⁹ In response to Lellouche spreading “fanciful and erroneous information” that was “likely to mislead the public...and taint the historical truth,” Lamoudi provided his readers and the public with the “truthful” account of the violence on 14 September 1934. His reference to *la vérité historique* is revealing, as it evoked the AUMA’s view of the history of Algerian Muslims as fitting into the historical trajectory of the French Republic.¹⁶⁰ They sought a purported return to an original Islam that was free of sufi and *maraboutic* corruption and in so doing wanted to demonstrate that the so-called fanaticism of Islam, which for the French was a defining feature of Muslim culture, was actually a historic fabrication.¹⁶¹ Should “fanciful and erroneous” rumors about savage acts of Muslim anti-Semitism become part and parcel of the history of Algerian Muslims, the AUMA’s narrative of the compatibility of “French” and “Muslim” would be subject to attack.

Thus Lamoudi undertook the project of explaining “the massacres of women and children, *innocent victims delivered defenseless to the unleashed fury of the mob!*” He assured his readers that in offering an explanation, *La Défense* was not explaining away the violence. Rather, they “deplore...the tragic end of all the victims of the riot, especially women and children who have done nothing to deserve such a ruthless execution.” Lamoudi employed his strategy of lamenting the violence and consoling the Algerian community as a whole, not just along religious lines. He asserted that the men of *La Défense* “have an equal pity for the Jewish children *sauvagement égorgés* by rioters in Constantine and for our Muslim children, killed in

¹⁵⁹ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Three for an analysis of the AUMA’s conception of modernity/progress and French Algerian history.

¹⁶¹ More on marabouts, sufism, and the AUMA’s thoughts on religious reform in the next chapter.

cold blood – or, to use a neologism that will excuse their behavior – *civilisément abattu* by the Jewish police officer Ain Beida.” The sharp difference between *égorgé* (to cut someone’s throat) and *abattu* (to shoot or cut someone down) is vivid. The italics were his own, and Lamoudi was likely engaging in a dialogue with the French and Algerian presses, which sought to characterize these murders – analogous in Lamoudi’s mind – as brutal acts by fanatics (i.e., Muslims), on the one hand, and civilized maintenance of the peace by the colonial authorities, on the other. Lamoudi was simultaneously espousing his own apparent impartiality while condemning the seemingly racist interpretations of French journalists in Algeria and the métropole, men who already boasted French citizenship and thus should have been upholding its ideals.¹⁶²

Lamoudi began his explanation of the “truth” by claiming two things: that no murders of women and children took place in ground-floor apartments of the Jewish quarter and that the rioters only “went up to the apartments from which shots were fired at them, not only by men, but also by women.” The implication was that Muslim rioters were not rampaging down the streets and indiscriminately breaking down the doors of Jewish families along the way. Rather, he maintained, they acted in self-defense. Though he did not state it directly, the Muslim rioters in his view only murdered women who took up arms against them. While this was not an excuse for the massacre, for Lamoudi it was indeed an explanation that belied an interpretation of the riots as random and explicit acts of unchecked anti-Semitism.

Abdelhamid Ben Badis put forward a similar narrative of self-defense in *Al-Shihab*. On 11 September 1934, Ben Badis published an extensive examination of the violence, offering day-by-day breakdowns of the events and his own conclusions and analyses about what the violence meant for the community. His version of events claimed that on Saturday night, he and Dr. Bendjelloul had worked hard to calm the Muslim population of the city, giving public speeches

¹⁶² Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

in every street of the Muslim quarter of the city, imploring fellow believers not to seek revenge on the Jewish community for the initial incident. These speeches had allegedly calmed the Muslims, who on Sunday morning returned to business as usual, trading with Jews at market. It was only after seeing that Jews had begun firing gunshots from their windows into the crowd of Muslims below, Ben Badis claimed, that the Muslims were “sent into horror and outrage and plunged headlong into the rash proceedings.”¹⁶³

Like Lamoudi, Ben Badis was hesitant to give explicit expression to the “rash proceedings” undertaken by the Muslims. Rather, he focused on a so-called “psychological report” of the state of mind of the crowd, explaining that “self-defense is innate in man, indeed in all animals” and that this instinct is sharpened when “the defenseless unarmed man...sees his enemy armed and – seeing bullets fired from his weapon – feels imminent danger.” According to this logic, Ben Badis concluded that “Those among the Muslims who did these horrible acts were not motivated by hatred of the Jews, nor by factors of religion or race, but instead were motivated by the instinct of self-defense against an armed threat.”¹⁶⁴ Despite Ben Badis’ claims throughout his exposition that the Muslims “bore no hatred for the Jewish religion” and “were not intent on something evil against the Jews,” he shared with *La Défense* the determination to point fingers at the Jewish community for the killing of their own.¹⁶⁵

Both Lamoudi and Ben Badis aimed to detract attention away from Muslim responsibility and toward Jewish culpability. Lamoudi claimed that the results of the official investigation “showed in an indisputable way” that the Jews of the city who were not under threat of attack by the rioters “continued to shoot revolvers despite the exhortations of their Christian neighbors and

¹⁶³ Ben Badis, “Fajj’ at qusintina.”

¹⁶⁴ Ben Badis, “Fajj’ at qusintina.”

¹⁶⁵ Ben Badis, “Fajj’ at qusintina.”

the representatives of the authorities.”¹⁶⁶ The unchecked violence in this instance, then, fell on the Jewish people, who in his view were reckless and unjustified in their use of force. Ben Badis added to this criticism by claiming that, unlike the Muslims – who had appealed to the police following the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque incident – the Jews who disobeyed the authorities clearly “lacked respect for the government.” While Ben Badis was explicit in his assigning of blame, writing that there was “clear evidence that Jews bear responsibility for the evil word and deed [of the riots,]” Lamoudi crossed the party line, so to speak, in supposing that “perhaps...some of these [reactions] were in legitimate self-defense.”¹⁶⁷ Either way, both men explained the situation so that Muslims were guilty of implied but not explicit violence. But then Lamoudi presented the case of the Jewish woman “Miss Attali.”

According to Lamoudi, Miss Attali resided in the second floor apartment of a building whose first-floor storefront was “ransacked” by the rioters. In response to this, she allegedly “fired at least seven revolver shots on the natives.” He claimed not only that several trustworthy witnesses – “including Europeans whose names we know – saw this woman use her weapon,” but also that there remained traces of Miss Attali’s bullets embedded on the wall of the school facing her apartment. Lamoudi ascertained that this “provocation” was the catalyst for the massacre of the Jewish families.¹⁶⁸ Although Lamoudi avoided stating it explicitly, the rioters murdered the Attali family allegedly in retribution for the shots Miss Attali fired. The massacre of this family took center stage in ensuing accounts of the anti-Semitic nature of the weekend riots and, in the overarching history of the events. The narrative that made its way to the international press and which Lamoudi attempted to counter in this article asserted that no one in

¹⁶⁶ Indeed, the official investigation found in favor of the Muslim narrative of events, that oppression and provocation incited the Muslim community to riot, rather than the Jewish narrative, which claimed the events were the result of long-term planning and collusion between Muslim leaders and anti-Semitic authorities.

¹⁶⁷ Ben Badis, “Faji’ at qusintina,” and Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

¹⁶⁸ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

the apartment had access to a firearm and that the rioters stormed the apartment and broke through the door after sacking the shop downstairs. Lamoudi did not lend credence to this version of events, but instead asserted: “In the face of the absolute impossibility of knowing exactly how this has occurred and any assertion one way or the other faces just criticism, we can only speculate.”¹⁶⁹ In a rare departure from his commitment to finding the truth, Lamoudi seemed to deny that any objective facts existed in this instance. In so doing he discredited either interpretation. What fact does remain, however, is that one man, one woman, two young girls, and a three year old child were killed in the apartment.¹⁷⁰

For his part, Ben Badis did not specifically mention the murder of the Attali family in *Al-Shihab*. Like Lamoudi, Ben Badis too was vague in his description of this particular massacre and avoided explicitly detailing the violence. He wrote that over the course of Sunday, “Twenty-odd Jews were killed, including five women and six children. When more shots were fired from the windows – some from women – the aggressors [*al-muta‘addina*] went up [*yas‘adina*] into these residences, where they attacked those who were in the houses without discrimination [*yubtishin biman fiha ‘an ghair tamyiz*].”¹⁷¹ Here Ben Badis did not extrapolate on the killings (which *Dépêche de Constantine* described as “carnage” and a “massacre”) and instead used a less virulent term – *yubtishin*, meaning “to attack with violence; to bear down on (someone),” to describe the actions of the perpetrators.¹⁷² His language implied that these “aggressors” (notably, he did not call them Muslims) did not purposefully target and murder these women and children but rather, due to their agitated “mental state,” could not (or did not) differentiate and so

¹⁶⁹ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Attal, *Les émeutes de Constantine: 5 août 1934* (Paris: Editions Romillat, 2002): 199-202.

¹⁷¹ Ben Badis, “Faji‘at qusintina.”

¹⁷² *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed., ed. J. M. Cowan: 77.

committed these “egregious acts.”¹⁷³ It was because of the crowd’s sense of being under threat – and *not* “the effects of Islam,” which explicitly forbids “killing of women and children even in legal war,” that these crimes were committed.¹⁷⁴ Echoing *La Défense*, Ben Badis’ conclusion implied culpability of the Jewish community in their own suffering and simultaneously exculpated the Muslim community en masse.

Following his discussion of the Attali family, Lamoudi then attempted to establish a factual foundation for his assertion of Jewish culpability. He claimed that “several independent first-hand witnesses” had provided *La Défense* with accounts of Jewish men abandoning their wives and children in the streets and fleeing for self-preservation: “On Boulevard Victor Hugo, a Jew was with his wife and his children when he saw a group of *indigènes surexcités* coming toward him. Seized with fear, he abandoned his family and shut himself in a *maison chrétienne*. Despite the cries and desperate appeals of his own who were surely no less afraid than him, *l’homme* refused to open.”¹⁷⁵ Lamoudi claimed that the rioters, despite their energy, did no harm to the defenseless women and children. He highlighted the fact that the Europeans who witnessed this “unmanly attitude” confronted “*the man*” with insults and jeers once the “storm” had passed, but he deridingly excused the man’s behavior: “We know our Semitic brothers (*nos frères sémites*) – like many of their fellows – sometimes easily lose all their courage and all their level-headedness.”¹⁷⁶ By alleging that the Europeans had done the job of condemning the man’s lack of virility, Lamoudi himself did not have to engage in direct criticism of yet another Jewish citizen.

¹⁷³ Ben Badis, “Faji’ at qusintina.”

¹⁷⁴ “Les Evénements[sic] de Constantine,” *Dépêche de Constantine*, 10 August 1934.

¹⁷⁵ Italics in original.

¹⁷⁶ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

Lamoudi continued by claiming that the reserve the Muslims exhibited on boulevard Victor Hugo – in *not* assaulting the women and children – showed “that the rioters...knew to respect insofar the lives of the defenseless, to the extent that their provocateurs made it possible for them.” But he juxtaposed this lack of action with a peculiar reminder: “It should not be forgotten that the natives were provoked (we demonstrated provocation in our last issue) and that they believed in a state of self-defense.”¹⁷⁷ Were they provoked into violence against women and children, or did they not exhibit this violence at all? By avoiding using direct language in talking about the massacre of the Attali family, Lamoudi compromised his own argument. It seemed that he was arguing that the riots were not widespread, unchecked, indiscriminate acts of savagery but rather a measured reaction against the short- and long-term provocations that the Muslim community of Constantine had experienced. He portrayed the murder of women and children, then, as just an unfortunate anomaly.

The tension in Lamoudi’s argument in this article was perhaps the product of both attempting to avoid laying fault at the feet of the Muslim community and justifying why it was that women and children were murdered. The two objectives were essentially incompatible. This tension, coupled with the seemingly obvious culpability of the Muslim rioters in these deaths, was perhaps the real reason why *La Défense* avoided printing news of the murders in earlier issues. But as Lamoudi made clear in his opening, the increased elucidation of the other side of the story necessitated a response in defense of the Muslim community. Even if Lamoudi’s previously published narratives of the short-and long-term causes of the riots contained truth, the Muslim rioters were nonetheless guilty of the murder of the Attali family. Lamoudi’s tenuous attempts at achieving both objectives exposed his political project. Ben Badis shared in this project in the aftermath of the violence, as reflected in his assessment printed in *Al-Shihab*, in

¹⁷⁷ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part II.

which he outlined the initial guilt of Eliaou Khalifa, as well as the desire among the Muslim community (of which he considered himself the spokesperson) for peace and reconciliation with both the Jews of Constantine and the French administration.

Ben Badis' narrative of the violence was thus rife with references to how calm and understanding the Muslim community of Constantine was in the aftermath of the initial insult. He wrote, "Despite the insults the Muslims heard from the first Jew [about] their religion and their prayers and their mosque... they did not get agitated. Wisely, they did not respond to him, taking into consideration that he was drunk. This is conclusive evidence of their tolerance, as well as proof that they do not possess hatred for the Jewish religion or a desire for revenge." Writing in Arabic, Ben Badis was nonetheless engaging with the narratives of fanaticism and anti-Semitism that arose in the French press following the riots. He went on to explain that rather than incite violence, the offended Muslims initially submitted their complaints to the police, which he claimed was additional proof that they did not want to seek revenge. Demonstrating the reformist belief in the Algerian Muslims' readiness for French citizenship, Ben Badis explained that in appealing to the proper authorities, these individuals were merely seeking "their right to justice." They were determined, he claimed, "to wait for justice from the government and the department of public security." Khalifa, on the other hand – a citizen – resisted the police, which for Ben Badis demonstrated his "disobedience" to the government.¹⁷⁸

By pinpointing Khalifa and the other agitators, Ben Badis, like Lamoudi, was able to criticize individuals – essentially accusing them of being bad citizens – and ostensibly avoid sweeping negative assessments of the Jewish community at large. Further, he was able to juxtapose the objectionable behavior of these French citizens with that of the Muslims, whom he characterized as calm and reasonable in the face of even violent adversity. He explained that

¹⁷⁸ Ben Badis, "Faji'at qusintina."

because they were throwing rocks and firing bullets into crowds of Muslims, the “Jews bear responsibility” for the tragedy. Like Lamoudi, he demonstrated short-term provocation as the immediate cause of the violence. Such an accusation revealed the complexity of the relationship between the Jews and the Muslims of Constantine, as well as their political leaders. Both Lamoudi’s and Ben Badis’ rhetoric demonstrate that they were vying for approval for their community from the French administration, and finger-pointing to another scapegoat – the Jews – was critical to overturning negative opinions.¹⁷⁹

The Politics of Constantine’s Religious Communities

Embodying the complexity of reformist dialogue with the Jewish community of Constantine was Lamoudi’s five-point appeal to his “Semitic brothers,” printed on 28 September 1934. Throughout, he reminded his readers that Jewish leaders sought to sow discord between the two religious communities, while Muslim leaders like himself sought a return to peaceful relations. Having established this juxtaposition of political agendas, Lamoudi posed a series of five questions “to the Jews all over Algeria.”¹⁸⁰ Throughout this interrogation, Lamoudi juxtaposed his own conceptions of responsible citizenship against the alleged behavior of the Algerian Jewish community, representing its members as irresponsible citizens.

He first questioned whether the Jewish constituency approved of “everything that is said and written by those who speak on your behalf and who we are obliged to consider your qualified representatives, until proven otherwise?” Having earlier established that these representatives provoked intercommunal violence, Lamoudi painted their constituencies into a corner: “If so, how do you reconcile this trend to perpetuate the malaise and misunderstanding between you and the Algerian Muslims with the desire, expressed by some of you, to see

¹⁷⁹ Ben Badis, “Faji’ at qusintina.”

¹⁸⁰ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part III.

harmony and good neighborly relations quickly restored?” And if it was the case that these men were not accurately representative of the opinion of the Jewish population, he asked, “why do you not publicly disown the troublemakers who...through their insolence and arrogance caused the tragedy of August 5?” By posing the questions as such, Lamoudi again made the Jewish community culpable in the violence; if they claimed to not discriminate against Muslims, why then would they not “disown” their openly discriminatory representatives?¹⁸¹

Lamoudi’s description of representative politics reinforced his narrative of an unjust administration, a repressed Muslim population, and a recalcitrant Jewish community. If the system were functioning according to its tenets, if the Muslim population were granted equality before the law, and if all *citoyens francais* were upholding their duty to the Republic, the riots of 5 August could not and would not have taken place. But the administration was failing, and both it and the Jewish population, per Lamoudi, were discriminating against Muslims. His next question reinforced this point: “Has the hard lesson of recent events not been enough to prove to you definitively that the best way to behave is to respect Algerian Muslims, who provoke no one, who hurt no one but who must be respected, must cease to be provoked and mistreated?” Lamoudi’s inquisition was both accusatory and threatening, and it echoed Ben Badis’ conception of the violence as reactionary yet justifiable, as he alluded to the fact that the Muslim population would righteously lash out against those who were unjustly mistreating its members.

Lamoudi concluded his appeal with a final inquiry that again reinforced his understanding of the powerful and hegemonic position of Algerian Muslims, despite their inequality before the law: “Do you forget the blessings our ancestors, who were all-powerful masters of this country, showered upon your people after almost all the Peoples of the Earth had rejected, persecuted, and hunted you with the utmost cruelty?” With this historicization,

¹⁸¹ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part III.

Lamoudi viewed himself, as well as the Muslim community of which he claimed to speak on behalf, as an authoritative representative of Algerian history. He seized from the Jews of Algeria the right to define the history of the nation. In some ways, the aftermath of the riots of Constantine represent a struggle “over the cultural and political power of authoritative representation, i.e. to speak the past and, through it, the present, of community and culture with legitimate authority – to produce a dominant definition of social reality.”¹⁸² History became a tool in the hands of Lamoudi, who utilized his narrative to lend authority to claims for equality of *native* Algerians and calls for reform. While for the French colonizer, the term “native” served to categorize inferiority, for Lamoudi, in this context, claiming native belonging to Algeria for the Muslim population was a method of empowerment over the Jewish community. The Jews, he claimed, were guests on this land – welcomed, but nonetheless foreign. His exploitative reminder to the Jewish community suggested to his reader that these were veiled threats; while Lamoudi and Ben Badis viewed the Constantine riots as an anomaly, they did not consider them unfounded. Lamoudi identified the Jewish community and its leaders as the agents who should bear the burden of repairing relationships between the two groups should they want to avoid further aggression against their co-religionists in the future.¹⁸³

Running alongside Lamoudi’s curious appeal to the Jews of Algeria in the 28 September issue was an editorial entitled “*Deux Justices!*” Throughout this piece, accusations of hypocrisy shifted away from Jewish leaders and their constituents and back toward the organ’s ultimate target of criticism, the colonial administration. The editorial began with a description of Eliaou Khalifa’s behavior on the night of 3 August, claiming that in his drunken state he “allowed himself to insult Muslims in prayer, to desecrate their mosque and to blaspheme their religion.”

¹⁸² McDougall, *History and Culture*, 5.

¹⁸³ Lamoudi, “La Tragédie Constantinoise,” part III.

Furthermore, his behavior was the “initial cause of the tragic events” that ensued that weekend and “caused grief...and immeasurable losses.” Despite the gravity of these accusations, the editorial did not issue any condemnations of the like published on 10 August. Rather, it launched into a heated criticism of the “justice” handed down by the colonial administration.¹⁸⁴

The editorial pointed out that despite Khalifa’s destructive behavior in the mosque and his clearly demonstrated culpability, “the Code planned for this ‘offender,’ *CITOYEN FRANCAIS*, only two days in jail and a fine of 15 francs!”¹⁸⁵ The editorial juxtaposed this punishment with that issued to an “elected Muslim belonging to one of the most honorable families and counting among the most esteemed and regarded intellectuals” who “imposed a very slight correction to a security agent who had treated him with incredible insolence.” The editorial is referring here to Dr. Mohammed Bendjelloul, who “violently struck” the Inspector General of Police in the face, while in the presence of the Secretary General of the Prefecture and the Prosecutor of the Republic. According to Rochdi Ali Younsi, the police officer in question had placed a native man under arrest for assaulting a Jew, and when the officer refused to comply with Bendjelloul’s demands to release the man, Bendjelloul slapped him in the face.¹⁸⁶ While Bendjelloul was not arrested immediately, so as to appease the already angry crowd that had gathered after the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque incident, he was later brought up on charges.¹⁸⁷ In this instance, the “‘offender,’ simply a ‘*sujet francais*,’ was sentenced to one month in prison and a fine of 100 frs!”¹⁸⁸

La Défense’s indignation at the harsh treatment of Bendjelloul was coupled with their own explanation of Bendjelloul’s motivations. The editorial claimed that Bendjelloul struck the

¹⁸⁴ “Deux Justices!” *La Défense*, 28 September 1934.

¹⁸⁵ “Deux Justices!”

¹⁸⁶ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 146.

¹⁸⁷ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 147.

¹⁸⁸ “Deux Justices!”

police officer after he accused Bendjelloul of being “a liar and anti-French.” This claim remains unverified, and it was perhaps, for *La Défense*, a deliberate allusion to the infamous slapping incident in which the dey of Algiers ostensibly smacked French consul Pierre Duval in the face with a fly swatter. The French press portrayed the alleged slap “to the body of a representative of France...as a blow to the honor of France,” and it was oft cited in colonial histories as “justification for an invasion of 35,000” followed by one hundred years of occupation.¹⁸⁹ Bendjelloul’s case made for a powerful comparison, as it was a Muslim filling the role of the “representative of France,” defending the “honor of France.” The editors questioned whether the prosecutor in Bendjelloul’s case agreed with the “insults uttered by that agent to a representative of the people (the people being Muslim)” and wondered why he had not brought charges “against the slanderer” if he indeed condemned the accusations. The fact that it was purportedly only after having been accused of being “anti-French” that Bendjelloul reacted violently was typical of *La Défense*’s narrative; symbolically, this was a grave insult for a man advocating for French citizenship.¹⁹⁰ And once again, they were able to claim that it was not the administration but rather the Muslim population that was honoring and defending what it meant to be French.

This narrative came full circle in the editorial’s conclusion, which claimed the aforementioned asymmetry in treatment before the law between a Muslim and a Jew could be explained by a simple fact: “There are thus two JUSTICES in this beautiful country, subject for over a century to the Nation that we defended in 1914, [a war] she herself was fighting in order to defend the law and JUSTICE.”¹⁹¹ The gravity of this reminder about what was at stake in 1914 would not have been lost on an audience just fifteen years removed from the Great War. Furthermore, this reference to Algerian sacrifice introduces yet another aspect of *La Défense*’s

¹⁸⁹ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 45-46.

¹⁹⁰ “Deux Justices!”

¹⁹¹ “Deux Justices!”

explanation for the outbreak of violence between Jews and Muslims in Constantine, and one which merits further inspection.

As demonstrated in the first chapter, the First World War was a turning point for colonial relationships in Algeria. While the passage of the Jonnart Law in 1919 expanded the Muslim electorate, participation in the most influential assemblies of Algerian government remained restricted. Nonetheless, many local politicians continued to work within the boundaries of the republic in order to achieve political gains for the Muslim population. In Constantine in particular, the AUMA and its reform-minded politicians worked within the colonial political system to protect their minority religious status while maintaining (or seeking) status as French citizens. Because Algerian Jews had already been granted French citizenship per the Cremieux Decree in 1870, political activity in the Jewish community strived to maintain a tenuous balance between assimilation into French culture and preservation of religious minority status that did not contradict one's "civil status as members of modern nation-states."¹⁹² What *La Défense*'s and *Al-Shihab*'s coverage of the Constantine riots sheds light on is the parallel political process that was taking place within the community of Muslim elite. The antagonism exhibited by Lamoudi and the editorial board toward the Jewish community and its leaders, as well as Ben Badis' criticisms of Jewish provocations, reflected the friction this process created when opposing conceptions of the relationship between religion and citizenship clashed.

Lamoudi's accusations of hypocrisy against the Jewish community of Constantine and the colonial administration alike reflect the fact that he and the AUMA as a whole did not see an inherent conflict between practicing Islam and being an upstanding French citizen. Lamoudi and Ben Badis' strenuous, though sometimes incomplete, efforts not to condemn Jews en masse but rather particular provocateurs similarly reflected an ideology grounded in the belief that religion

¹⁹² Cole, "Constantine," 842.

did not define one's political character. The reformist ulama's narrative, as reflected in *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab*, required their Jewish counterparts fulfill a variety of roles in their political rhetoric. They must be innocent as a whole but culpable in certain instances; they must share an amicable and fraternal bond with their Muslim brothers but be reminded of their historic inferiority; they must be French citizens but inept and undeserving citizens at times. More than anything they must be emblematic of the failure of the French administration in upholding liberty, equality, and fraternity. As the 28 September editorial concluded in reference to the imprisonment of Bendjelloul, this asymmetry was not sustainable: "Thinking of these verdicts and remembering...the Jewish policeman who killed a Muslim child is still free ... as hundreds of ours are serving at [Barbarossa] very severe penalties for offenses they have not committed, we issue this reflection: Yes, in Algeria there are two justices. But fortunately there is a third: immanent justice."¹⁹³

The Reformist Message of the AUMA

Whereas the previous chapter demonstrated the socioeconomic and political context that underlay the eruption of violence in Constantine, this chapter has examined *La Défense's* and *Al-Shihab's* reaction to the riots in light of the reformist message of its umbrella organization, the AUMA. A distinction was made at the outset of this examination between the AUMA's advocacy of association with the French Republic and the Young Algerian's stance of assimilation. Despite the distinct objectives of these two different policies, they have regularly been conflated in histories of Algerian nationalism.¹⁹⁴ Because both of these policies stem from paternalistic, colonial conceptions of how to rule subject peoples, it can be easy to overlook the significance of their particularities. After all, both presumed the necessity of the *mission*

¹⁹³ "Deux Justices!"

¹⁹⁴ See Cole, "Constantine."

civilisatrice and for that reason neither survived the onslaught of self-determination and demise of the European empires.

However, without lending credence to the French civilizing project in Algeria and in order to reveal a “suppressed alternative effaced...by authoritative histories,” I seek to demonstrate that throughout the interwar period, the message of the reformist ulama was informed by and must be understood in the context of their pro-association stance.¹⁹⁵ In other words, they advocated for a political relationship with the French state for Algerian Muslims (i.e., naturalization), coupled with cultural autonomy in the realm of religion and education. As such, their criticisms of colonial policy existed *within* the framework of the state, and should not be interpreted to have extended into the realm of independent political nationalism at this point.

Indeed, the editors of *La Défense* themselves distinguished between the two policies of assimilation and association, in the program of their very first issue, pointing out that there exist “two currents and two trends” in the political sphere:

Many young intellectuals ask outright assimilation, the unrestricted application of quality ‘French’ texts, and the abolition of all things which differentiate us from other ‘French.’ Others, who constitute the vast majority, merely ask for the widening of the scope of our freedoms, the granting of political rights, and serious reforms allowing us to live decently and honorably.¹⁹⁶

The importance of the contention that their pro-association stance must be taken into consideration lies in the fact that historians examining the role of the ulama in the proto-nationalist movements of the interwar period, as well as historians examining the AUMA’s responses to the Constantine riots, inject an explicitly nationalist narrative into their analysis. Rochdi Ali Younsi’s thorough examination of the Constantine riots, analyzed in light of the trilateral relationships between Muslims, Jews, and French officials, takes for granted that the

¹⁹⁵ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 5.

¹⁹⁶ “Notre Programme.”

Muslim majority was animated by an explicitly nationalist sentiment, rather than any legitimate claims to increased rights within and reforms of the existing political framework. Allan Christelow concluded his book on Muslim law courts in Algeria with an examination of the rise of reformist movements in the early twentieth century. He noted that the transplantation to France of movements “Strongly committed to progress through education, Franco-Muslim cooperation, and political gradualism” contributed to their survival, for a moderate movement as such “could not survive in Algeria, where there was a growing polarization between administration backed 'maraboutism' and nationalism reformism.”¹⁹⁷ While the radicalization of the AUMA in the late 1930s lends credence to Christelow’s point that moderate organizations could not survive in Algeria in the long term, his assertion dismisses the importance of the political activity of reformist ulama in the early 1930s and the AUMA itself, prior to its aligning itself with the liberation movement. Such an effacing allows room for further historical revision of the role and positions of the AUMA in the interwar period.

In his 2008 thesis entitled, “The Politics of Assimilation, Muslims, and the Anti-republican Right in 1930s Algeria,” Cliff Haley concluded, with reference to *La Défense* and other ulama publications, that the “Muslim Press had a specific interest in covering their anti-government critiques with an aura of patriotism and civic duty as a veneer of pro-French sentiment protected their speech from unwanted scrutiny by the police.”¹⁹⁸ The cornerstone of Haley’s analysis was his assertion that Muslim support for the reformist message promulgated by the Popular Front government in 1936 was an “opportunistic turn” on their part, and that the ulama’s cooperation with the Popular Front stemmed from their shared “rejection of the model of

¹⁹⁷ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 258.

¹⁹⁸ Cliff Haley, “The politics of assimilation, Muslims and the anti-republican right in 1930’s Algeria,” (Master’s thesis: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008): 14.

assimilation and the republican government that endorsed it.”¹⁹⁹ To demonstrate that the ulama were anti-republican, Haley asserted that on the pages of *La Défense* and similar publications, these men performed an elaborate ruse:

Benhoura professes the most correct loyalty to France, even as he energetically criticizes the government in Algiers. For Benhoura the Muslim elite write in French so that they can expose to the good French public the transgressions of the Algerian administration...Benhoura casts his role as a defender of French honor, pitting good French values against the corruption of the government.²⁰⁰

If one assumes that the only option for Algerian Muslim politicians in the interwar period was to believe in the policy of assimilation or to demand independence, then Haley’s analysis holds water. If this had been the case, of course these writers would fear that being misinterpreted as nationalists “would result in their papers being shut down,” and so would veil their criticisms in pro-French language.²⁰¹ While Haley’s interpretations of the ulama’s language are one extreme, the “tendency to develop a metanarrative of a unified and unifying nationalist movement,” based on the role and the rhetoric of the AUMA, has created a field of scholarship in which it is possible to overlook the complexity of the political narratives of the interwar period and therefore draw conclusions such as his.²⁰²

Examining the language of *La Défense* more in-depth – and in conjunction with Arabic language sources – is thus a project in reconstructing the various forms that the “continuous struggle” for “cultural and political power” took in Algeria in the interwar period.²⁰³ And what this project has revealed is that above all else, the AUMA viewed itself as a religious and cultural reform organization that was ostensibly apolitical. While the group has been notoriously characterized by reference to its popular credo: “Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language;

¹⁹⁹ Haley, “Politics of Assimilation,” 42.

²⁰⁰ Haley, “Politics of Assimilation,” 11. Mohamed Benhoura wrote under the pen names Aboulhak and Veritas.

²⁰¹ Haley, “Politics of Assimilation,” 13.

²⁰² McDougall, *History and Culture*, 14-15, and Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 14.

²⁰³ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 15.

Algeria is my fatherland,” and its reformist message necessitated a bevy of critiques of the French colonial administration, at the time of its founding and in 1934, its members were not necessarily political nationalists. As John Ruedy has usefully delineated, Ben Badis, founder of the AUMA, made an explicit distinction between political nationalism and so-called ethnic nationalism. Further, he regarded ethnic nationalism, “which defines culture, religion, and values,” as the far more important of the two. Ben Badis believed that “Two peoples such as the French and the Algerian can beneficially share political nationalist so long as each respects the ethnic nationalism of the other.”²⁰⁴

As McDougall demonstrates in his discussion of Ben Badis’ reaction the French centenary celebrations in Algeria, the scholar did not object to the fact of colonization but rather to the continued trope of conquest: rather than pit colonized against colonizers, Ben Badis lamented “the inability of the coloniser, and the colonial system, to move from a system of conquest to one of partnership.”²⁰⁵ It was thus with the goal of such partnership in mind that the AUMA’s official position was one of association with the French empire. That is, as “admirers of the modernising impact of French culture, the Ulemas remained adamant that the Muslim Algerian could be French *and* Muslim, hence should have the right to retain his/her double culture (as the Jewish population had done).”²⁰⁶ According to Ali Merad, the rhetoric of the reformist movement, whether in Arabic or in French, indisputably established the reformers’ loyalty to the French Republic.²⁰⁷

Understanding the distinction made between ethnic and political nationalisms on the part of reformist ulama helps shed light on the Constantine riots as a watershed moment for the men

²⁰⁴ John Ruedy, “Continuities and Discontinuities in the Algerian Confrontation with Europe,” in *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* ed. John Ruedy (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994): 77

²⁰⁵ McDougall, 63.

²⁰⁶ Peter Dunwoodie, *Francophone Writing in Transition: Algeria 1900-1945* (Berlin: Peter Lang AG, 2005):47.

²⁰⁷ Merad, *Réformisme*, 398-399.

of the AUMA. Though tragic, the violence that erupted in August was an opportunity for Ben Badis and his compatriots to demonstrate the consequences of systemic colonial injustice and to illustrate the inescapable need for immediate reform. Examining the language with which *La Défense* and Ben Badis characterized the violence and assigned blame for it reveals the complexity of colonial relationships in Constantine, making it impossible to reduce the riots and their aftermath to mere instances of virulent anti-Semitism coupled with nascent nationalism. But this examination also uncovers an ideological strand that went beyond the desire for association with France and French citizenship. Indeed, a thorough treatment of the reformist narrative of the Constantine violence must take into account the AUMA's position in the Islamic reform movement of the early twentieth century.

Because histories of the Constantine riots have largely ignored the reformist scholarship that inspired Ben Badis and his co-religionists, they have reached erroneous conclusions about the meaning of the riots in the longer history of Algerian nationalism. The following chapter will examine the ideological underpinnings of ulama reformism in Algeria, placing the AUMA within the wider narrative of global Islamic reform. By further examining the language of *La Défense* in this context and incorporating additional AUMA literature into the analysis, one can more fully understand the political project of the AUMA. In 1934, the policy of association with the French Republic wholly meshed with the reformist ulama's desire to revive in Algeria – through the vehicle of education – an Islam that was capable of surviving within the framework of a modern state.

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATION EN ROUTE TO MODERNISM: RELIGIOUS NOTABLES, REFORM, AND THE COLONIAL STATE

In the 10 August 1934 issue of *La Défense*, *Veritas* identified immediate and remote causes of the Constantine massacres. Primary among the remote causes were an entire range of colonial policies aimed at disenfranchising the Algerian Muslim population. As elaborated in the previous chapter, the complaints operated in both the political and socioeconomic realms. But predominant among *La Défense*'s criticisms of colonial policies, before and after the riots, were those relating to the state's attempts to legislate Islam. These complaints operated on a logistical, cultural level; the editors uniformly expressed a need for Arabic language education and Qur'anic schools. But central to *Veritas*' criticisms of the *Circulaires Michel* was an ideological battle being waged by the reformist ulama against the French administration for the right to dictate what Islam in Algeria was and should be.

Referring to the *Circulaires*, *Veritas* explained that by restricting access to mosques, the colonial administration was in fact engaging in "a fixed design to prevent Islam, at all costs, to get rid of superstitions that disfigure it and prejudices which drown it, superstitions and prejudices seen as essential for the maintenance of the native in an inferior position vis-à-vis the European."²⁰⁸ Here *Veritas* juxtaposed Islam with superstitious beliefs, and drew a parallel between such superstition and political inferiority. To unpack this accusation, it is necessary to consider the religio-ideological underpinnings of *La Défense* and the AUMA, as well as the religious landscape of French Algeria.

²⁰⁸ *Veritas*, "Les évènements de Constantine."

Turning to an examination of the colonial administration's relationships with religious notables in French Algeria, one sees that a perceived rift between rural marabouts and urban ulama in the nineteenth century laid the ground for policies that transformed this rift into a political reality by the interwar period. From the mid-nineteenth century, French commitment to the *mission civilisatrice* necessitated, in their view, a restructuring of the Muslim judicial system that would eventually disrupt the social and cultural balance in cities and the hinterland alike. In the early period of this project, notable religious lineages in the cities, like the revered Ben Badis family of Constantine, worked within the framework of the colonial state to achieve reform. On the other hand, early resistance from religious leaders in rural regions gradually gave way to an active process of accommodation with the administration. At the turn of the century, urban ulama like the young Abdelhamid Ben Badis were looking outward, at global narratives of Islamic reform, to forge new ideas about the Franco-Algerian relationship. An analysis of this process reveals that the underpinnings of the reformist ulama criticisms of maraboutic Islam relied upon a creative historicization that effaced the relationships urban religious notables developed with the French regime.

Placing the editors of *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab* into the wider narrative of Islamic reform allows one to recognize the depth of the tragedy that the Constantine riots were for the reformist ulama. Perceiving themselves as political partners of the French, they advocated “a reformed and purified Islam” as the vital remedy to societal disharmony. In the early 1930s, they preached that traditional religious education was the vehicle for spreading such “‘civilisation’ to the masses,” and in effect preparing them for French citizenship.²⁰⁹ Such senseless violence in the city that was home to this movement – and, until August 1934, symbolic of the successes of educational reform – in many ways shattered the integrity of the reformist message. It was thus

²⁰⁹ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 114.

in the aftermath of the riots that *La Défense* and Ben Badis sought to perform damage control, drawing upon their narrative of Algerian history, which highlighted the marabouts' roles in the construction of the colonial state, in an effort to shift culpability for the breakdown of the colonial civic order away from the Muslims of Constantine and toward their perceived enemy: marabouts and tariqas.

Saints and Scholars

At the time of the French conquest of Algiers in 1830, about forty-five percent of Algeria's population were rural nomads. Another fifty percent were considered sedentary cultivators. Only about five percent of the population, then, lived in the cities, and the majority of these city dwellers were of non-Algerian origin.²¹⁰ The native Muslim population, both in town and countryside, was largely unified under the Sunni Maliki madhab.²¹¹ Within this population of Sunni Muslims, however, there existed distinct approaches to Islamic practice. According to Paul Silverstein, the Muslim community of Algeria was “split into the orthopraxy of the urban faith, a set of Sufi brotherhoods, and the various rural heteropraxies of ancestor/saint veneration and religious leadership of marabouts – lineages claiming descent from the Prophet.”²¹² This characterization points to a seeming urban-rural divide often seen in Islamic societies that extended beyond political and economic interests and into the realm of religion and culture.

The practice of sufism was a characteristic feature of Islam in the nineteenth-century Maghreb. Sufism, a complementary mode of seeking religious knowledge and experience within Islam rather than a distinct sect of legal school, is rooted in mystic practice and the belief in

²¹⁰ John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992): 21, 25.

²¹¹ With the exception of a small but notable Ibadi Shi'a subsect living in the M'zab Valley in the northern Sahara.

²¹² Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004): 41.

direct connection with the divine.²¹³ Despite the “segmentary tribal form of organization” of the Algerian hinterland, rural societies operated within a framework of social unity, “formed and conditioned by a deeply internalized Islamic world view and value system.”²¹⁴ This shared religious ethic, which helped to “bridge the gaps between different life styles and among competing clan and tribal units,” was underpinned by sufi brotherhoods (tariqas) and Islamic saints (marabouts). Tariqas and marabouts represented traditional forms of authority and contributed to social cohesion.²¹⁵

Marabouts, who were holy men or their successors, were considered “repositories of baraka, divine grace, which they in turn could share with their followers.” Through ritual prayer, offerings, and pilgrimage to holy sites, believers sought to “appropriate a part of the baraka with which” the saint or site were suffused.²¹⁶ The worship of saints took a more structured form within the tariqas, sufi brotherhoods that were “more systematic theologically and more widely spread geographically” than marabouts themselves. These sufi orders “offered Muslims an alternative or supplementary path to salvation which emphasized the intuitive, the affective, and the mystical as contrasted with the ritualism and legalism of Sunni orthodoxy.”²¹⁷ Within each tariqa, salvation then necessitated adherence to a particular path, often characterized by mystical elements of devotion not typical of orthodox Sunni Islam. According to Fanny Colonna, tariqas were “both hierarchic and egalitarian,” in that membership was highly organized and managed by a sheikh, but also freely chosen and not based upon birthright.²¹⁸

²¹³ Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 24-48, and Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111.

²¹⁴ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 25.

²¹⁵ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 28, and Zack, 213.

²¹⁶ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 28.

²¹⁷ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 28.

²¹⁸ Colonna, “Cultural Resistance,” 108.

Sufism and saint worship influenced and even mediated personal, social, and political life in rural Algerian society. Marabouts and shaikhs bridged the aforementioned gaps within segmentary tribal society by “acting as arbiters, mediators, mentors, and guarantors of access to resources shared by different groups,” and served as the ideological rallying point behind which groups assembled should mediation between communities or political powers prove ineffective. Within these communities were *zawaya*, which functioned not only as schools (i.e., madrasas) and monasteries, but also as venerated shrines and, in times of crisis, “centres for revolt.”²¹⁹ Across the Maghreb at large, the *zawaya* were foundational aspects of rural life; they were not only sites of education for teachers of the Qur’anic schools, they also served as hostels, charitable institutions, meeting places, and, because they were often built at or near the tomb of a saint, pilgrimage sites.²²⁰

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, subjugation by first the Ottomans and then the French colonial system “provided substantial motives for political resistance” throughout Algeria.²²¹ Tariqas took advantage of their widespread bases of support and “demonstrated repeatedly...their capacity to mobilize the dispersed energies of [the] predominantly pastoralist” hinterland.”²²² According to Allan Christelow, in the early decades of French occupation, marabouts and tariqas played a “key role both in sustaining the morale of resistance and in providing a framework of cooperation between tribes.”²²³

Standing in popular historical juxtaposition to the mysticism and tribalism of rural

²¹⁹ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 29.

²²⁰ Judith Scheele, *Village Matters: Knowledge, Politics & Community in Kabylia, Algeria* (Cumbria, U.K.: Long House Publishing Services, 2009): 14n.

²²¹ Laremont, “Islam and Politics of Resistance,” 38.

²²² Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 40 and 58.

²²³ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 14.

Algeria was the Islam of the urban ulama.²²⁴ While both styles of Islam could be found in urban and rural contexts alike, this overarching structural tension was not unique to Algeria but rather had manifested in a variety of Islamic contexts since the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, when sufi orders began attracting larger numbers of followers. In the French Algerian context, this religious divide was seemingly reinforced by geography; the ulama were seen to embody ordered, urban culture, whereas marabouts were representative of the anarchic tribalism of the rural hinterland. Ruedy explained:

...the Islam of the great city mosques, the scholars, and the jurists was essentially a reflection of literate culture physically, economically, and politically dependent upon the urban milieu. The Islam of the marabouts and the shaykhs, relying upon signs and symbols – holy and marvelous men, places, things, deeds, events – clearly reflected a rural, less literate, dispersed and often mobile culture.²²⁵

Despite the ostensible ease and sense of this juxtaposition, the Islam of the ulama and that of the marabouts transcended borders, and each could be found throughout all of Algeria.²²⁶ The divide was not so stark geographically, nor were the categories themselves mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated, for the AUMA and their reformist precursors and contemporaries, the *insistence* upon a divide between the so-called village Islam of marabouts and the pure Islam of urban ulama was a political claim integral to their reformist platform. Indeed, reformist movements within Islam since the time of the Prophet have defined their “scripturalist” approach to the religion and to relations between man and God in opposition to the mystical practices of marabouts.²²⁷ As will be discussed, for the reformers of the AUMA, equality for Algerian Muslims necessitated progress toward modernity, embodied in part by

²²⁴ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 17. Ulama are formally trained Islamic scholars whose claims to religious authority rest not in the possession of divine grace but rather their knowledge of “an austere, egalitarian, scripturalist Islam.” Christelow distinguished between these two categories: “The ulama uphold the known, revealed principles of religion, embodied in the shari’a. The marabouts intercede with God, in matters where His will cannot be fully understood, by virtue of their baraka.”

²²⁵ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 28.

²²⁶ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 28.

²²⁷ Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 11.

commitment to rationality. The historicism of the French, who imposed their own ideology of cultural progress onto Algeria as a whole, was mirrored by the AUMA, who crafted an image of maraboutic Islam and a narrative of its role in the subjugation of Algerian Muslims that, while not reflective of reality, would lend credence to its positions.²²⁸ Village Islam, with its belief in saintly intercession and worship of idols, was stuck in the past and was an antithesis to progress. Reforms were necessary for Algerian Muslims to be able to “catch up” to their Western overlords.²²⁹ While other reform movements denied the orthodoxy of sufi Islam, for Islamic modernists in Algeria, maraboutic Islam was both unorthodox (religiously) and backwards (socially and culturally), and therefore complicit in the decline of Algerian Muslim society during the colonial period.²³⁰ A history of the interaction between Algerian religious institutions and state (colonial) institutions will illuminate the ostensible justification for the reformist ulama’s criticisms of sufi religious notables as antithetical to progress.²³¹

Religious Notables and Structures of Power

When Veritas juxtaposed Islam with superstition in his 10 August article, he was explicitly condemning what he and his compatriots considered the corrupt Islam of the marabouts. He claimed not only that zawaya were “centers of fanaticism and intolerance,” but

²²⁸ This conception of progress became part of Algerian conceptions of history in the interwar period: national history became “the mirror of the past and the ladder by which one rises to the present...the springboard for...progress.” See Houari Touati’s chapter on Algerian historiography for a brief discussion of the role of historical time in the nationalist movement and consciousness. Houari Touati, “Algerian Historiography in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: From Chronicle to History,” in *The Maghrib in Question: Essays in History & Historiography*, ed. Michael Le Gall and Kenneth Perkins (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 1997): 84-93.

²²⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000): 4-9.

²³⁰ Eickelman, 11, and Merad, 29-31.

²³¹ It is critical to keep in mind throughout this chapter that which Dale F. Eickelman pointed out in his work, *Moroccan Islam*. Despite the claims of scripturalists and Islamic modernists that certain sufi practices are not part of pure Islam: “from the viewpoint of tribesmen, peasants, and others who hold such beliefs and act upon them, intermediaries with God are part of Islam as they understand it. Supporters of this conception do not in general systematically articulate their beliefs, but they certainly would reject the notion that they are an amalgam of Islamic and non-Islamic elements. They regard themselves as Muslims, pure and simple.” Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 10.

also that marabouts were “*spoliateurs* of the gullible and exploiters of their naiveté.”²³² In accusing marabouts of exploiting the naiveté of gullible natives, Veritas was referring to the claims of reformist ulama that religious notables in tribal regions had compromised with French officials, ceding control of the religion and thus of Muslim superiority to an outside power. Such an accusation merits unpacking, as it is a complex and loaded historicization of the process of accommodation that took place in the Algeria from the mid-nineteenth century forward.

To understand the relationships of power sharing that developed in French Algeria during this time, as well as the reformist ulama’s criticisms, one must consider the theological and political history of power structures within Islam. Traditionally, political authority within Muslim society was rooted in religious legitimacy, and political leaders would often seek the cooperation and approval of religious figures, whose widespread influence could command the support of the masses. As foreign sovereigns, European colonizers attempted to appropriate this practice to their advantage, and worked “to obtain the permanent political support from the men of religion on political and justice issues.”²³³ By the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century, rural Algerian society was largely structured around the religious and political leadership of marabouts and tariqas, while many urban ulama had attached themselves to the power structures of the Ottoman beylik in the cities.²³⁴

Over the course of the French occupation, the colonial administration would attempt to restructure Algerian society in ways that pitted the authority of the urban *alim* and the rural marabout against one another. While the catalyst of this conflict lay in French policy, the politics of its origin rely upon a particular historicization of the spread of Islam. In many places throughout the Islamic world, the ulama emerged as religious leaders within Muslim

²³² Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.”

²³³ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 13-14.

²³⁴ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 31-33, 59-61.

communities. Versed in the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic law, ulama viewed themselves as responsible for transmitting religious knowledge to their local communities and followers. The ulama, as arbiters of this knowledge, played a central role in both the spread of Islam and the governance of Muslim society.²³⁵ According to Laremont, "The political leaders (the sultans) and the *ulema* established a political relationship of uneasy symbiosis, with religious leaders advising in the regulation of private and moral behavior, while the sultans governed the state."²³⁶ In exchange for a conferral of religious legitimacy upon their regime, political leaders would offer ulama both protection and patronage.

Despite this political compromise and the ostensibly indisputable religious authority of the ulama, as Islam continued to spread and to incorporate non-Arab individuals into its ranks, obtaining religio-political authority among the masses often necessitated a process of accommodation. Although "the ultimate source of moral authority [in Islam] is unambiguous," as it is embodied in the teachings of the Qur'an, the spread of Islam beyond its historic center was characterized by "a fluidity and a creativity within the social process of constructing knowledge in the...Islamic world."²³⁷ While the ulama struggled to define religious tradition and protect the religion from internal fissures and heterodoxy, sufism and saints made Islam more knowable and tangible for the "non-lettered masses."²³⁸ Unlike literate and professionally trained religious scholars, the illiterate could not connect directly with the religion's holy texts, and thus sought alternative paths to understanding the Islamic message.²³⁹

²³⁵ Bulliet, *Islam*, 111.

²³⁶ Laremont, "Islam and the Politics of Resistance," 15.

²³⁷ Richard Eaton, "The political and religious authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid," in Richard Eaton ed., *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 263, and Jonathan P. Berkey, "Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Near East," *Past and Present*, 146 (Feb. 1995), 40, 46.

²³⁸ Eaton, "Baba Farid," 264.

²³⁹ Eaton, "Baba Farid," 264.

In this context, “baraka was a commodity eagerly sought by people of modest substance from those blessed with special grace and piety.”²⁴⁰ Particularly in North Africa, pre-Islamic cultural practices, such as the use of amulets, saint worship, and shrines, were incorporated into an Islamic framework, allowing for the gradual growth of an Islamic identity.²⁴¹ In Algeria, marabouts and tariqas facilitated this process and their religious authority made them important political functionaries, particularly within rural populations.²⁴² In the nineteenth century, Qur’anic teachers were tariqa members, and played a central role in tribal life:

The influence of such a personage is far greater than that of a mere village teachers: he is teacher and vicar all at once...because he knows how to write, he is often involved in family affairs. Because he can read, it is he who deciphers notes from the district officer for the shaikh. He is not just the learned man, but the only learned man, the light and oracle of the tribe.²⁴³

This perceived bifurcation between Islamic traditions was not unique to Algeria, nor the colonial period. As Fanny Colonna demonstrates, these scripturalist currents have coexisted “from the very beginnings of Islam, as [has] the often virulent struggle for influence between the doctors (ulama) on the one hand, and representatives of the religious orders on the other.” This tendency was present in Algeria long before the French, or Ottoman, invasion, and resistance to the French occupation would largely develop within the context of these two religious forces.²⁴⁴

Nevertheless, this historicization of the role of ulama and the role of sufi saints within Islam, as well as their apparently mutually exclusive approaches to religious knowledge, helps one to understand the religious landscape of Algeria at the mid-nineteenth century. Outside of Constantine, a professional class of ulama did not take shape throughout Algeria until the

²⁴⁰ Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 261.

²⁴¹ See Dale F. Eickelman’s *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 2003), and Akbar S. Ahmed and David M. Hart, eds., *Islam in Tribal Societies: From the Atlas to the Indus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

²⁴² More on conceptions of maraboutic Islam will follow.

²⁴³ Yvonne Turin, “Affrontements culturels dans l’Algérie coloniale. Ecoles, Médecines, religions, 1840-1880,” Paris: Maspéro, 1971, quoted in Colonna, “Cultural resistance,” 109.

²⁴⁴ Fanny Colonna, “Cultural Resistance,” 107.

beginning of the twentieth century, and so formally trained scholars did not play a central role in the religious lives of most Muslims, particularly in rural areas.²⁴⁵ Tariqas, on the other hand, were central components of Muslim communities. Within zawaya, “the Sufis educated students in Arabic and Islam, they cared for the sick and for the poor, and they eventually trained soldiers for combat.”²⁴⁶ Religious and political authority were largely intertwined. Thus throughout the turbulent nineteenth century, sufi Islam proved fertile ground for resisting imperial encroachment in rural Algeria.

For the French occupiers, zawaya and tariqas were above all else flash points of resistance to the colonial power. Indeed, the aforementioned Abd al-Qadir, leader of resistance against the French soon after the 1830 invasion, was himself a young marabout who studied in a zawiya and whose father was “the venerated [sheikh] of the Maghribi branch” of the Qadiriyya tariqa.²⁴⁷ Blurring the lines between saint and scholar, rural and urban, Abd al-Qadir’s edification and religious credentials lent him the support of ulama, who encouraged their own supporters to back his movement.²⁴⁸ While Abd al-Qadir’s protracted resistance came to an end with his surrender in December 1847, until 1871, the occupying power faced armed resistance every single year, save 1861, and it usually emanated from tariqas.²⁴⁹ Thus until the turn of the century, the regime possessed an “abiding fear of collective unrest” along religio-tribal lines.²⁵⁰

Rebellion, Cooptation, and Accommodation

Efforts to combat the political potency of the tariqas, and to ease imperial paranoia about armed resistance, began in Algeria as early as 1854. The French administration set out very early

²⁴⁵ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 32.

²⁴⁶ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 38-39.

²⁴⁷ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 58.

²⁴⁸ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 53. Abd al-Qadir was conferred the status of marabout not only through rigorous religious education, but also due to his paternal bloodline, which made him a sharif.

²⁴⁹ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 55.

²⁵⁰ Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 3.

on to develop a centralized Muslim court system, under the control of the colonial state. By cementing control over the judicial system on the basis of Islamic law, the administration believed they could foster religious unity throughout the colony.²⁵¹ In so doing, the French would not only extend their influence over religious and cultural institutions, but also would work to forestall and obstruct resistance to colonial rule by disempowering institutions with the wherewithal to foment rebellion. Allan Christelow details the evolution of the Muslim court system in French Algeria, concluding that the equilibrium that existed between religious scholars and the state in the Ottoman period was “decidedly altered” by the French, whose “insistence on adherence to standardized procedures and a well-defined hierarchy of appeal deprived the judicial process of its flexibility.”²⁵²

What is striking about Christelow’s study for the purpose of this paper is not only his conclusion but rather the relationships he describes between the colonial administration, the urban ulama, and rural marabouts. In the mid-nineteenth century, French officials created a class of colonially appointed Muslim clergy, under the purview and pay of the administration. As Louis Rinn, chief of services of Indigenous Affairs, explained in his 1882 treatise, “*Note sur l’instruction publique musulmane en Algérie*,” the most important aim for the French administration was the recruitment of Muslim clergy: “To us French, the Muslim clergy is a necessary political instrument, and given the moral renown of the Marabout, this instrument will always be at our disposal, if we understand how to properly select, train, and reward our imams and muftis.”²⁵³ Despite French wariness of the political threats posed by the marabouts, their

²⁵¹ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 20.

²⁵² Christelow, *Law Courts*, 262.

²⁵³ Louis Rinn, “Note sur l’instruction publique musulmane en Algérie,” 1 February 1882 (Alger: Imprimerie de l’Association Ouvrière P. Fontana et Compagnie).

sustained readjustments of the Muslim court system resulted in the rise of the “maraboutic aristocracy” in the late nineteenth century.²⁵⁴

During the prior period of military rule, the occupiers usually did not directly intervene in the application of Muslim justice. However, between 1859 and 1867, the French undertook concerted efforts to significantly reshape the Muslim judicial system in Algeria. The transition from military rule to civilian governance had led to a change in priorities for the administration, from physical control and occupation of territory to the moral conquest of the Algerian populace. The rhetoric of the moral conquest led the administration to pursue policies to impose French values and further government control onto the Algerian people to allow for durable social and cultural integration.²⁵⁵ The rationalization, bureaucratization, and centralization of the judicial system was integral to this process. The French began selecting and appointing all tribal qadis, who were each made to swear oaths of loyalty and submission to the administration. In so doing, “the French could hope to gain closer control over even the day-to-day aspects of native social and economic life.”²⁵⁶

Coupled with direct intervention into the judicial system, authorities took control of “religious properties and foundations (the *hubus* and the *awqaf*), thereby depriving mosques, *zawiyas*, and schools of the revenue that they needed to survive.” Despite these efforts, French officials succeeded only in pushing Algerian Muslims out of traditional places of worship, since mosques now fell under the auspices of the occupier, and into the sufi tariqas, whose memberships had increased drastically by the turn of the century. According to Christelow, French restructuring of educational and judicial institutions not only deprived religious scholars’

²⁵⁴ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 221.

²⁵⁵ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 107-109.

²⁵⁶ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 143.

of the autonomy that had afforded them legitimacy in the Ottoman period, but also resulted in a body of poorly trained and inept Islamic “scholars.”²⁵⁷

It was after the French realization that the tariqas and associated zawaya remained a probable breeding ground for anti-colonial sentiment that the environment for Veritas’ criticisms would evolve. In the late nineteenth century, the French developed a policy of cooptation of Algerian sufism. Despite contemporary conceptions of the zawaya as hotbeds of insurrection, Louis Rinn explained: “Almost all French people in Algeria demand the total abolition [of zawaya], without a full understanding of the situation, which is not what it seems. All zawaya, in fact, are not hostile to us, and it will [behoove us politically] to protect and encourage more of these.”²⁵⁸ Rather than continue to agitate the tariqas militarily, the administration adopted a policy of assimilation. In exchange for their cooperation with the colonial power, tariqas and individual marabouts would be rewarded with positions in and favors from the administration.

From tax cuts to loosened restrictions on travel and access to zawaya, tariqas stood to gain enormously should they decide to subjugate themselves to the French administration.²⁵⁹ By offering marabouts official positions in the administration, the French could either gain allies in these individuals or, at the least, discredit them in the minds of the Muslim public, thereby neutering the marabout’s ability to agitate politically.²⁶⁰ Increasingly, and particularly in matters of intergroup quarrel over land, a local family or maraboutic lineage required the stamp of a state-appointed qadi to defend their claims.²⁶¹ The political capital of resistance began to give way to the benefits of service to the regime; marabout-qadis who demonstrated loyalty to the

²⁵⁷ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 68-70.

²⁵⁸ Rinn, “Note,” 38.

²⁵⁹ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 71-72.

²⁶⁰ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 37, 139.

²⁶¹ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 160.

regime were promoted to more prestigious posts with better pay.²⁶² According to McDougall, attempts to break the “oppressive peace” had become suicide missions for these groups, who thus sought to sustain it in exchange for colonial endorsement as “custodians of an Algerian religio-cultural patrimony and as legitimate spokesmen for their community and its interests.”²⁶³

There was thus both a tradition of resistance and a policy of cooperation between marabouts and tariqas and the French administration. As Julia A. Clancy-Smith concludes in her study of religious notables’ relationships with the colonial power, sufi leaders “forged novel course[s] of action” in their dealings with the colonial power, wavering “between various forms of submission, accommodation, evasion, and resistance.”²⁶⁴ Clancy-Smith’s conclusions are supported by the fact that colonial officials like Rinn perceived the willingness of some religious notables to cooperate with the French administration. Over decades of violent subjugation, religious notables made calculated decisions to ensure survival. “In return for cultural autonomy and freedom to engage in socioreligious works, [leaders] refrained from politics, as narrowly defined by Algeria’s European masters, and prudently avoided clashes with colonial forces.”²⁶⁵ This decision to accommodate was not one that took place wholesale post-1871, but rather one that developed in local contexts over the entirety of the French occupation.

Extending Clancy-Smith’s conclusions about the complex relationships that developed between religious notables and the occupier, Christelow’s study sheds remarkable light onto the process of accommodation taking place not between marabouts and the French, but rather between urban ulama and the colonial administration. While by the end of the nineteenth century

²⁶² Christelow, *Law Courts*, 181-182.

²⁶³ McDougall, 127.

²⁶⁴ Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 5, 214 and 252. Clancy-Smith offered a comprehensive examination of this history, of the “dimensions of rebellion against and tacit agreements with the colonial state” within French North Africa, in her book, *Rebel and Saint*. She overturned the assumption that “Muslim notables...were invariably the causative agents in anticolonial resistance in the rebellious half century stretching from 1830 to 1871 – only to subsequently become compliant collaborators in the French imperial experiment.”

²⁶⁵ Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*, 252.

in the rural areas of the south and west, many marabouts and tariqas had integrated into the colonial system via judicial and administrative posts, a majority of urban ulama had been working to accommodate the French since the time of the occupation. Part of the reason for this willingness to negotiate was that, unlike their rural counterparts, religious notables in the cities did not possess the coercive threat of tribal retribution in their relations with the occupier.²⁶⁶ Notwithstanding this military impotence, Algerians in the coastal cities were faced with a tremendous French presence; in close contact and under constant scrutiny, the urban ulama quickly learned that accommodation was key to survival.²⁶⁷ Oftentimes the most effective strategy for ingratiating oneself with the French was to preempt their social and cultural critiques of Algerian Islam. Critically, this entailed distancing oneself from the negative stereotypes of rural, maraboutic Islam, and insisting that where “tribesmen were thugs...city folk were decent and civilized, worthy of the entire confidence of the French.”²⁶⁸ This willful distancing contributed to the destruction of the political balance that linked the tribal world with the urban, both culturally and religiously.

Despite the complexity of the situation facing religious notables in French Algeria, reformist ulama in the early twentieth century did not write such an holistic history onto the evolution of the Franco-Algerian relationship. It was with the rural marabouts’ process of survival and accommodation which the AUMA took issue, and their culpability in the spread of so-called mystical Islam. In the aftermath of the Constantine violence, Veritas claimed that the perpetrators of the “looting and assassinations” must be sought “among the clientele of the zawayas, whose zeal, means, and influence *le Gouvernement Général* supports, maintains, and

²⁶⁶ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 84.

²⁶⁷ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 96.

²⁶⁸ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 89.

extends.”²⁶⁹ A key aspect of this criticism revolved around the role of education, or lack thereof, in perpetuating the subjugation of Algerian Muslims. For the reformist ulama, education was of utmost import, not only as a vehicle for spreading their message but also as an ostensibly apolitical talking point behind which they could veil more virulent criticisms.

Calls for Educational Reform

One of the major effects of the French policies of assimilation and cooptation of religious structures in Algerian society occurred in the field of education. Despite the cooperation tariqas had begun offering the administration, officials nonetheless closed a great number of native schools in the late nineteenth century, particularly those attached to *zawaya*. While Rinn insisted on pursuing alliances with *marabouts* and other religious notables, he was adamant in his condemnation of the Algerian *madrasa*. He explained that some *zawaya* had been freed from administrative supervision and placed under the control of local tribes; in these locales, “where morality was not a subject of special education,” the *madrasas* had become “schools of vices and even havens for bandits.”²⁷⁰ It was criticisms such as this that the reformist ulama would eventually echo.

Claims like this fueled the administration’s belief that the moral conquest could not evolve without an overhaul of the Algerian system of education. This overhaul went hand-in-hand with the mid-nineteenth century reforms of the Muslim judicial system. In closing Qur’anic schools attached to mosques and *zawaya*, the administration hoped to reroute young Muslim students into French schools.²⁷¹ To this end, the French created not only joint Arab-French

²⁶⁹ Veritas, “Les évènements de Constantine.” This claim follows in the tradition of many reformist Muslims, who claim that the “ignorance” of those who practice mystic Islam puts them “at the mercy of charlatans, parasites, opportunists, and other varieties of ‘spiritual delinquents.’” In this case, the French. See Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam*, 12.

²⁷⁰ Rinn, “Note,” 8.

²⁷¹ Laremont, “Islam and the Politics of Resistance,” 72.

primary and secondary institutions, but also opened three “official” madrasas in the 1850s whose purpose was the training of judicial officials. Prior to this colonial intervention, a young Muslim scholar would travel to “the prestigious Islamic universities of Tunis, Fez, and Cairo,” and spend a decade studying Islamic law under renowned scholars. Until a change in policy at the end of the nineteenth century, aspiring qadis were required to attend these official madrasas, under the tutelage of French-appointed teachers. Rather than intellectual breeding grounds for great scholars of fiqh, “these were...both low in caliber and narrow in focus, being exclusively concerned with the training of judicial officials.”²⁷²

These French-controlled madrasas hoped to churn out French-educated, Muslim scholars, capable of bridging the social and cultural gaps between the occupiers and Algerian Islamic society.²⁷³ Despite these lofty aims, recruitment to these schools remained low for decades, and the scholars trained in them garnered little respect and copious criticisms.²⁷⁴ Rather than flock in great numbers to the French schools, young Muslims crowded the remaining schools of rural *zawaya* and only in some cases attended the bicultural *écoles arabes-françaises*. In most cases, however, Muslim children attended no school at all; in 1870, less than five percent of all Algerian children, including Jews, were receiving an education.²⁷⁵

The lack of education for Algerian Muslims was a sticking point throughout the entire century of French occupation. The violence of the Constantine riots represented an opportunity for the reformist ulama to reinforce their criticisms not only of the marabouts, but also of colonial policy in the realm of education. In its first issue after the riots, *La Défense* published

²⁷² Christelow, *Law Courts*, 41, and Merad, *Réformisme*, 33.

²⁷³ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 146.

²⁷⁴ By the turn of the century, the administration re-opened judicial positions to qualifying candidates trained in schools of the *zawaya*. *Zawayan* candidates were quite successful in obtaining positions, much to the chagrin of *madrasan* ulama.

²⁷⁵ Ruedy, *Modern Algeria*, 104. In 1870, only 1,300 Muslim children were attending the thirty-six Arab-French primary schools; about 200 attended the parallel secondary *collèges*.

“*L’Appel d’un Israélite*,” in which the author attributed the cause of the violence, in part, to ignorance: “Alas! the crowd [*la foule*] is ignorant: it is opened to the barracks, but it is closed to the schools! It is allowed to revel in empty promises to conserve its stagnant stupidity, so it can be managed in order to better serve [the French.]”²⁷⁶ Such a heated condemnation on the intellect of Algerian Muslims came not from the editors themselves, but rather an Algerian Jew named André Kouby. By publishing this piece, *La Défense* not only presented a critique of the state of education that its editors largely shared, but also captured the fact that dialogue, rather than enmity, existed between the Jewish and Muslim communities. The newspaper’s own ensuing criticisms of the actions of the Jews of Constantine were matched, in part, by Kouby’s appeal.

The theme of ignorance continued on 24 August 1934, when the editors reprinted MP Jules Moch’s castigation of the administration’s education policies: “If we recall that for a population of 900,000 school-aged Arabs, there are not even 80,000 places in schools, and that there are almost no girls’ schools, then we have a general overview of the extreme misery and total ignorance of the Arab proletariat.”²⁷⁷ In the same issue, the editorial claimed that nine out of ten Algerian children did not find places in public schools.²⁷⁸ Criticisms such as these appeared not only in the AUMA’s French organ, but were also prominent in their associated Arabic language papers. In late 1933, just before the French administration banned the paper from circulation, *Al-Sirate* engaged critically with the paucity of education facing Algerian Muslims.

In unattributed articles on the front pages of two of their September 1933 issues, *Al-Sirate* posed the questions, first “*Limatha numna ‘u min al-ta ‘lim awladna?!?*” (“Why don’t we educate our children?!?”), followed by, “*Man al-mas ‘ul an al-man ‘ min ta ‘lim awladna?*” (“Who

²⁷⁶ Kouby, “*L’Appel d’un Israélite*.”

²⁷⁷ Moch, “*Le feu...*”

²⁷⁸ “*Au Secours!*”

is preventing our children's education?")²⁷⁹ Throughout these articles, *Al-Sirate* explained that the colonial administration had deprived "the community of Algerian Muslims" of education in many parts of the country. They claimed that in recent years, "demands for the opening of schools to teach our children the basic principles of Islam and the official language of Islam" had been ignored. Foreshadowing the strategy of Lamoudi's *La Défense*, *Al-Sirate* diverted all responsibility for this deprivation away from "French law," which they claimed "distances itself" from such deprivations. Indeed, they could not "put the responsibility for this deprivation on French public law in general when we see that the Jews, for example, are opening private schools to train their children in their religion." Once again mirroring *La Défense*'s emphasis on the need for equality between Muslims and Jews, *Al-Sirate* appealed to French treatment of the Jewish community as justification for increased rights for Muslims. The newspaper placed responsibility for these reforms not on the French Republic, nor even upon Governor General Jules Carde, but rather upon the prefects of each administrative district. Because schools were given permission to operate in some districts and not in others, *Al-Sirate* concluded: "we don't believe that the reasons for the deprivation come from anyone except [the prefect] in these three districts because they are in charge of what comes out of the *dar al-ahmaala* in the way of deprivation." Apart from this prohibition on the local level, *Al-Sirate* emphasized that they were wholly pleased with French law.²⁸⁰ Like *La Défense*, the paper's criticism targeted not French rule generally, but rather specific individuals and distinct policies.

The concerns of *Al-Sirate* and *La Défense* in the realm of education converged once again in regards to ignorance. *Al-Sirate* claimed in their 18 September 1933 issue that the administration turned down the brother of a sheikh who requested permission "to teach the

²⁷⁹ "Limatha numna' u min al-ta'lim awladna?!" *Al-Sirate*, 18 September 1933, and "Man al-mas'ul an al-man' min ta'lim awladna?" *Al-Sirate*, 25 September 1933.

²⁸⁰ "Man al-mas'ul..."

children of his people...and rescue them from the clutches of ignorance.” Further, *Al-Sirate* claimed that the AUMA was founded “for the dissemination of knowledge and virtue and to fight against ignorance and immorality.”²⁸¹ To this end, they requested of Carde the following:

In the name of respectable [French] law and in the name of the great principles of the [French] Republic, we direct our request to the general government and its head, Monsieur Carde, to allow us to teach our children our religion and the language of our religion, as well as to extend the permission to educate, which has been granted to a few regions, to the whole country.²⁸²

Al-Sirate portrayed the issue of religious and Arabic education as central to the concerns of the administration as a whole. Their reasoning was that should the great majority of Algerian Muslims remain uneducated, the greater the opportunity for ignorance, intolerance, and fanaticism to spread throughout their ranks. This conviction was shared by the editors of *La Défense*.

It was in *La Défense*'s criticisms of the lack of education and the resulting proliferation of ignorance in the Muslim population that the editors alluded to Muslim culpability in the outbreak of violence. Throughout months of coverage in the aftermath of the riots, the editors of *La Défense* avoided assigning blame to the Muslim community of Constantine. They identified short-term and long-term catalysts, pointing fingers at Jewish leaders and, cautiously, the Jews of the city. They denounced colonial officials and the administrative policies, although avoiding criticisms of the Third Republic writ large. Their finely tuned political journalism turned a blind eye to the reality of the weekend of 3-5 August, which was that in fact dozens of Algerian Muslims had injured and killed more than twenty Jewish civilians – including women and children. Rather, the editors of *La Défense* unabashedly called for political reform within the context of the existing Franco-Algerian relationship, with the goal of improving the lot of

²⁸¹ “Limatha numna‘u...”

²⁸² “Man al-mas‘ul...”

Algerian Muslims. Such an agenda necessitated that men like Lamine Lamoudi speak on behalf of the Muslim population en masse. Such a spokesperson would demonstrate that the ideas that *La Défense*, or even the AUMA, propagated were representative of what said population itself desired and embodied. Reliance on violent retribution was not one of these ideas.

What *La Défense*'s rhetoric about the Constantine riots attempted to efface but nonetheless revealed was that there existed an immeasurable gap between the actions and ideologies of the AUMA, of Lamine Lamoudi, and of Ben Badis, and *la foule*. The ideological platform of the AUMA called for increased education and the spread of modernity, implying that the "crowd" was uneducated and ignorant, not only of the merits of French culture but also of Islam itself. For the reformist ulama, the riots of Constantine became an example of the effects of this ignorance and of the pressing need for social and religious reforms. The Muslims of Algeria would make suitable French citizens, if only the administration would extend them the opportunity and if only they could be freed from the corrupting influence of maraboutic Islam. Education was the cornerstone of this agenda, for a general lack of it, coupled with the almost exclusive availability of an "obscurantist," zawayan education for rural Algerians, had been spreading this corrupt influence to the masses.²⁸³

Salah Bey and Ben Badis: Education in Constantine

While the issue of education was one that permeated the whole of Algeria, within the city of Constantine, the politics of education – like all *politiques Constantinois* – had a long and dynamic history. On 20 October 1933, *Al-Sirate* continued from the month prior its elucidation of Muslim education in Algeria. Writing from Constantine, Ben Badis claimed that he was recently the subject of a government inquiry, as he was suspected of teaching at the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque in Constantine without permission from the administration. French intervention into the

²⁸³ Fanny Colonna, "Cultural resistance in colonial Algeria," 115.

religious sphere brought with it rigorous oversight of Qur'anic schools and mosques, requiring religious teachers to request special dispensation to teach. Badis explained, in his meeting with the prefect of Constantine, that twenty years prior, the *secrétaire général des affaires indigènes* had granted him permission to teach in the mosque and that he had been doing just that for the past twenty years.

During this time, students from all over the country had come to the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque to study Islam and the Arabic language under his tutelage. The people of the city and foreign tourists, impressed by the vibrancy of the student body, had for twenty years credited this to “the attention and care of the government for Islamic mosques” and to their granting to “Muslims the freedom of education.” Yet, Ben Badis explained, he was merely a volunteer teacher, and the students and facilities had subsisted not on government assistance but rather on zakat, “on the slight subsidy of food and aid given by beneficent people.” For the past twenty years, Ben Badis had graciously kept this fact to himself, allowing people to believe in the benevolence of the administration, and yet he found himself summoned to the prefect's office to defend his right to teach in the mosque.²⁸⁴

As founder and president of the AUMA, Ben Badis of course had a vested interest in the religious and linguistic education of his fellow Muslims. It had been the mission of the reformist ulama since at least 1930 to found, fund, and operate the *écoles libres musulmanes* for the teaching of Arabic, French, and the *éléments indispensables de la religion*.²⁸⁵ According to Ali Merad, at least seventy of these private Muslim schools were operating across Algeria in 1934-1935. But as a member of the religious elite of Constantine, Ben Badis had a particular interest in the issue of education, as the city and the district at large were home to the most numerous and

²⁸⁴ Abdelhamid Ben Badis, “Ba‘d ‘ashrin sana fi al-ta‘lim, nasa‘l hal ‘anda-na rukhsa?” *Al-Sirate*, 30 October 1933.

²⁸⁵ Merad, *Réformisme*, 338-343.

active religious schools. As *Al-Sirate* outlined in the 25 September 1933 article, there were thirteen private religious schools across the three administrative districts, and seven of these were in Constantine.²⁸⁶ Despite the disparities between the figures provided by Merad and *Al-Sirate*, it is definitive that at the turn of the century, Constantine embarked upon an educational renaissance unmatched in scale in other Algerian cities and that continued to surge in the interwar period, thanks largely to the activities of Ben Badis and other reformist ulama.²⁸⁷

That this renaissance took place in Constantine is no surprise. As previously discussed, the city was home to vocal religious leaders and was a vibrant intellectual and cultural center long prior to the French occupation.²⁸⁸ Looking back to the Ottoman period, it is apparent that this rich intellectualism flourished under the policies of Salah Bey, who ruled the Constantine beylik from 1771 to 1791. In an effort to solidify government control over religious affairs, Salah Bey sponsored the construction of numerous schools and mosques, while simultaneously submitting “provincial habus revenue to central control.” Motivated both by a desire to bring education under tighter surveillance and also a commitment to public welfare, the bey’s policies were met with hostility on the part of marabout families whose interests were at stake in this cooptation.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the bey set a precedent for the sponsorship of religious education in the city, and it was he who first established a Qur’anic school at the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque.²⁹⁰

This history was not lost on Ben Badis, who appealed to the memory of Hussein Bey in his 30 October 1933 article: “Hussein Bey founded the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque for the purposes of prayers, and praise, and education (*li salah wa tasbih wa ta’leem*).” According to Ben Badis,

²⁸⁶ While this estimation seems low when considered against Merad’s 1934-1935 estimation, there are at least two possibilities for this figure: Merad’s estimation includes both primary and secondary schools, and the newspaper could be referring only to the secondary institutions, of which there were far fewer; or, in agitating for educational reforms and more schools, it behooved *Al-Sirate* to underestimate how widespread private education had become.

²⁸⁷ Merad, *Réformisme*, 339.

²⁸⁸ See Chapter One.

²⁸⁹ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 32-33.

²⁹⁰ Hussein Bey established the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque itself in the 1740s.

who was arguing for freedom in religious education, Hussein Bey had ordered this message carved into the front wall of the mosque, “as if he feared the neglect of education and that educators would be denied their rights (*haqqhum*) to the hubus endowments.” For Ben Badis and the editors of *Al-Sirate*, the fears of these Ottoman beys had been realized; despite the relative vitality of education in Constantine compared to other cities and provinces, there simply were not enough schools to accommodate the needs of the Muslim population. As reported by Ben Badis, the madrasa at the Sidi-Lakhdar mosque alone welcomed more than 100 students from all three prefectures, while over “2000 residents of Constantine and its environs” frequented and filled the mosque itself each night. Deprivation in the realm of education, he argued, was “not the matter of Abdelhamid Ben Badis personally but the issue of the linguistic and religious education of all Muslims.”²⁹¹

Ben Badis himself was the son of an affluent and honorable Constantine family, “renowned over centuries for their learning,” and had received both a French and Muslim education in the city. His grandfather, al-Makki Ben Badis, was one of the influential urban notables who had learned French and worked with the colonial occupiers to implement reforms of the Muslim judicial system.²⁹² In the late nineteenth century, as French officials increasingly overlooked the opinions of the urban ulama, al-Makki Ben Badis abandoned the long-standing policy of working within the system to affect change. According to Allan Christelow, al-Makki Ben Badis was one of a wave of Islamic scholars during this period who turned “to politics and pamphleteering,” and he was arguably the first Algerian politician to co-opt “this tool of

²⁹¹ Ben Badis, “*B`d `ashrin sina...*”

²⁹² Christelow, *Law Courts*, 23 and 183.

European politics.”²⁹³ No longer willing to compromise in the realm of religion and religious law, al-Makki Ben Badis began breaking the mold.

After completing his secondary education in Constantine in 1908, Abdelhamid Ben Badis was sent not to one of the French-sponsored madrasas, but rather to the illustrious religious institution, Zaytuna University in Tunis.²⁹⁴ Ben Badis spent four years studying in Tunisia, returning briefly to Algeria in 1912 before setting out to travel to the Near East, “to the sources of Islamic enlightenment and the high place of Arab culture.”²⁹⁵ It was over the course of his studies in Tunisia and his subsequent travels in the Middle East that Abdelhamid Ben Badis came under the tutelage of Islamic scholars who were calling for substantial reforms within Islam.²⁹⁶ According to Ali Merad, Ben Badis’ “journey to the East” affirmed and strengthened the fundamental aspects of his faith and intellect, as: “*Les lieux saints avaient agi sur son âme, en exaltant sa sensibilité religieuse. L’Égypte avait surtout agi sur son esprit, en lui proposant des exemples and des symboles.*”²⁹⁷ As McDougall explained, for Algerian ulama, this type of “mythically purifying journey east in search of redeeming sacred knowledge and moral strength,” did not serve as a reminder of the “distance separating Algerians...from their Arab and Muslim ‘brothers.’” Rather – and as it became for Ben Badis – it was a journey wherein one realized the glory of Algeria’s “dreamed-of, pre-cataclysmic past,” could be reached again.²⁹⁸

By examining the influence of Islamic modernism on Ben Badis and fellow ulama in Algeria, new light is shed upon the rhetoric of *La Défense* in the aftermath of the Constantine riots, as well as the political role of the AUMA in the interwar period. While Ageron argued that

²⁹³ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 234.

²⁹⁴ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 221, 233, and 252, and Ali Merad, *Ibn Badis: Commentateur du Coran* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1971): 24.

²⁹⁵ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 28-29.

²⁹⁶ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 24-30.

²⁹⁷ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 28.

²⁹⁸ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 59.

the violence of August 1934 was a simple flashpoint of tension, a localized bloodletting with no wider implications, Haley argued the contrary, claiming that the violence was in fact an pogrom by the increasingly agitated masses and that the reformist ulama and *La Défense* furtively endorsed such violent anti-Semitism. Cole, S.B. Roberts, and Younsi have since offered more systematic interpretations, linking the French policies toward religious communities with heightened political tension between Muslims and Jews. As I have demonstrated thus far, an holistic approach that incorporates economic, cultural, and sociopolitical factors into the study of the relationships between French officials, *colons*, Muslims, and Jews is necessary to understand why the riots occurred.

What has yet to be demonstrated here, and in the larger history of the violence, is what the Constantine riots signified for the reformist ulama. Examining the rhetoric of *La Défense* in the aftermath of the riots, alongside excerpts from associated Arabic newspapers from the period, has opened a window onto how and why men like Lamoudi sought to control – and even contrive – the narrative of the violence. Having placed *La Défense*'s criticisms of the Jewish community; of the French administration and its officials; and of their fellow Muslims into the longer history of Algeria, one can understand the organ's basic explanation for the violence. Yet what has not been revealed, and was only alluded to in their rhetoric, is how the Constantine riots fit into the reformist ulama's conception of Algerian history. By examining the AUMA's context within the wider narrative of Islamic reform, it becomes clear that the riots were, for Ben Badis and *La Défense*, evidence of the deterioration of Muslim society at the hands of the colonizers and their collaborators.

From al-Majjawi to the AUMA: Islamic Modernism in Algeria

The disillusionment al-Makki Ben Badis felt with the colonial regime stemmed largely from its failure to compromise, or the failed compromises, with the urban ulama in their policies toward the Muslim judicial system. After decades of negotiating and hacking away at the integrity of the system, by the late nineteenth century, religious notables across Algeria were faced with the reality that Muslim judicial and educational institutions had been stripped of their practical flexibility and intellectual vibrancy. The journalistic revolution of the 1870s, in which al-Makki Ben Badis played a prominent part, saw many Islamic scholars speaking out against the system.²⁹⁹ In 1877, Abd al-Qadir al-Majjawi, a scholar from Tlemcen with close ties to al-Makki, wrote a pamphlet decrying the state of Islam in Algeria. Throughout, al-Majjawi claimed that Algeria was lagging behind both Europe and the Middle East in intellectual and cultural matters. To combat this inferiority, al-Majjawi called for the implementation of new educational curriculum modeled on “modern teaching methods already in use in Egypt, which concentrate on both religion and science.” Science, al-Majjawi argued, would serve as a great complement to religious instruction, offering “additional proof for the necessity of God’s existence.” According to Allan Christelow, this pamphlet was the first significant expression of Islamic modernism in Algeria.³⁰⁰

Stemming from a centuries-long, and well-documented, history of Islamic reform, Islamic modernism emerged in the nineteenth century largely in response to the declining geopolitical position of the Muslim world vis-à-vis the West. For Islamic modernists, European incursions into the lands of Islam and their ensuing global geopolitical dominance indicated that the influence of the West – and of Christianity – were on the rise, while Islam itself was in

²⁹⁹ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 27. Christelow explains that the late 1870s and 1880s were years of decline in central control, accompanied by “growing cultural and political assertiveness on the part of the Algerians Muslims.”

³⁰⁰ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 231.

decline. These reformers believed that reversing this decline and overcoming this inferiority necessitated a channeling of the forces of modernity that the West had embraced long ago.³⁰¹ While al-Majjawi voiced these ideas in Algeria in the 1870s, at the turn of the nineteenth century, grand mufti of Egypt Muhammad Abduh was influentially espousing Islamic modernism and mobilizing Islamic scholars throughout the Muslim world. For these thinkers, divisions within the Muslim umma had made Islam vulnerable to foreign incursion. Abduh argued that the remedy for this was to establish “a righteous and just society...in accordance with the teachings of the Qur’an.”³⁰² Abduh believed the umma was capable of social progress and that this could be achieved through the widespread teaching of the Qur’an and Prophetic hadith. Motivated by his own stale and unsatisfactory religious education, Abduh thus advocated for “an indigenous functional system of education” as the avenue for reform.³⁰³

The criticisms of the state of Islam were particularly resonant in French Algeria. When Abduh traveled to North Africa in 1903, he was allegedly “appalled by the backwardness of most aspects of Algerian Islam.” For Abduh, the superstition and decadence of maraboutic Islam ran contrary to the “true spirit of the Koran [which] was one of liberalism, enlightenment, and tolerance.”³⁰⁴ He claimed that with the spread of Islam had come divisions that had weakened it. In his treatise, *The Theology of Unity*, Abduh described this process of accommodation and its effects:

People came into Islam in droves – Persians, Syrians and their neighbours, Egyptians and Africans, and others in the train...People of all religious persuasions had come into Islam

³⁰¹ Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Islamic Modernism," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Masud et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 238. For more on the history of Islamic modernism and strands within the movement, see S.M.A. Sayeed, *Islamic Modernism (Socio-Cultural Analysis)* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1990); *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* ed. John H. Donohue and John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994).

³⁰² Yvonne Haddad, “Muhammad Abduh: Pioneer of Islamic Reform,” in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, 36-37.

³⁰³ Haddad, “Muhammad Abduh,” 52.

³⁰⁴ Ali Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 102.

without knowing it inwardly, but carrying with them into it their existing notions, seeking some kind of mediating compromise between the old and the Islamic. So after the tempests of sedition came the tempests of doubt. Every opinion-monger took his stand upon the liberty of thought the Qur'an enjoined. The newcomers asserted their right to an equal stake with the existing authorities, and schisms raised their heads among the Muslims.³⁰⁵

Abduh's criticisms struck a chord with ulama across Algeria. Frustration with administrative reforms of the judicial system had already spawned prejudice against the marabouts, and Abduh's narrative offered a unified, Islamic framework in which the urban ulama could voice their attacks against heterodoxy. In the years following Abduh's assessment of the state of Algerian Islam, an onslaught of attacks against sufi Islam arose in the major urban centers.³⁰⁶

Perhaps the most prominent of scholars who rose to Abduh's call for reform was Abdelhamid Ben Badis. During Ben Badis' time in Egypt, young Muslim intellectuals were engaging in dynamic debates about nationalism, modernism, and reformism.³⁰⁷ While many scholars rejected Abduh's reformist agenda, his most fervent disciple, Rashid Rida, was gathering a substantial following among the young students studying at Al-Azhar University and the newly founded Egyptian University. Having been exposed to the "lively intellectual climate" of early twentieth century Egypt and the wider Islamic world, Ben Badis returned in 1914 to his home city of Constantine, where he believed the message of Islamic modernism could affect positive change.

His primary goal was to establish a system of free education for young Muslims. However, Ben Badis was in the minority of urban ulama in the early 1900s who had opted out of cooperation with the French administration. Considered a renegade, he was largely refused, on the authority of the grand mufti of Constantine, the authorizations necessary to publish and to

³⁰⁵ Muhammad Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg (London: Ruskin House, 1966): 34.

³⁰⁶ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 252-257.

³⁰⁷ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 257.

teach in state-sponsored mosques. Thus, and as we know, Ben Badis began teaching in smaller, “secondary” mosques around the city.³⁰⁸ It was for these activities he had received permission from the native affairs officer of the city, as previously discussed. Although he departed Algeria for the duration of the First World War, Ben Badis returned in 1919 and continued pursuing educational and cultural reforms, taking up journalism as a vehicle to spread his reformist message.³⁰⁹ Throughout the 1920s, he was prolific and his activity significant; in addition to opening free Arab schools, he created cultural and literary circles; established youth centers; and encouraged charitable works throughout the city. In 1931, he founded the AUMA, as an umbrella organization to facilitate these reforms and whose platform espoused the tenets of Islamic modernism in an Algerian context.³¹⁰ As the prior discussion of the *Circulaires Michel* demonstrated, despite the organization’s apolitical stance, French officials were suspicious of and at times severe in their handling of the activities of its members. Increased tension between the group and the administration in the early 1930s led to inquisitions such as the one Ben Badis faced in regards to his teaching activities at Sidi-Lakhdar mosque.

Just a year prior to the events of Constantine, in June 1933, founding member of the AUMA Taieb el-Okbi gave an interview to French writer Robert Randau for the Algiers-based, French-language weekly, *L’Afrique du Nord Illustrée*. Earlier that year, the administration had passed the *Circulaires Michel* and el-Okbi was one of the preachers banned from teaching in certain mosques, as his access to the Grand Mosque of Algiers was restricted.³¹¹ Throughout the interview, el-Okbi gave voice to the entire range of concerns with which the AUMA was grappling. Randau printed the interview in full, with a short introduction wherein he described

³⁰⁸ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 31-32.

³⁰⁹ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 33.

³¹⁰ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 53.

³¹¹ Merad, *Ibn Badis*, 244.

el-Okbi as a “remarkable orator” who enjoyed great popularity among “*les milieux indigènes*.” In almost spokesperson-like fashion, el-Okbi spoke to the state of Islam in the modern world: “I believe that the situation of Muslims in the world is deplorable from every point of view: religious, social, intellectual. My fellow believers must step up efforts to become civilized.” el-Okbi’s language not only echoed that of Abduh and his religious milieu, but meshed with near perfect harmony with the *mission civilisatrice*. The shape these “efforts” would take in Algeria were embodied by the urban ulama, as he followed with: “Of course, I am not speaking here of city dwellers; the elite of these [cities] have a situation that leaves nothing to be desired.”³¹²

When asked about the state of Islam in Algeria, el-Okbi explained that he was a “staunch opponent” of marabouts and tariqas, which had created fragmented, localized religious traditions. The absence of unity within Islam had thus led to the deplorable situation of Algerian Muslims. Extending his criticisms, el-Okbi said that he objected to “above all else those who place an intermediary between man and God. I preach the observance of the true Islamic law, and the pure Islamic morals.” He denounced these religious figures as heretics, and as harmful to those believers who they had lead down the path of a “corrupt and decadent Islam.” Worship, he explained, “must be performed only under the rules laid down by the Quran and [in the example] of the Prophet.” Only by stripping Algerian Muslims “of all superstition” could they “come out of their torpor [and] become, in the near future, educated men.” The dissemination of religious education, he explained, “was the only remedy to the evils [of maraboutism].” Once again echoing the *mission civilisatrice*, el-Okbi made clear that Islam was not a hindrance to progress, but rather that *superstitious* Islam was the problem.

el-Okbi reinforced the compatibility of Islam and modernity when asked about the relationship between Algeria and France. He explained that language instruction was the

³¹² Robert Randau, “Un entretien avec Taieb el Okbi,” *L’Afrique du Nord illustrée* 633 (17 June 1933): 2-3.

fundamental step in “raising peoples,” claiming: “The Algerian Muslim must first receive French instruction, which is indispensable, I proclaim. And that secular instruction is complemented by the religious instruction received outside of the school and subject to scrutiny by the French authority.” Here el-Okbi demonstrated the symbiotic relationship he perceived between the Islamic religion and scientific knowledge, represented by his appeal for secular education in Algeria. He explained that the two should go hand-in-hand, benefiting one another and, in this case, improving the lot of Algerian Muslims by enhancing their ability to “grasp” the importance of the continued Franco-Algerian relationship.³¹³

Primary among the tenets of Islamic modernism were educational reform, as el-Okbi emphasized in his interview, and cooperation with the occupying government at the expense of active political involvement.³¹⁴ For Abduh and later for Ben Badis, unlike other Islamic modernists, resistance against the French presence and thus the West itself was not a priority.³¹⁵ By taking a conciliatory and evolutionary approach, Abduh and Ben Badis believed Muslims could reform the religion from within, thus bringing Islam into harmony with Western modernity.³¹⁶ It is for this reason that Ben Badis founded the AUMA as a cultural and social reform organization with no explicit political objectives. As evidenced by Ben Badis’ writings in *Al-Sirate* and by those of his colleagues in *La Défense*, from its founding, the primary objective of the AUMA was “purging Algerian Islam of heterodox accretions [and]...encouraging religious

³¹³ Randau, “Un entretien,” 2-3.

³¹⁴ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 252.

³¹⁵ This apolitical, gradualist approach was not shared by Abduh’s disciple, Rashid Rida, who rejected cooperation with non-Islamic (i.e., Western) powers. Rida’s association with the Islamic modernist movement and his later drift toward Saudi Wahhabism caused many French officials to suspect Algerian reformers (the AUMA) of more extreme, Wahhabist viewpoints. This was reflected in el-Okbi’s interview, as he attempted to distinguish between agreeing with aspects of Wahhabism and being a “supporter of full ouahabisme.” He denied having any relations with any “head ouahabite,” going so far as to explain that he and Ibn Saud were never in Mecca in the same year. See Randau, “Un entretien,”

³¹⁶ Haddad, “Muhammad Abduh,” 36-37.

and Arabic language instruction.”³¹⁷ By encouraging edification in Arabic and the religion’s holy texts, the reformist ulama hoped to facilitate the spread of orthodox Islam, which they believed could coexist peacefully and fruitfully within the framework of the colonial state. This evolutionary approach necessitated not only mutual effort on the part of Algerian Muslims en masse, but also a willingness on the part of the French administration to recognize that both Islam and Algerian Muslims were capable of making such “progress.” For the reformist ulama in the interwar period, such recognition would necessarily take shape in the granting of full citizenship rights to all Algerian Muslims, without requiring the abandonment of Muslim personal status.

el-Okbi spoke to this issue in his 1933 interview with Randau when asked about naturalization. He explained that a Muslim born in France acquired French citizenship by law, because any person born on French territory was considered French, and yet that individual remained a Muslim nonetheless. He argued that should this law be extended to French Algeria – land that is part and parcel of the Republic: “this would amount to a mass naturalization ordered by legislation. Muslims can therefore benefit from this without being considered to have renounced Islam.” el-Okbi went on to explain that this was a very sensitive issue with many diverging opinions among Islamic scholars, and that Algerian Muslims who voluntarily waive their personal status are considered renegades and turncoats by the population at large, who “are not mature enough to grasp these nuances.” Although he did not condemn the actions of Muslims who abandoned Muslim personal status, el-Okbi made clear his position on naturalization, which altogether summarized the position of the reformist ulama in this period: “If the educated

³¹⁷ John Ruedy, “Continuities and Discontinuities,” 77.

Muslim could obtain French citizenship rights without giving up his personal status, I would have no objection; it would be the ideal solution, in my opinion.”³¹⁸

Despite the AUMA’s commitment to religious and cultural reform, staunch positions such as this made continued cooperation with the entrenched colonial state difficult. Because most French officials doubted the apolitical nature of the organization, they closely surveilled and strictly limited the activities of its members. Even Randau, a veritable *pied-noir* and no enemy to the idea of an Algerian Islam compatible with French colonialism, could not distinguish between the group’s efforts to reform religion and agitating political activity. In the introduction to el-Okbi’s interview, Randau wrote: “Taieb el Okbi represents the party in Algeria that is both religious and political (among Muslims religion is not separated from politics and I think for Christians, it is just about the same)...that strives to bring Islam to its original purity without holding progress in contempt.”³¹⁹ This French unwillingness or inability to view the reformist ulama as exclusively religious and cultural agents, and the difficulty for its members in separating their calls for reform from political activism, prevented the administration from viewing the AUMA as allies civilizing mission of the colonial project.

³¹⁸ Robert Randau, “Un entretien,” 2-3.

³¹⁹ Robert Randau, “Un entretien,” 2-3.

CONCLUSION

For members of the AUMA, the riots of Constantine represented continued failure on the part of the colonial administration to make the concessions necessary to contribute to the continued evolution of the Algerian Muslim populace. *La Défense* argued exactly this, pointing out the economic and sociopolitical measures that had been taken over the course of decades to prevent Muslims from achieving equality. Juxtaposing the treatment of the Jewish community with that of the Muslims, the editors of both *La Défense* and *Al-Sirate* demonstrated a commitment to *fraternité* and *égalité* that they alleged was wanting in the French administration. Exclusionary policies aimed at the Muslim population, as well as inclusionary measures designed for the Jewish population, evidenced this prejudice. By this reasoning, *La Défense* and Ben Badis argued that the violence in Constantine was not the product of fundamental anti-Semitism but rather of colonial policies that worked to create a chasm between the two communities. These policies were motivated in part by the desire of European *colons* and some colonial officials to continually subjugate the Algerian Muslim. Connecting this discrimination back to the message of Islamic modernism, they also argued that the inability of *colons* and the administration to respect *l'indigène* was in large part due to their impression of Islam as barbaric; the marabouts and tariqas, who had compromised with the colonial officials to obtain power and influence, propagated such misconceptions about the religion.

What confounded the editors of *La Défense* in the aftermath of the riots was the unwillingness of the administration to appreciate the rationality behind their call for reforms. Grounding its appeals in the rhetoric of the French Republic, *La Défense* presented its logic as unassailable: Algerian Muslims could and would practice a *rational* Islam while also becoming French citizens, just as their Jewish neighbors had done. For Ben Badis, communities with

different *ethnic* nationalisms, as defined by culture, religion, and social values, could share a *political* nationalism within the framework of one state, as long each group respected one another's ethnic nationalism.³²⁰ In his exposé “*Faji ‘at qusintina,*” (“The tragedy of Constantine”), published in the aftermath of the Constantine riots, Ben Badis appealed to this concept, referencing the long history of peace “between the two elements of Abrahamic Semites [*bayn ‘ansurain samiyyain ibrahimiyyain*] that have lived together for centuries in one nation [*watan wahid*].” His language here, referring to two religious elements composing one unified political whole, reflected not only his conception of the relationship between religion and nationality in Algeria, but also echoed *La Défense*'s reckoning of the French as having disrupted the longstanding peace between these two religious communities.³²¹ According to John Ruedy, the AUMA “was content to coexist with the French political reality, as the official religious establishment was then doing and as the ulama had coexisted with the Turkish establishment long before the French conquest.”³²² Such an agenda seemed to mesh with the professed *mission civilisatrice*. And yet progress was stagnant during the interwar period. As McDougall explains, the process of seeking accommodation with the colonial order continually drew Ben Badis and his cohort into conflict with it.³²³

Understanding this failure necessitates understanding the rhetorical bedrock of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism. In preaching their message of Islamic reformism, the AUMA presupposed the legitimacy of European political modernity and the historical trajectory it implied. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has laid out, European imperialists set out on colonial missions preaching “Enlightenment humanism at the colonized;” defending the importance of “concepts

³²⁰ See discussion in Chapter Two.

³²¹ Ben Badis, “*Faji ‘at qusintina.*”

³²² John Ruedy, “Continuities and Discontinuities,” 77.

³²³ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 70.

such as citizenship, the state...human rights, equality before the law,...the idea of the subject, democracy,...[and] scientific rationality.”³²⁴ And yet by the same breath, they denied the colonized people’s access to these concepts in practice by insisting that European guidance (i.e., occupation) was necessary before the colonized could achieve these principles. Colonial projects were ongoing missions to extend what had already arisen in Europe to non-European peoples elsewhere; historical time became a measure of cultural distance between these societies. This historicism, as embodied by the French *mission civilisatrice*, necessitated that the colonized must first experience a period of development and progress via the guiding light of the colonial power before they could be said to have progressed to the ultimate stage of historical development – self-rule. Per Chakrabarty, this argument “converted history itself into a version of this waiting room,” constantly perpetuating the colonial project.³²⁵

That Chakrabarty’s model applies to the French occupation of Algeria is not in itself revealing; however, if one understands the reformist ulama’s message of Islamic modernism as a local version of this same type of historical narrative, then the intransigence they faced from the colonial state becomes all the more clear. For Ben Badis and the AUMA, Algerian Muslims who practiced their version of orthodox Sunnism had progressed further toward modernity than the marabouts and their followers – those who el-Okbi claimed were not yet mature enough. Per McDougall, the reformist ulama themselves were able to colonize: Through religious and cultural reforms, the AUMA would enlighten the masses, bringing all Algerian Muslims to equal footing with themselves and thus that much closer to the French ideal of a citizen. Because this was the proposed mission of the French throughout the entirety of the occupation, the AUMA saw themselves as allies to the imperial cause. And so in the aftermath of the riots, the reformist

³²⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 4-9.

³²⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

ulama were in a precarious position; the Muslims of Constantine had essentially betrayed the reformist cause by resorting to violence, and so Ben Badis and Lamoudi and others condemned them. But forced to assure the French that Algerians Muslims were not their colonial stereotypes, they backtracked, outlining a long history of agitations and grievances that they claimed had led to the August riots.

And yet, French officials on the ground shared this same view of history, by which there was an unknowable and thus insurmountable gap between Algerian Muslims, even the most enlightened of them, and the French themselves. So for the European settlers and administrative officials, the riots were then a mere reflection of colonial reality. As McDougall demonstrates, for the colonizer, there was no acceptable status for the colonized other than that of “defeated native.”³²⁶ Intransigence on the part of these officials in negotiating for reform was motivated by a range of factors, not the least of which was colonial bigotry. But what can be discerned from the long history of French colonial relations with the urban ulama is that despite the rhetoric of the so-called moral conquest, the French administration was never as committed to these conceptions of cultural progress as the ulama themselves became in the interwar period.

Both the Second Empire and the Third Republic sought to empower, in name, urban religious notables, whom they saw as “resembling the enlightened sector of the bourgeoisie” and through whom they could complete the “moral conquest” of Algerian society.³²⁷ These notables proved willing to cooperate with the regime and work to reform, on French terms but within an Islamic framework. al-Makki Ben Badis embodied this willingness, as he worked for decades within the colonial state to positively reform the Muslim judicial system. Despite their condemnations of maraboutic collaboration, the reformist ulama of the interwar period were then

³²⁶ McDougall, *History and Culture*, 96.

³²⁷ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 110.

building on a tradition of cooperation with the colonial occupier. The lack of positive reforms for the Muslim community in the interwar period perhaps reflects a phenomenon Christelow refers to; neither the military regime nor the civilian regime were ever much interested in “protecting the weak and exploited.” The rhetoric of the moral conquest was above all else hyperbolic, despite its roots in French Enlightenment thinking, and both groups were ultimately “more concerned with the exercise of power” than the *mission civilisatrice*.³²⁸ What the fall-out of the Constantine riots then seems to suggest is that the reformist ulama were willingly or unknowingly oblivious to the hyperbole. Assessments of their rhetoric have determined that their mission to prove the civility of the Muslim populace must have been feigned, for French intransigence was assuredly obvious. But what their extensive coverage of the events indicates is not a feint but a strident determination to prove that civility to the French.

The Futility of Association

On 2 November 1934, *La Défense* published an editorial entitled, “*La solution attendue*,” in which the editors condemned the inability of the “Government of Paris” to solve the “serious problems that concern our freedom, our security, and our future.” They appealed to “political liberalism, good sense and wisdom” to take into account the “just demands...and legitimate aspirations of the Muslim people in Algeria.” Although the political turmoil spurred by the riots would continue to feature on the pages of the newspaper for many weeks to follow, this editorial read almost as a conclusion – a final commentary – from the editors. Without referencing the violence, the editorial astutely invoked the cause-and-effect relationship that they had spent weeks delineating between administrative mismanagement and the riots:

For us the only desired solution is that which we have always advocated: to put an end to the regime of inequality, injustices, and iniquities under which we have suffered too much, for one that allows us to live worthily and honorably as our neighbors of other

³²⁸ Christelow, *Law Courts*, 110.

racés and other religions do, in a country that is ours, and one that has absolute respect for our rights, our freedoms and to our beliefs.
Any other solution would dangerously aggravate the situation and perpetuate discontent and misunderstandings, which have effects and consequences that everyone deplures. What we are saying today is the repetition of what we have always written in this journal, but this repetition is more than ever necessary, and it will be again and again. The reason [of it] overrides the mad selfishness of those who do not want to realize that their stubbornness and blindness harm not only us Muslims, who are victims, but also the nation in whose name they govern us.³²⁹

This excerpt speaks to the overall project of the reformist ulama in the aftermath of the violence. For these men, the Constantine riots were an opportune moment to demonstrate the logic behind their political project. Unlike the French and Algerian presses, which played up the brutality and bloodshed of the riots, *La Défense* and *Al-Shihab* wanted to swiftly move beyond the riots as a tragic moment of suffering for the Jewish population. Instead, the editors characterized the riots as a much larger tragedy, not only for Constantine but also for France as a whole.

But as weeks passed, the French administration would eventually conclude that the so-called Muslim narrative of the events – that their community had been provoked and was not at fault – was closer to the truth than that of the Jewish leaders, who vocally maintained that the violence was actually a pre-conceived and calculated plan against their community.³³⁰ Such a conclusion had the effect of further deteriorating relationships between the two religious communities. Lamoudi's language on the pages of *La Défense* became increasingly virulent, and on 2 November he wrote of the "pretention," "pride," and "power" of the Jewish community.³³¹ Indeed at the end of 1934, Mohamed Benhoura ("Veritas," "Aboulhak") would leave *La Défense* to found his own newspaper, and would enter into an alliance with the Croix de Feu in an effort to challenge the Jewish political bloc.³³² And so the progressively hostile relationship between

³²⁹ "La solution attendue," *La Défense*, 2 November 1934.

³³⁰ Younsi, "Colonial triangle," 167-189.

³³¹ Lamine Lamoudi, "La Tragedie constantinoise," part VII, *La Défense*, 2 November 1934.

³³² Haley, "Politics of Assimilation," 18-19.

the Muslim and Jewish communities has obscured historians' view of that relationship in August 1934, as well as the reformist ulama's relationship with the colonial state. What this thesis has thus put forth is that in the aftermath of the riots, political capital for the AUMA and its members rested in winning back what favor the Muslim community lost with the French administration, not in launching rhetorical attacks against either their Jewish neighbors or the French Republic. The tension between praising and criticizing the Jewish population that was present in this rhetoric makes clear that they considered the Jewish community not the enemy of the reformist cause but rather a confirmation of it and a testament to the success of association.

As Younsi contends, however, it is unlikely during this period that ordinary “Muslims...distinguished between French settlers and naturalized Jews, especially as the latter continuously asserted their Frenchness and their leaders held some of the most important administrative positions.”³³³ It is this disconnect between the reformist ulama and their constituency that perhaps best explains the AUMA's inability to truly make sense of the explosion of violence against the Jewish community of Constantine. Anxious to disseminate their vision of Algerian history and Algerian Muslims – so as to achieve much hoped for equality within the colonial framework – they condemned other versions of Algerian Islam as the guilty parties. Speaking in colonial voices and preaching colonial policy, these ulama denounced these so-called colluders while themselves perpetuating the colonial project. It was thus that their (a)political project of association became permanently confined to the waiting room of history, while their cultural and religious message – “Islam is my religion; Arabic is my language; Algeria is my fatherland” – proved a compelling credo for those individuals who would, by 1954, insist upon independence from the French colonial system as the only catalyst for change.

³³³ Younsi, “Colonial triangle,” 142.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel was born in Sarasota, Florida, and grew up in Lexington, South Carolina, where she attended Lexington High School, graduating in 2010. She went to the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied European History and Modern Middle Eastern Studies. She graduated *magna cum laude* in 2014 with her Bachelor of Arts and was accepted into the Department of History at Florida State, where she served as a graduate assistant and research assistant for the Middle East Center.