

Celebrating the “Nation” in a Colonial Context: “Bastille Day” and the Contested Public Space in Algeria, 1880–1939*

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Compared to the triumphalist celebrations at the beginning of the Popular Front government in 1936, the Bastille Day ceremonies that were held in France three years later appear to have been rather perfunctory exercises that took place in the context of a paralyzed political system.¹ From an Algerian perspective, however, the celebrations of 1939 were far from unspectacular. In the run-up to the commemoration, traffic had already intensified between Algeria and the metropole. Two competing Algerian delegations arrived in Paris to attend the official celebrations.² One of them, a group of Algerian notables specifically assembled by the colonial administration, was treated with particular honor as the representative of “Muslim Algeria.” The other one, led by Ferhat Abbas and Dr. Mohamed-Salah Bendjelloul—two leading reform-minded critics of the colonial regime—was received quite differently. Having traveled to Paris on their own initiative, the men were largely ignored by French officialdom and not even

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¹ See, e.g., Olivier Ihl, *La fête républicaine* (Paris, 1996), 363–69; Pascal Ory, *Une nation pour mémoire, 1889, 1939, 1989* (Paris, 1992), 165–95. This article is based on research in several Algerian and French local, regional, and national archives and libraries. I was one of the first researchers to gain access to the Algerian municipal archives mentioned below. The sources quoted here derive from the Archives of the *baladiyya* (municipality) of Oran (ABO) and Constantine (ABC); the Archives of the *wilaya* (department) of Oran (AWO); the Algerian National Library; the French National Archives (Archives Nationales de France [ANF]); the French National Library; and the French Overseas Archives (Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer [ANOM]). All translations from French and Arabic, if not otherwise attributed, are my own.

² “Renseignements sur les Echos dans les milieux indigènes de la célébration du 14 juillet à Paris,” Centre d’Informations et d’Étude (CIE), Constantine, July 19, 1939, ANOM, GGA 9H/18; “L’activité indigène dans le département d’Oran au mois de juillet 1939,” CIE, Oran, ANOM, GGA 3CAB/14; “Bulletin mensuel d’informations concernant l’activité indigène dans le département de Constantine au mois de juillet 1939,” CIE, Constantine, ANOM, GGA 11H/59.

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mentioned in the press. For its part, the French government sent thousands of Croix du Combattant (a military distinction established in 1930) to Algeria, combining the anniversary of the Revolution with the (long-delayed) decoration of the Muslim Algerian veterans of World War I.³ On the holiday itself, the police were on high alert in Algiers and elsewhere, ready to use force in preventing demonstrations of Messali Hadj’s Algerian nationalist party Parti du Peuple Algérien.⁴ In East Algerian Constantine, a region traditionally under the influence of Italian settlers, the Italian consul refrained (this time) from responding to the *Marseillaise* with the Fascist arm salute. While his restraint was strongly appreciated by the French prefect, Italian veterans were notably absent from the military parade.⁵

This short account of events, though at first glance impressionistic, raises the two main problems that this article seeks to address. First, it highlights how important the politics of symbolism and elements of metropolitan political culture were in colonial Algeria. For while scholarship over the past few years has tended to focus on the cultural repercussions of colonialism in the European metropolitan territories, the events of July 14, 1939, in Algeria suggest a transfer of European (French) cultural practices into a particular colonial context. The diffusion of metropolitan symbols was an important means of imperial integration throughout the various colonial empires in general.⁶ However, French Algeria’s colonial regime and its demographic structures made it particularly predisposed to such transfers of metropolitan symbolism. This “masterpiece” of modern French colonialism was in fact designed as a specific colonial project.⁷

³ See, e.g., Oran department Mayor of Relizane to Prefect, Oran, July 15, 1939; Administrator of the Commune Mixte of St. Lucien to Prefect, Oran, July 19, 1939, AWO, //1289; *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 15, 1939.

⁴ For the main events in Algiers and Boufarik, see Report, Chief, Police spéciale départementale (PSD), Algiers, July 15, 1939; Prefect, Algiers, to Governor-General, July 18, 1939, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; Commissaire central adjoint, Algiers, to Commissaire central, Algiers, July 14, 1939, ANOM, Archives de la Préfecture d’Alger (APA) 91/4I/3; Report, Commissaire, PSD, Bône, July 15, 1939, ANOM, GGA 3CAB/98.

⁵ See the police report from Chief, PSD, Constantine, July 17, 1939, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30.

⁶ For symbolic politics in colonial and imperial settings, see Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen, *Kolonialismus: Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, 7th, rev. ed. (Munich, 2012), 120–23; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2009), 607–16. For the British Empire and especially India, see Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987), and *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ, 1996); John M. McKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986).

⁷ For an overview of French colonialism in the Maghreb, see Jacques Berque, *Le Maghreb entre deux guerres* (Paris, 1962); Jamil Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge, 1987). On French colonialism in Algeria, see Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine*, vol. 1: *La conquête et les débuts de la*

In the first decades after the conquest began in 1830, and especially after the civilian regime was established in 1870–71, Algeria had become home to a vast and significant European settler community of *Français d'Algérie* that reached a figure of almost one million by the early 1950s.⁸ Furthermore, as a result of France's ambitious colonial doctrine of "assimilation," Algeria was definitively as of 1871 considered an integral part of French national territory and no longer an "exotic" colony. Colonial rule in Algeria was (at least in part) paradoxically based on the denial of its colonial character.

Since the 1960s, scholars have in various ways stressed the importance of symbolic displays and public history within Algeria's colonial situation, shaped as it was by settler colonialism and the doctrine of assimilation. In the 1960s and 1970s, a generation of liberal French historians emphasized the triumphalist centennial celebrations of 1930 as a key event in Franco-Algerian colonial history.⁹ Furthermore, numerous studies of settler cultures and identities since the late 1980s have pointed out the significance of historical references among the European settler community.¹⁰ In most cases, they have indicated the importance of a pre-Arab Roman presence in North Africa. That history had been extensively used in colonial propaganda and literature in order both to claim North African territory and to bring cohesion to the heteroge-

colonisation (1827–1871) (Paris, 1964); Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, vol. 2: *De l'insurrection de 1871 au déclenchement de la guerre de libération (1954)* (Paris, 1979); John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN, 2005); Abderrahmane Bouchène et al., eds., *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale* (Algiers/Paris, 2012).

⁸ During the period discussed in the article, their number steadily grew from 280,000 in 1872 to around 412,000 in 1881; 634,000 in 1901; 722,000 in 1911; more than 790,000 in 1921; and 946,000 in 1936.

⁹ Especially Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie*, 403–11. In this context the celebrations were often considered as yet another "missed occasion" to reform the colonial system. Some explanations of this narrative may be found in Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique: Histoire et société* (Paris, 1974), 33–34.

¹⁰ For this historiography, see Jonathan Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930–1954* (Rochester, NY, 2002); Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford, 1998); Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London, 1995); David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870–1920* (Cambridge, 1990). The importance of historical references in the Algerian colonial regime has been recently summed up by Abdelmajid Hannoum, "The Historiographic State: How Algeria Once Became French," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2008): 91–114. Explicitly or not, in many ways these authors of more recent works are carrying out research initiated by a number of French scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, Jean-Robert Henry, Hubert Gourdon, and Françoise Henry-Lorcerie, "Roman colonial et idéologie coloniale en Algérie," *Revue algérienne des sciences juridiques, économiques et politiques* 11 (March 1974): 7–252; Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris, 1975); Jean Déjeux, *La littérature algérienne contemporaine* (Paris, 1975).

neous settler community.¹¹ Adding to this, recent research on the political culture of Algerian nationalism has shown the crucial role played by historical representation in the anticolonial struggle and the creation of an (independent) "Algerian nation."¹²

Given the considerable attention paid to symbolic dimensions in the study of colonial rule in French Algeria, it is surprising that the question of how metropolitan symbolic displays and celebrations were transferred to Algeria has been largely neglected. Studies on Algeria's sociocultural history agree on the importance of this aspect, but they do not go beyond some rather unfocused general remarks on the celebration of national holidays in Algeria.¹³ Taking the annual celebrations of Bastille Day, France's best-known and longest-lasting national holiday, as an object for a case study, the present article seeks to examine in closer detail the symbolic transfers from the metropole to the colony. What did it mean to commemorate the 1789 storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution in an Algerian colonial space? To what extent did the national holiday become part of the assimilationist colonial project? And how was the metropolitan celebration adjusted to colonial realities? This article argues that while the organization of Bastille Day constituted an important means of creating a decidedly French (metropolitan) public in Algeria, it was also subject to specific local dynamics in the colonial context that shaped the celebration in appearance and in meaning.

This last point touches on the second major issue this article will address. The Bastille Day of 1939 in Algeria exemplifies the tremendous force with which official political symbolism and the initiatives of diverse actors might clash. This specific event, I will argue, signaled the climax of multiple attempts to adapt the French national holiday to Algeria's colonial context. As suggested by the account above, these efforts at appropriation emerged from opposed and competing parties, ranging from public officials and decision makers to non-official, oppositional, or even banned groups. In addition, the ceremonial activities were not limited to the French population but also prominently included other factions of colonial society. On the one hand, there were the non-French settlers, an important but generally underprivileged component of the European settler population, sometimes in open conflict with the dominating *Français de*

¹¹ See Patricia Lorcin, "Rome and France in Africa: Recovering Colonial Algeria's Latin Past," *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (2002): 295–329; Nabila Oulebsir, *Les usages du patrimoine: Monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie, 1830–1930* (Paris, 2004). The most important figure of this "Latinist" discourse was the novelist Louis Bertrand (1866–1941).

¹² See esp. James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

¹³ Gosnell, *Politics of Frenchness*, 82–84; Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914* (Seattle, 2008), 234–36.

France; they are represented in the present case by the Italians in Constantine. On the other, there was the Algerian Muslim population, the colonized who made up the majority of colonial society. Subject to a system of social, judicial, and political discrimination, they are represented in the present case by some elites allied with the colonial power as well as by different parts of the heterogeneous Muslim protest movement, ranging from moderate reform-oriented to clearly nationalist activists.

Bastille Day thus holds an analytical value that has hardly been exploited in the current historiography on Algerian cultural history, given its tendency to focus on the emergence of collective “identities” (mainly among the settler community).¹⁴ The activities around Bastille Day not only attest to a high degree of participation by both non-elites among the settler population and Muslim colonial subjects:¹⁵ in addition, they allow us to assemble groups of actors from the colonizing and the colonized population alike—groups that have often been analyzed separately—within a common framework.¹⁶ The present article is thus less concerned with the construction of (supposedly) coherent collective identities or (supposedly) solid hegemonic patterns—both dominant themes in recent cultural studies on colonialism—than with localized social activity and the (often conflict-ridden) interactions between different factions of colonial society. How did these commemorations unite and divide the diverse populations in the settler colony? How were they used by various groups in their efforts to emerge in public spaces? I maintain that celebrations of the national holiday can be drawn upon to analyze changing intercommunal relations and interactions within Algerian colonial society in a common analytical framework. In this article, then, I will consider the activities surrounding Bastille Day as one set of social practices that establish and mark a shared public space—one in which different components of colonial society were able to negotiate and define their relationships (and places) within that emerging society. Like recent studies on Algerian nationalism pointing to the intersections of French and Algerian political cultures, the present article seeks to propose a more nuanced and dynamic vision

¹⁴ For a general critique of the “identity” concept in colonial studies, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 59–90.

¹⁵ On Algerian agency and reactions to colonial rule, see, e.g., Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Popular Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley, 1994); Allan Christelow, “Oral, Manuscript, and Printed Expressions of Historical Consciousness in Colonial Algeria,” *Africana Journal* 15 (1990): 258–75; Peter von Sivers, “Indigenous Administrators in Algeria, 1846–1914: Manipulation and Manipulators,” *Maghreb Review* 5–6 (1982): 116–21.

¹⁶ On historiography, see Edmund Burke III, “Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib,” in *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (Basingstoke, 2000), 17–34; Michel Le Gall and Kenneth Perkins, eds., *The Maghrib in Question: Essays in History and Historiography* (Austin, TX, 1997).

of colonial society without excluding the violent or hierarchical dimensions of colonial rule.¹⁷ More generally, this piece illustrates an approach to cultural history that takes into account social practices and political struggles, and seeks to avoid positions that reduce symbolic political displays to mere "public transcripts" maintained only by and for those in power or that, on the contrary, declare them to be the expression of an all-encompassing collective identity beyond the reach of strategic manipulation.¹⁸

This article will examine the connections between cultural transfers, creation of public space, and changing negotiations of rule in colonial Algeria, based on empirical evidence from the annual Bastille Day celebrations in Algerian towns and cities from the time of their inauguration in 1880 until the end of the Third Republic in 1940. I will address these connections in three stages. In the first section of the article, I will discuss in general terms what it actually meant to celebrate the French national holiday in colonial Algeria. Then, in the second and third sections, I will analyze the celebrations in connection with two fundamental areas of conflict within Franco-Algerian colonial society that surfaced in two different periods. Specifically, Section II deals with debates about the position of non-French settlers that peaked in the 1880s and 1890s, while Section III examines the increasing political mobilization of the Algerian populace during the interwar years, particularly the 1930s, as well as the concurrent public conflicts regarding changes in colonial rule. Both analyses demonstrate that while celebrations of the national holiday were intended to promote assimilation by creating an explicitly French public sphere, they were also subject to strong local and hence colonial dynamics that resulted in significant departures from practices in the metropole. As a consequence, the French national holiday became an important field of interaction and negotiation between various groups in the colony.

I. CELEBRATE—TO ASSIMILATE?

In France, the establishment of Bastille Day as a national holiday was mainly connected with severe conflicts surrounding the legitimate political system: the

¹⁷ For a close analysis of Algerian nationalist political culture and its connections with colonial politics, see Omar Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad: Histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens* (Paris, 1995); McDougall, *Culture of Nationalism*; James McDougall, "The Fetishism of Identity: Empire, Nation and the Politics of Subjectivity in Algeria," in *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony*, ed. John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani (Basingstoke, 2007), 49–71.

¹⁸ To James Scott, official celebrations are nothing but forms of "self-hypnosis" on the part of elites and do not have any serious impact on the governed masses. See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1990), esp. 45–107.

Third French Republic.¹⁹ In the four decades before its proclamation in September 1870, France had gone through three fundamental regime changes, two of them induced by revolution, the other by a coup d'état. And in the first years of the Third Republic, the regime itself had to face massive internal opposition. It was only in the late 1870s that, enabled by power and majority shifts, pro-republican politicians were able to attain leading positions in the state. The adoption of the fourteenth of July as an official national holiday in 1880—ten years after the regime change—expressed the Republic's increasing stability. The new national holiday was linked to a broad set of measures designed to permeate the entire national territory as a republican space. The symbolic politics encompassed the adoption of the *Marseillaise* as the national anthem (1879) and the virtual flood of Marianne busts and statues of the Republic that entered public buildings and public spaces in the 1880s. These were accompanied by major political projects, such as the introduction of compulsory public education.²⁰

Comparable to its development in metropolitan France, the republican national holiday provided a means of integration into national and republican territory in Algeria as well. However, on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the national holiday was being introduced into a country whose status as a French province was neither self-evident nor certain. For it was actually only with the republican victory in 1870 that the assimilation doctrine triumphed in France's policy toward Algeria. In the interest of "assimilation," the new regime broke with the predominance of the military. It declared the colony an integral part of French national territory and applied elements of the metropolitan administrative system, notably the departmental structure and communal law, to Northern Algeria. In the institutional context, assimilation entailed a more active participation by the European population in metropolitan and Algerian politics, while enhancing the already-strict control over the local Muslim population. The 1884

¹⁹ For the meaning and context of Bastille Day see Christian Amalvi, "Le 14-juillet: Du dies irae à Jour de fête," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984–92), 1:421–72; Ihl, *Fête républicaine*; Olivier Ihl, "Des fêtes sans Dieu: L'enjeu de la laïcité dans les célébrations républicaines de la Troisième République," in *Lieux de mémoire et identités nationales*, ed. Pim den Boer (Amsterdam, 1993), 227–35; Rosemonde Sanson, *Les 14 juillet, 1789–1975, fête et conscience nationale* (Paris, 1976). For the history of the Third Republic see Maurice Agulhon, *La République*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1992).

²⁰ The classic, yet somewhat one-dimensional analysis of these processes comes from Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA, 1976). On the history of republican symbolic representations, see, in particular, Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines 1789 à 1880* (Paris, 1979), *Marianne au pouvoir: L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris, 1989), and *Les métamorphoses de Marianne: L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris, 2001).

communal law—a building block of republican municipal autonomy in France—served particularly to fortify local settler democracy in Algeria; at the same time, it tightened the colonial grip on the Algerian population by strengthening settler domination within the municipal councils and bringing huge Algerian districts (*douars*) under their control.²¹

The revolutionary state symbolism and the new national holiday constituted an excellent tool for the Franco-Algerian local authorities and organizers to foster, at least at a symbolic level, the country’s (institutional) assimilation and to manifest its close ties to the metropole. Numerous local authorities started remarkably early—some even in the 1870s—to provide their cityscapes with important republican symbols.²² They were encouraged by the local press, which imagined that “soon every town, every suburb, every municipality, will have on its public square the bust of the Republic of the *communes*, the monument of the liberty and the communal autonomy”²³—as well as tighter colonial rule in Algerian *communes*. Even though exact numbers cannot be determined, there is evidence that the North Algerian departments had a higher density of public Marianne busts before World War I than did many metropolitan regions.²⁴

Studies of Algerian colonial culture, if they refer at all to Bastille Day in the colony, tend to see its function as such an overseas simulation of the metropole.²⁵ And indeed, one encounters a great deal of empirical evidence for such a claim. In 1880, for example, the (Francophone) local press frenetically hailed the idea of a unitary national holiday, with some newspapers suggesting that this holiday would be about nothing less than the unity of colony and metropole:

Given its status [as the living image of France], it is up to the colony to manifest its feelings by joining in the delight of the metropole to which it is connected in the most sacred of bonds. . . . For this event, almost all of the Algerian villages have organized

²¹ See Claude Collot, *Les institutions de l’Algérie durant la période coloniale (1830–1962)* (Paris, 1987), 93–103. On the post-1884 municipal councils as major actor of commemoration in Algeria, see Jan C. Jansen, “1880–1914: Une ‘statuomanie’ à l’algérienne,” in Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l’Algérie*, 261–65.

²² See, e.g., Oran: [City Council] Sessions of July 17, 1879, September 14, 1879, and May 4, 1880, ABO, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville d’Oran, R11 (1878–79), 112v, 153v; R12 (1879–81), 107v; Constantine: [City Council] Sessions of December 3, 1878, August 16, 1879, and July 16, 1879, September 12 and 20, 1879, ABC, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville de Constantine, R16 (1878–79), 2r–v, 101r; R 17 (1879–80), 2v–3r, 5v–6r, 8v–9r; Tlemcen: Félix Dessoliers to Minister of Education, Cults, and Fine Arts, July 19, 1882; Prefect, Oran, to Minister of Education, Cults, and Fine Arts, ANF, F/21/4884.

²³ *Le Tell*, March 1, 1884.

²⁴ See Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, 209–20, esp. 215.

²⁵ See, in particular, Gosnell, *Politics of Frenchness*, 82–84; Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City*, 234–36.

celebrations that in a unitary spirit bind the hearts of the Frenchmen who on both shores of the Mediterranean celebrate a date reminding them of the triumph of freedom over tyranny. . . . We highly appreciate such generous enthusiasm that unites in a fellowship of ideas (*communion d'idées*) the two parts of this large family separated by the sea.²⁶

Looking at how the celebrations were observed in Algerian cities and villages similarly suggests the assimilatory function of Bastille Day. From the first year onward, particularly in the bigger cities, local organizers did their utmost to follow the metropolitan models as precisely as possible, especially that of Paris.²⁷ Their programs approximated the guidelines that structured the holiday in France, and these hardly changed over the years to come. The morning was reserved for official events and receptions, with a military parade and sometimes a parade of civil associations (as in Oran). The afternoon was taken up with a distribution of supplies to the needy and a series of public events and amusements, such as concerts, performances, contests, and more receptions. In the interwar years, these events were flanked by demonstrations of political groups and veteran's associations. In the evening, balls, illuminations, and fireworks closed the day.

Adding to the schedule were unplanned (yet still ritualized) events that suggested that the celebrations of July 14 stimulated ties between colony and metropole. Thus, the Algerian *communes* witnessed the same conflicts that, particularly in the first years, accompanied the holiday in metropolitan France: opposition to the lay ceremony on the part of the Catholic clergy, notorious rivalries between local music clubs, and both local and national political struggles.²⁸

Yet it would be simplistic to stop at this point and content ourselves with the assessment that Bastille Day was adopted and celebrated in Algeria. The follow-

²⁶ *L'Echo d'Oran*, June 29, 1880. See also *La Vigie algérienne*, July 14, 1880; *L'Akhbar*, July 14, 1880.

²⁷ For the typical schedule of the celebrations in France see Amalvi, "14-juillet," 439–44; Ihl, *Fête républicaine*, 134–79. The schedule of the celebrations in the Algerian cities has been reconstructed by examining the annual newspaper and police and intelligence reports. See, for example, on the celebrations in Algiers during the 1880s alone, *L'Akhbar*, July 15/16, 1880; July 15/16, 1881; July 15/16, 1882; July 16/17, 1883; July 15/16, 1885; July 15/16, 1886; July 15–17, 1887; July 15/16, 1888; July 15/16, 1889; *La Vigie algérienne*, July 15/16, 1880; July 15/16, 1881; July 15/16, 1882; July 15/16, 1883; July 15/16, 1884; July 15/16, 1885; July 15/16, 1886; July 15/16, 1887; July 15/16, 1888; July 15/16, 1889; *La Solidarité*, July 16, 1880; July 16, 1881; July 16, 1883; *Le Petit Colon*, July 16, 1885; July 18, 1888; *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 16, 1888; July 16, 1889.

²⁸ See, e.g., on conflicts with the clergy, Catholic Priest, Tiarat, to Prefect, Oran, July 15, 1880, ANOM, Archives de la Préfecture d'Oran (APO) 92/1U/2; *Le Petit Colon*, July 27, 1880; on conflicts between music clubs, see Procureur-général, Algiers, to Minister of Justice, October 30, 1906, ANF, BB/18/2337/2, dossier 1263A06.

ing three considerations suggest otherwise. First, the assimilating and unifying impact the holiday had in Algeria does not fundamentally differ from what can be observed in other—metropolitan—French provinces in this period.²⁹ In France, too, the supporters of the new regime consciously tried to suppress local or regional peculiarities behind a uniform national symbolism. Given the characteristics of the Algerian celebrations described above, one may assume that this dimension was more pronounced in colonial Algeria; yet it is hard to tell where the kind of national standardization that can also be found in the metropole ends and where an overcompensation prompted by the colonial context starts. Second, research has repeatedly shown that the diffusion of national symbols and rituals in nineteenth-century Europe cannot be conceived of as imposing a consistent pattern or as "acculturating" the provinces to a dominant center.³⁰ Rather, the elements of national political cultures were fitted into local contexts, combined with regional traditions, and transformed. Seminal works by Marc Michel and Eric Jennings examining French national holidays in interwar Senegal and Vichy Indochina, respectively, show that this principle also applies in colonial settings.³¹ Third, research has pointed out that rituals, despite their repetitive nature, undergo changes over time. Taking all these aspects into account suggests that we should take a closer look at actual practices to reveal the specific dynamics of Algeria's colonial situation behind the façade of the identical.

The nonmetropolitan context of Bastille Day in Algeria manifested itself most obviously in its purely physical conditions, revealing Algeria as a "province" of its own kind. The celebrations took place in the hottest period of the year, which often meant that they could not be observed widely, particularly in the interior of the country. In Constantine, for instance, the day was often marked by empty streets rather than general public activity.³² In addition, cities with a precolonial history had a preponderance of Arab and Ottoman buildings, something that obviously affected the celebrations. This was true even for Algiers, for despite its ambitious "modern" architecture, it was the New Mosque (*al-jām' i al-jadīd*) at

²⁹ See nn. 20 and 21.

³⁰ On this point as well as the third mentioned below, see, e.g., Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Jörn Leonhard, eds., *Nationalismen in Europa: West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2001); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt et al., eds., *Regional and National Identities in Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries* (The Hague, 1998); Charlotte Tacke, *Denkmal im sozialen Raum: Nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1995).

³¹ See Marc Michel, "'Mémoire officielle,' discours et pratique coloniale: Le 14 juillet et le 11 novembre au Sénégal entre les deux guerres," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 77 (1990): 145–58; Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940–1944* (Stanford, CA, 2001), 215–23.

³² See, e.g., *L'Indépendant de Constantine*, July 16, 1892; July 16, 1893.

the Place du Gouvernement that monopolized public attention during the illuminations, having been admired as a “masterwork,” a “palace of Thousand and One Nights,” and a “jewel.”³³

Most important, the national holiday of July 14 was introduced into an Algerian social context that was significantly different—in its demographic and power structures as well as in its cultural confrontations—from that of the metropole. The Frenchmen whose national holiday was being officially celebrated comprised a ruling minority of immigrants—a minority that did not even constitute a numerical majority within the European settler community. As a consequence, the celebrations were characterized by certain adjustments and shifts of meaning, two of which were particularly conspicuous. First, in colonial Algeria the issue of national sovereignty clearly outweighed the issue of the legitimacy of the form of government—the republic—that was central to the Bastille Day celebrations in metropolitan France. In other words, in a country where French citizens constituted a clear but dominant minority, it was imperative for them to emphasize that Algeria was a part of France and that they themselves were French. Second, the French Revolution of 1789, celebrated as a founding myth, was universalized more strongly in Algeria than in the metropole, so that it was simultaneously integrated into the colonial “civilizing mission” and used as a basis for subversive demands that revolutionary principles be implemented for the colonized population. These two major tendencies will be further elaborated below—first in an analysis of conflicts with non-French settlers in the 1880s and 1890s, which primarily addresses the issue of national sovereignty, then in an examination of the increasing mobilization of Algerian actors, particularly in the interwar years, which reveals how intensely the “civilizing mission” was negotiated in the context of Bastille Day.

II. DO BULLS HAVE TO DIE FOR FRANCE?

In the 1880s and 1890s, the first decades after the adoption of Bastille Day, it was the behavior of non-French Europeans toward the national holiday, rather than that of the colonized population, that required the attention of organizers and observers. Since French dominance among the settlers was not yet consolidated, this issue was crucial.³⁴ For quite a long time, non-French southern Europeans—mainly from Spain and Italy—constituted not merely an important

³³ See, e.g., *La Vigie algérienne*, July 15/16, 1882; July 15/16, 1896; *L'Akhbar*, July 15/16, 1885; *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 16, 1888; July 16, 1891; July 16, 1896; July 16, 1899; July 17, 1906; July 15, 1922; July 15, 1929; *Feuillets d'El-Djézaïr* 4 (1912): 81–82; *L'Echo d'Alger*, July 15, 1919; July 14, 1920.

³⁴ On the “foreigner issue,” see Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie*, 118–33; Gosnell, *Politics of Frenchness*, 140–217.

group but in fact the majority of European settlers in Algeria. As official colonization programs had failed to create French majorities, colonial authorities sought to tackle the problem by facilitating the automatic naturalization of non-French Europeans born in Algeria from the late 1880s onward. The danger associated with non-French settlers and their possible integration ("absorption") gave rise to numerous polemics between administrators, politicians, demographers, and the French and Franco-Algerian public. The situation in Western Algeria was deemed particularly critical, as some regions were firmly in Spanish hands.³⁵ Some observers even felt the regional capital of Oran was a lost cause: "Oran has become a Spanish city in which the Spaniards rule, speak with an imperious tone and threaten, when they are drunk, to throw the Frenchmen into the sea."³⁶ Oran's proximity to Spain and the fact that it had a significant Spanish past made the Spanish presence, in the eyes of many regional representatives, a serious threat to French national sovereignty. The Spaniards, as the deputy Eugène Étienne saw it, were just waiting for an opportunity to "appropriate all the local administrations and morally prepare the annexation of the department of Oran by Spain."³⁷

The concern about national sovereignty in Algeria did not leave the French national holiday unaffected, given that it was the very symbol of the French claim. In the first decades, the massive presence of non-French Europeans had a noticeable impact on the organization as well as the coverage of the July 14 celebrations. In this context, an entire series of conflicts emerged that revealed how difficult it was for the colonial government and French settlers to maintain a public position of sovereignty and sustain it against the non-French settlers. Spanish-dominated Oran proved literally to be the arena for one of the most significant battles for sovereignty that took place in this era: a conflict over the staging of bullfights. An arena had been opened in 1888 by a Spanish entrepreneur, and many bullfights took place around July 14. Though not part of the official schedule, these attracted far more spectators than any other ceremonial activity. Sometimes the corridas constituted the most important or even the only attraction of the day.³⁸

The form of the corridas regularly raised arguments between those involved: the Spanish organizers, the French communal and central authorities, and the Spanish and French portions of the populace. These disputes focused on the issue of whether a bullfight should end with the bull's death, as practiced in

³⁵ For the Spaniards in Oran, see Jean-Jacques Jordi, *Les Espagnols en Oranie 1830–1914: Histoire d'une migration* (Montpellier, 1986).

³⁶ *La Vigie algérienne*, June 13, 1882.

³⁷ "Rapport parlementaire sur l'Algérie, 1887," quoted in Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie*, 122.

³⁸ See, e.g., *L'Echo d'Oran*, July 15, 1888; July 15, 1912.

Spain, or by a mere simulation (*simulacre*) of the killing. In fact, the French ministry of the interior put forward an interpretation of the 1850 French law of animal protection (Loi Grammont) that would prohibit killing the bull.³⁹ For their part, the organizers had no intention of respecting the ban on killing, choosing to invite mainly Spanish matadors, who in turn were cheered on by a predominantly Spanish audience. The procedures that were adopted, based on those used at some French bullfight sites (e.g., the one in Nîmes), allowed a certain margin for such misconduct: to prevent civil unrest the local authorities often granted special permits or ignored violations of the regulations. Thus the killings became an integral part of the bullfights in Oran.⁴⁰ Tolerated by the communal authorities, this practice evoked massive criticism among local societies for the protection of animals, the superior (prefectural) administration, and parts of the French public in Algeria. In the 1880s and 1890s especially, the insistent efforts of animal-rights activists to ban the “barbaric” customs of the *corrida* regularly led to the total prohibition of bullfights and the shutdown of the arenas by prefectural order. Yet pressure exerted by the organizers and communal authorities just as often caused the prohibition to be revoked.

While it would seem obvious to link these conflicts to the “foreigner issue” in French Algeria, we should again be careful about jumping to conclusions. Similar debates about bullfights and prohibitions of killing the animals took place at the same time in metropolitan France, where people began to discover the *corrida* as a popular and lucrative spectacular. This was particularly true for southern France (the Midi), for example in Nîmes, where authentic bullfight traditions had developed. Here the conflicts sometimes even led to violence, which was closely followed by the public in Oran.⁴¹ As a result, the *corrida* functioned as a medium of regional self-assertion against the increasing influence and regulation of everyday life emerging from Paris.

In Algeria, however, this conflict became amalgamated with the nationality issue among the settlers and, hence, with the issue of national sovereignty within the colony. As in metropolitan France, there were clearly Frenchmen who also supported the Spanish bullfights in Algeria. Yet the bullfight issue merged into the controversies about the status of “foreigners” in French Algeria. Evidence

³⁹ For the Loi Grammont and the conflicts around the bullfights in France, see Michel Laforcade, *La tauromachie dans le sud-ouest de la France: Contribution à l'étude d'une tradition locale* (Paris, 1984).

⁴⁰ For these disputes see the huge dossier in ANOM, APO 92//3150. For the first years alone, see: Society for the Protection of Animals, Oran, to Prefect, Oran, March 30, 1888; Prefect, Oran, to Governor-General, August 7, 1888; Prefect, Oran, to Governor-General, August 22, 1889; Mayor of Oran to Prefect, Oran, October 30, 1889; *Arrêté* of Prefect, Oran, May 27, 1890.

⁴¹ See *L'Echo d'Oran*, June 16, 1884; July 1, 1884; July 8, 1889. For the debates about bullfighting in France, see Laforcade, *Tauromachie*.

for this can be found in the reactions to the very first application to build a bullfight arena in Oran, which was filed in 1879 by a Spaniard, Miguel Lopez. While the mayor of the city found it "reasonable, considering the great number of Spaniards who live in Oran, to respect their preferences (*goûts*),"⁴² the prefect vetoed the project for similar considerations: "I do not deem it politically clever, particularly in the present case, to stage exciting games and thereby awaken the character of a population that is essentially mobile given the multiplicity of our relations with Spain. Nor [is it wise] given its violence and its fits of anger, to honor [its] customs . . . which our civilization increasingly rejects quite categorically, as does the law itself."⁴³ The reigning authorities did not abandon their resistance until 1887, when they granted permission for the construction of a bullfight arena in Oran.⁴⁴

But the most impressive evidence is provided by the events themselves, as could be observed on July 14, 1889. On this day, the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution, a huge corrida took place in Oran.⁴⁵ In the run-up to it, the organizers announced that the Spanish ensemble of the Niños Sevillanos would kill all six bulls in honor of the centennial. For their part, both the opponents of the bullfights and the French prefect urged those celebrating to refrain from killing the bulls. The organizers' refusal to give in led to severe repercussions. The municipal representatives decided to stay away from the event, and they refused to grant the requisite ad hoc permit for such killings. An enormous audience watched the conflict play out: between 8,000 and 10,000 people, far more than 10 percent of the total population of Oran, surged to what was the only attraction of the afternoon program. When at the end of his fight the fifth matador, like his predecessors, vainly pleaded for permission to kill the bull, the situation escalated. Some of the spectators started to fling stones, bottles, and even benches into the arena and then assaulted the official grandstand. While the spectators' rage was increasingly leveled against the walls of the arena and the gendarmes who came by, they took other actions that were even more shocking

⁴² [City Council] Session of May 12, 1879, ABO, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville d'Oran, R11 (1878–79), 84r–v. See also [City Council] Session of February 19, 1881, ABO, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville d'Oran, R12 (1879–81), 258v–259r.

⁴³ Prefect, Oran, to Mayor of Oran, April 30, 1881, ANOM, APO 92/3S/5. See also Prefect, Oran, to Mayor of Oran, June 25, 1879; Prefect, Oran, to Mayor of Oran, July 11, 1879, ANOM, APO 92/3S/5.

⁴⁴ [City Council] Session of May 21, 1887 and July 2, 1887, ABO, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville d'Oran, R19 (1886–88), 383–84, 354, 357–58; Prefect, Oran, to Mayor of Oran, July 18, 1887, ANOM, APO 92//3150.

⁴⁵ For the events in the run-up to the corrida and on July 14, 1889, see Prefect, Oran, to Governor-General, July 14, 15, 18, and 22, 1889, ANOM, APO 92//3150; *L'Echo d'Oran*, July 15–20, 1889; *Le Petit Africain*, July 16–20, 1889; *La Vigie algérienne*, July 16–18, 1889; *L'Akhbar*, July 15–17, 1889.

to French observers: French flags were torn down and trampled under foot while Spanish ones were waved triumphantly—all this on the centenary of the French Revolution. “One had the impression of witnessing the demolition of the Bastille, the anniversary of which was being celebrated.”⁴⁶ In Algiers, rumors circulated that even the city hall of Oran had been destroyed.⁴⁷ It took the military unit that was summoned one and a half hours to end the civil unrest.

Such violent conflicts surrounding the practice of the *corrida* in Oran significantly receded as World War I approached—a clear sign of the decline in national tensions among the European settlers since the turn of the century. Yet the struggles over the *corridas* did not disappear entirely. They recurred regularly, as in the mid-1930s when the Spanish Civil War drove many republican refugees to Western Algeria, where mistrust toward the Spanish expatriate community was on the rise again.⁴⁸

III. DID THE BASTILLE ALSO FALL FOR THE “INDIGÈNES”?

Over the years, the colonial relationship—in the sense of the power relations between the colonial power and the colonized population—took center stage in Bastille Day celebrations. Since the turn of the century, the French “revolutionary heritage” and “civilizing mission” were increasingly referenced by a variety of participants in Algeria.⁴⁹ This development had its origins in a variety of partially antagonistic factors, in a complex interaction between the “opening up” of French history and the French national holiday vis-à-vis the colonized population and the growing appropriation of July 14 by Algerian actors. This interaction can already be observed at the start of the twentieth century, and its dynamics and complexity—constantly on the increase in the interwar years—reached their high point in the years before World War II.

“Civilizing mission” and “revolutionary heritage” (1880s–1920s)

Let me turn first to the role played by the French organizers. Even though their attention was largely directed toward the non-French settlers at the end of the nineteenth century, they never entirely lost sight of the colonized population. The degree to which the celebrations were related to the Algerian (“indigenous”) populace strongly depended on the demographic circumstances of the place in question. Among the major cities this was especially true of Constantine, the only city that never had a European majority. In the 1880s it was pri-

⁴⁶ *Le Petit Africain*, July 16, 1889.

⁴⁷ *L’Akhbar*, July 15/16, 1889.

⁴⁸ *Arrêté* by the Municipality of Oran, June 20, 1936, ABO, L49.

⁴⁹ On the concept of “civilizing missions,” see Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Zivilisierungsmissionen: Imperiale Weltverbesserungen seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz, 2005).

marily (but not exclusively) here that the colonized population was explicitly addressed in the celebrations along with the "foreigners." When in 1889 the city council of Constantine trimmed the budget for the celebrations, the biggest local newspaper accused it of jeopardizing European supremacy:

With a stroke of the pen, Mayor Mercier has erased this expense he considers to be useless. But does this man, in the eyes of many a reputable scholar in Arabic who knows the *Arab soul*, not know at all the beneficial effect our patriotic celebrations have on the indigenous population? The cannon blasts, the parade, the music, the pyrotechnic wonders—they all show that we are a large, strong, and wealthy nation. Is this the right moment to break with our traditions and to cut back on such expenses? In the face of our pale communal paper lanterns, the parsimonious distribution of provisions, and the absence of the customary fireworks, won't the Arabs in their simple minds be induced to believe that the French are in decline?⁵⁰

For similar reasons, there were a number of scattered initiatives after the late 1880s, and not only in Constantine, that aimed at supplying the "indigenous" neighborhoods with a small portion of the celebration budget.⁵¹

Such debates over the formal involvement of the Algerian population took place periodically. These debates could not be separated, however, from the question of what meaning the national holiday and the history it commemorated might have for Algerians. Since the 1880s, a variety of voices had publicly addressed the issue of how Bastille Day could be integrated into the "colonial achievements" in Algeria. This touched on something that went far beyond the question of the formal status of the "indigenous" population in the celebrations: at issue was how French (revolutionary) history could be reconciled with the actual colonial situation. As a result, those who commented on this issue cannot be associated with a distinct political position. They ranged from journalists of both left- and right-wing newspapers, administrators, and anti-Jewish mayors to activists for a more liberal colonial policy.

In their reports and speeches, these people imagined the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution as events in the universal history of civilization rather than as mere facts of French national history: "14 July is not only the celebration of the Fatherland and Freedom: it also commemorates the emancipation of souls, the liberation of the oppressed, civilization and progress. All peoples can celebrate it with us because everyone reaps the benefits that the principles of 1789 spread all over the world."⁵² A quasi-Jacobin interpretation of the Rev-

⁵⁰ *L'Indépendant de Constantine*, July 14, 1899; original emphasis.

⁵¹ See, e.g., [City Council] Sessions of June 2, 1897, and June 17, 1897, ABC, Registres des délibérations du Conseil Municipal de la ville de Constantine, R37 (1897), 48, 64–67; [City Council] Session of July 5, 1900, *Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville d'Alger*, 1900, 222–23.

⁵² *L'Echo d'Oran*, July 11, 1892.

olution became manifest here. In this view, the storming of the Bastille marked the beginning of the universal liberation of mankind, and it was France's mission to disseminate that liberation across the world. The French "civilizing mission" in Algeria was thus deemed part of the French Revolution, even its logical continuation, for "nowhere are the blessings of the Revolution appreciated more strongly than in the country which for so long a time was soiled with piracy, slavery, and barbarism."⁵³ Seen through the prism of the "civilizing mission," the Revolution could serve to legitimize hierarchies and power structures within the Algerian colonial society because it indicated not only the universality of its principles but also the preeminence of the French population: "It is the holiday of freedom we are celebrating today, and freedom knows neither nations nor races. . . . Nonetheless, we are not wrong in celebrating it with a special emphasis. It does not belong to our history alone, but it remains our history's distinctive honor."⁵⁴ This universalized conception of the French Revolution was thus deeply marked by a tension between (imperial) inclusion and differentiation, one of the main tensions of imperial politics in general.⁵⁵

But linking "revolution" and a "civilizing mission" did not necessarily imply affirming the colonial status quo. This can be seen in the increased adoption of Bastille Day by the emergent (and heterogeneous) Algerian protest and opposition movements. Urban and "gallicized" (*francisés*) intellectuals and educated circles were the first to organize themselves after 1900. Often calling themselves "Young Algerians" (*Jeunes Algériens*), they fought, along with their "indigenophile" French comrades, for a reform of the colonial system and the dismantling of systematic racial discrimination.⁵⁶ From the outset, July 14 held a prominent place in this new movement and its (emerging) public sphere. Thus, the very first Young Algerian paper, *El Misbah*, published in Oran, referred to "enthusiastic" Bastille Day celebrations in Muslim neighborhoods and thanked

⁵³ *L'Akhbar*, July 14, 1885; July 15, 1894.

⁵⁴ *L'Akhbar*, July 15, 1895.

⁵⁵ See Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley, 1997), 1–56, esp. 10–11; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 11–12.

⁵⁶ For the Young Algerians, see, in particular, Charles-Robert Ageron, "Le mouvement 'jeune-algérien' de 1900 à 1923," in *Etudes maghrébines: Mélanges Charles-André Julien* (Paris, 1964): 217–43; John Ruedy, "Chérif Benhabylès and Ferhat Abbas: Case Studies in the Contradictions of the Mission Civilisatrice," *Historical Reflections* 28 (2002): 185–201; Ahmed Koulakssis and Gilbert Meynier, *L'Emir Khaled, premier za'im? Identité algérienne et colonialisme français* (Paris, 1987); Zakya Daoud and Benjamin Stora, *Ferhat Abbas, une autre Algérie* (Algiers, 1995) and the articles by Julien Fromage ("L'expérience des 'Jeunes Algériens' et l'émergence du militantisme modern en Algérie [1880–1919]," 238–44, and "Le docteur Bendjelloul et la Fédéra-

the city council for providing the funding.⁵⁷ In 1912, another paper organized a two- to three-week trip to Paris. The paper did not provide the full itinerary of the trip, but it did mention its high point: the Bastille Day celebrations in Paris.⁵⁸

The significant attention paid to the national holiday was just as political as the above-quoted statements of French settlers, journalists, and colonial administrators. In fact, the Young Algerians related, sometimes literally, to the meaning of the “revolutionary heritage” in colonial Algeria, but they turned it around politically and integrated it into their oppositional program. This was part of a strategy that can be described as *subversive appropriation* and that profoundly characterized their program: they adopted the concept of “assimilation” and the promises of equality and progress inherent in the French “civilizing mission” but then directed them against the system of colonial domination, thereby fighting colonial domination from within using its own legitimizing myth.⁵⁹ They did not aim at ending “French Algeria”; instead, they sought reforms toward equality—reforms that in the end would have undermined the fundamental framework of colonial rule.

This strategy became relevant for the politics of symbolism insofar as many Young Algerians were capable of virtuosically appropriating fundamental elements and *lieux de mémoire* of French political culture and (re)positioning them against colonialism. Bastille Day and the “revolutionary heritage” stood at the center of their activities. The Revolution and its principles of “Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity” comprised the core of an idealized image of France, in the name of which many Young Algerians made their demands. This image clearly contrasted with colonial domination. Many leading Young Algerians, such as Emir Khaled, the main figure in the first postwar years, and Ferhat Abbas, one of the most important leaders in the 1930s, based their struggle on this gap between the “real” France and colonial realities in Algeria.⁶⁰ While the colony seemed, from this perspective, deeply “un-French,” or even anti-French,

tion des élus musulmans,” 398–401) and by Malika Rahal (“Ferhat Abbas, de l’assimilationnisme au nationalisme, 443–46) in Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l’Algérie*. On the reception of French revolutionary thinking among the Young Algerians, see Guy Pervillé, “Les principes de 1789 et le mouvement national algérien,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 76 (1989): 231–37.

⁵⁷ *El Misbah*, July 22, 1904.

⁵⁸ See *El Hack*, March 16–23, 1912; May 11–18, 1912.

⁵⁹ This, according to James Scott, is one of the general “weapons of the weak”; see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 317, 338, and *Arts of Resistance*, 70–107.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Ferhat Abbas, *De la colonie vers la province: Le Jeune Algérien* (1931; Paris, 1982), 46, 132–34, 142; *L’Ikdam*, July 28, 1922. See also Ben Ali Fékar, “La représentation des Musulmans algériens,” *Revue du monde musulman* 3 (1909): 19–22, esp. 21. More generally on this strategy, for example, Daoud and Stora, *Ferhat Abbas*, 17, 81–85; McDougall, *Culture of Nationalism*, 60–66.

the role of the “true” revolutionary France fell upon the metropole. What was completely elided was the colonial potential inherent in the revolutionary universalism of French values that, as we saw, many French speakers and commentators made reference to. By the same token, the revolutionary principles cited were meant to transform colonial rule into a positive “civilizing mission”: “We are no longer foreigners; we are no Frenchmen, but subjects. That is to say: We are diminished individuals compared to the European who settled in our country. The France of 1789 is aware of this and, loyal to its ideal of freedom, facing the paradoxical situation, is transforming its rule into a civilizing mission, while other nations are still making appeals to hatred.”⁶¹

This contrast between the “true” and the “false” France frequently merged into a historicizing interpretation of Algerian reality that Ferhat Abbas, in retrospect, dismissed as a fundamental “phantasm” of his generation.⁶² The ancien régime and the situation in France in 1789 served as a backdrop against which the colonial situation could be described and interpreted. In Young Algerian texts, the discrimination that had to be overcome often functioned as “Bastille” or “citadel,” while the claims of the colonized population appeared as a “book of grievances” by the revolutionary “Third Estate.”⁶³ As a consequence, many Young Algerians posed as advocates of the heritage of 1789. They claimed to be “imbued with the ideas and great principles of the Revolution of 1789,” as expressed by Dr. Taïeb Morsly, one of their earliest representatives.⁶⁴ As successors to the revolutionaries, they should not give in to the colonialist “counter-revolution,” the massive opposition of settlers and colonial administration. Ferhat Abbas threatened in the 1920s, “Colonialism be warned! . . . The principles of 1789 are a ‘commodity’ (*denrée*) France contributes with its schools and universities. The day will come on which they could trigger a serious explosion.”⁶⁵

With the Popular Front to Revolution? (1930s)

July 14, 1936, witnessed such an “explosion.” Enormous celebrations and demonstrations of various political organizations marked this anniversary in almost all the cities and major towns in Algeria. Even though the sheer extent and intensity of the public mobilization hinted at an as yet unseen dimension, the real “revolutionary” role of this day was played by the Algerian population. The cel-

⁶¹ Abbas, *De la colonie vers la province*, 132.

⁶² Ferhat Abbas, *La nuit coloniale* (1962; Algiers, 2006), 89.

⁶³ See, for instance, one of the most important documents of Young Algerian intellectual production before World War I, Chérif Benhabylès, *L’Algérie française vue par un indigène* (Algiers, 1914), 63, 83.

⁶⁴ Article from *Le Républicain de Constantine*, quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1871–1919*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968), 2:1039. The date of April 13, 1910, given by Ageron is apparently not correct.

⁶⁵ Abbas, *De la colonie vers la province*, 162.

ebulatory processions of the leftist Popular Front parties in particular were virtually overrun by Algerian demonstrators.⁶⁶ In Algiers, with 8,000 people participating, they made up about one-third of the entire parade. In Oran, they comprised one-fifth (of about 30,000 people altogether). In Constantine, they even constituted a majority (3,000 out of 5,000). According to reports from other midsize cities like Orléansville and Philippeville, there were massive Popular Front processions there as well attended by hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Algerians. They often made up a large part, in some cases even the majority, of those marching in the parades. In addition, numerous Algerians joined celebrations organized by right-wing parties. These events heralded a whole series of “explosions” in the four years before the outbreak of World War II—events that characterized public life in French Algeria and that were closely connected to Bastille Day.

What, then, had happened? Since the 1920s, the Algerian political scene had undergone fundamental changes. An increased politicization had brought to life a range of Algerian opposition and protest movements, along with the Young Algerians, who now often appeared as *élus* (elected representatives) organizing themselves in regional *Fédérations des élus musulmans*. There were the Islamic reformists of the Algerian *salafiyya* known as the Association of Algerian Muslim ‘ulamā (scholars of Islam), claiming authority over the religious, linguistic, and cultural “identity” of the Algerian “people”; the nationalist *Étoile Nord-Africaine* (ENA), mobilizing for Algerian independence first among France’s North African migrant societies and, since the mid-1930s, in Algeria itself; and the Communist Party (Parti Communiste, or PC), wavering between pro-, reformist, and anti-colonialism and seeking, since the 1930s, to become an important “indigenous” party. These different groups not only aimed—each in its own way—at renegotiating colonial rule; they also had quite different ideas of how the “Algerian nation” or “Algerian people” was to be conceived.

The strategic appropriation of Bastille Day played an important role in mobilizing the Algerian population to participate in the renegotiation of “French Algeria.” As in previous decades, that mobilization was characterized by a complex interaction of various French and Algerian actors. Most important,

⁶⁶ The figures in the text are taken from police reports. For the processions on July 14, 1936, see Commissaire central, Algiers, to Director, Sécurité générale (SG), July 14, 1936; Report, Chief, Sûreté départementale (SD), Constantine, July 15, 1936; Chief, SD, Oran, to Prefect, Oran, July 15, 1936; Special report, Commissaire, Orléansville, July 15, 1936; Commissaire central, Philippeville, to Director, SG, July 15, 1936, ANOM, GGA 7cab/30; Report, SD, Constantine, July 15, 1936, ANOM, GGA 9H/48. The figures given by the different newspapers vary considerably, according to their political affiliations (see, e.g., *L’Echo d’Alger*, July 15, 1936; *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 16, 1936; *La Presse libre*, July 15, 1936; *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 15, 1936; *La Lutte sociale*, July 25, 1936; *La Dépêche de Constantine*, July 15, 1936).

certain developments in French policy and divisions in the political culture of the metropole left spaces that factions of the Algerian protest movements increasingly tried to fill. Since the mid-1930s, public life in France had been marked by a growing political polarization, with the emergence of radical mass movements at the extremes—the rightist leagues (Croix-du-Feu) and the leftist Popular Front (Front Populaire)—and the displacement of political struggle into the streets. Since 1935, Bastille Day had attracted enormous attention in all political camps, becoming a central occasion for testing the strength of the left and the right. Initially a Franco-French fight for the street, it generated a dynamic in Algeria that blurred the clear-cut lines between “European” and “indigenous” politics. The initial modest ambition to involve the Algerians in the national holiday had passed into an attempt to mobilize them. In light of the increasing competition and “massification” of politics, in some cases the French parties feverishly recruited Algerians for their mass demonstrations and celebration processions on July 14. The nationalist right wing proved no less interested than the left in enlisting Algerian “recruits.” Clear evidence for the pressure that was sometimes applied can be found in reports from the Commune Mixte of Sainte Barbe du Tlelat “that certain mayors, particularly the one of Tafaroui, urged the *indigènes* to participate in the march of the Rassemblement National and even obliged them to use the Hitler salute, that is, to raise and stretch the right arm, ‘in order to please the authorities.’”⁶⁷

Yet the most active of all was the PC. Immediately after July 14, 1935, the party’s papers expressed regret at the low level of Algerian Muslim participation in the celebratory parade. In view of the political competition, they wanted to take explicit steps to integrate them.⁶⁸ Such considerations were perfectly in line with the fundamental strategic changes the PC implemented in the following months. In order to strengthen its roots in the colony, more of the indigenous protest issues were integrated into its agenda, and in 1936 an “Algerian Communist Party” (Parti Communiste Algérien, or PCA) was founded. Afterward, the PC strove vigorously to persuade Algerian “workers” to participate in their 1936 Bastille Day processions. Their official appeal for the demonstration was designed to leave no doubt about the meaning of the date for the colonized population: “On July 14, 1936, the grandsons of the heroes of 1789 are embarrassed by this odious colonial regime that is turning Algeria into an immense

⁶⁷ Chief, SD, Oran, to Prefect, Oran, July 13, 1936, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30. See also the cases of Orléansville and Mostaganem, where in 1935 and 1936 a considerable part of the “indigenous” demonstrators, in the latter case led by Djilali Benthami, the brother of the well-known Young Algerian Belqacem Benthami, participated in the marches of French nationalists (*La Dépêche algérienne*, July 16, 1935; *La Lutte sociale*, August 1–15, 1935; Administrator of the Commune Mixte of Renault to Subprefect, Mostaganem, July 31, 1936, AWO, 1/9; Special Report, Commissaire, Orléansville, July 15, 1936, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 15, 1936).

⁶⁸ *La Lutte sociale*, August 1–15, 1935.

Bastille where a nation of six million souls is groaning.”⁶⁹ According to police records, the Communists on the local level clearly outdid their co-organizers (socialists, *radicaux*) with their “unrelenting and persistent propaganda”⁷⁰ urging Algerians to participate in the leftist march.

Despite their ideological differences, all political parties—from the communists to the rightist leagues—agreed that the Algerian recruits should play a merely passive role as a tacit mass. Larbi Tahrat of the Parti Socialiste, a (Muslim) speaker at the Popular Front demonstration on July 14, 1936, in Constantine, summarized this attitude succinctly when he urged the 3,000 Algerian Muslims present to have faith in the government and “to remain passive citizens of the colony, but to encourage the freedom fighters with their presence at the demonstrations.”⁷¹ This revealed a paternalistic attitude toward Algerians, a lack of regard for them as autonomous or mature political subjects, that was echoed in many other aspects of the celebrations as well. It emerged, for example, in the official slogans chosen for banners by local organizing committees of the Popular Front: most were extremely cautious in addressing colonial politics, instead concentrating on social policies that primarily concerned their European clientele.⁷² In addition, the press organs of each political camp referred to the high proportion of “women, children, and *indigènes*” in the processions of the opposing camp in order to minimize and ridicule their adversaries.⁷³ In 1936, the nationalists in particular seemed unable to decide whether to be delighted about the “indigenous patriots” in their own ranks or to be indignant about the participation of Algerians in the leftists’ processions. In their depictions, the marches of the Popular Front appeared to consist of hordes of “heterogeneous elements” not to be taken seriously, inasmuch as they primarily consisted of “some excited women,” “innocent little girls,” “innocent little boys,” and “some accidentally recruited indigenous guys (*de bon bougres d’indigènes, recrutés au hasard*).”⁷⁴ Sometimes the Algerians were reprimanded for their participation, as for example in a rightist Oran newspaper that spoke of a “group of Arab women, unveiled and ‘unleashed’”: “Oh Muslims, my friends,

⁶⁹ *La Lutte sociale*, July 14, 1936.

⁷⁰ Report, SD, Constantine, July 3, 1936, ANOM, Archives de la Préfecture de Constantine (APC) 93/B/3/700.

⁷¹ Report, Chief, SD, Constantine, July 15, 1936, ANOM, GGA 9H/48 and GGA 7CAB/30.

⁷² See, e.g., Report, SD, Algiers, July 15, 1937, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; Commissaire central, Philippeville, to Prefect, Constantine, July 15, 1937, APC ANOM, 93/B/3/272; Report, Chief, PSD, Algiers, July 12, 1938, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; Popular Front flyer for Bastille Day 1938 in French and Arabic, Constantine, ANOM, APC 93//8091; *L’Echo d’Alger*, July 15, 1936; July 15, 1937; July 15, 1938; July 15, 1939.

⁷³ See *La Dépêche algérienne* July 15, 1935; July 15, 1936; July 15, 1937; *L’Echo d’Alger*, July 15, 1935; *L’Algérie*, July 15, 1935; *La Presse libre*, July 15, 1935; July 15, 1936; *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 15, 1936; *La Flamme*, July 28, 1939.

⁷⁴ *La Presse libre*, July 15, 1936. See also *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 15, 1936; July 15, 1937; *L’Echo d’Oran*, July 15, 1936; *Oran-Matin*, July 15–16, 1936.

who are so dignified and respectful toward family and wife, how can you follow people who expose you to such intense ridicule?!"⁷⁵

Yet, from the beginning, any belief that "indigenous" participation would remain passive proved to be illusory. French efforts to mobilize the Algerian population simply fit too perfectly with developments within the Algerian protest movement that had attained new forms and dimensions in the previous years. The protest now shifted increasingly into the street and reached broader classes of (urban) society.⁷⁶ Moreover, all currents of the Algerian opposition reorganized their struggle and sharpened their profile—as the Communist Party had done when it implemented the measures discussed above in 1935–36. The activities of these different currents were accompanied by intensified conflicts with the colonial administration as well as by internal conflicts concerning necessary changes and the appropriate means for realizing them.

In addition, the Franco-French controversies and the resounding election victory of the left in early May 1936 featured a specific Algerian dimension, for it marked the beginning of intensive public debates about the objectives of colonial rule in Algeria. By May 1936 the *élus*, the *'ulamā*, and the PCA were already starting to realize the idea of a unified Muslim organization that had been under discussion for quite some time. The Algerian Muslim Congress (Congrès Musulman Algérien), established on June 7, 1936, was meant to overcome deep internal differences in favor of a unitary program and to strengthen its negotiating position toward the new government. In the Charte revendicative, the congress ratified assimilatory provisions combined with claims of religious and cultural particularity and proposals for social reforms. While this charter was "revolutionary" in scope, it did not embrace Messali Hadj's goal of independence. The Popular Front government firmly rejected such far-reaching egalitarian endeavors, but it nevertheless prepared a reform bill under the "indigenophile" state secretary and former governor-general Maurice Viollette. This legislation, named the "Blum-Viollette Bill," was supposed to show the government's good will toward the Algerian opposition by seeking to extend French citizenship to certain categories of the Algerian elite. It became the central issue in struggles around the reformulation of colonial rule after 1936.

Only in the light of these developments within the Algerian protest movement and the Franco-Algerian political scene can one explain the events that took place on Bastille Day from 1936 onward in almost all major and midsize cities. Even in 1935 Algerian papers had already proven to be well informed about the polarizing quarrels between the French parties over the events planned for the celebration that year. "What will happen on July 14?" asked *Al-Najāḥ* (En Nadjah), a widespread Algerian newspaper, and then went on to present a de-

⁷⁵ *Oran-Matin*, July 16, 1936.

⁷⁶ Jaques Berque (*Maghreb*, 280) in this context speaks of the "rise of the street" (avènement de la rue).

tailed report on the preparations, types of demonstration, and aims of the major political groupings in Paris.⁷⁷ The Algerians began to apply this precise knowledge about the situation and the functioning of French politics in the following year, for it was not only (or even primarily) the courting of the French parties but rather the effective mobilizing strategies of the Algerian protest movement that resulted in massive Algerian participation on Bastille Day in 1936. Some of the local Popular Front units in particular were "horrified at their success and the impression that their speeches made on the indigenous masses whose excesses they fear."⁷⁸ And indeed it was particularly they who saw themselves virtually overrun by supporters of the Algerian protest parties. The Popular Front had celebrated their newfound unity as the "Algerian Muslim Congress" in official victory celebrations on June 14, 1936,⁷⁹ and their mobilization was further intensified on Bastille Day.

Although both the Popular Front and the Muslim Congress were already past their prime by 1937, the massive mobilization of Algerian Muslims did not decline in the years to follow. Almost all the leading representatives of the Algerian protest—in particular 'Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, Ferhat Abbas, and Messali Hadj—continued to appear prominently during demonstrations and celebrations of the national holiday.⁸⁰ Several even gave speeches. In 1937, roughly one-third of the 10,000 demonstrators in Algiers were Algerians. With the declining participation of European demonstrators, the Algerian share in that city rose to two-thirds (3,000 out of 4,500) in the following year.⁸¹ In many other cities that still permitted mass celebrations on Bastille Day, Algerian demonstrators and prominent representatives of the Algerian opposition also showed up in greater numbers, often encompassing half or even more of the Popular Front processions.⁸²

⁷⁷ *Al-Najāh*, July 14, 1935. See also the account of the celebrations in Paris in *Al-Najāh*, July 17, 1935.

⁷⁸ Report, SD, Constantine, June 14, 1936, ANOM, GGA 9H/48.

⁷⁹ Besides the report from Constantine in the previous footnote, see also Commissaire central, Algiers, to Prefect, Algiers, June 15, 1936, ANOM, APA 91/F/5; Report, SD, Algiers, June 14, 1936; Chief, SD, Oran, to Prefect, Oran, June 15, 1936; Commissaire central, Bône, to Governor-General, Prefect, and Subprefect, June 14, 1937, ANOM, GGA 7G/31; *L'Echo d'Alger*, June 15, 1936; *La Dépêche algérienne*, June 15, 1936; *L'Algérie*, June 15, 1936; *La Presse libre*, June 15, 1936.

⁸⁰ On Abbas's and Ben Badis's participation, see "Bulletin mensuel d'information concernant la politique indigène dans le département de Constantine au mois de juillet 1938," CIE, Constantine, ANOM, APC 93//4136; *Al-Baṣā'ir*, July 22, 1938; *La Lutte sociale*, July 23, 1938. For Ben Badis, see also n. 88. For Messali's appearance, see nn. 93–96.

⁸¹ See Report, SD, Algiers, July 15, 1937, ANOM, APA 91/4I/6; Report, Commissaire, PSD, Algiers, July 15, 1938, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30.

⁸² See, e.g., Report, Chief, SD, Constantine, July 14, 1937; Commissaire, Philippeville, to Director, SG, July 15, 1937; Report, Chief, PSD, Constantine, July 23, 1938, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; Commissaire, Bordj-Bou-Arréridj, to Subprefect, Sétif, July 19, 1938; Report, PSD, Bône, July 15, 1938, ANOM, APC 93//8091.

This massive—and frequently majority—presence of Algerian demonstrators at the Popular Front processions on July 14 clearly shifted the focus of what was being publicly negotiated. The struggle over the political system—the republic—was increasingly superseded by issues of colonial politics. The various groups of the Algerian protest movement and their leading representatives made systematic use of Bastille Day to formulate their own demands, engaging the Popular Front with their own mandates. In 1936, speakers and some banners were already calling for the abolition of the *Indigénat*, the discriminatory legal code for the colonized population.⁸³ Beginning in 1937, such claims and slogans became more and more evident in the festivities. The concluding point of the parade in Algiers, the Place du Gouvernement, became the place where anticolonial slogans were recited each year before the demonstration was dispersed.⁸⁴

After the subversive appropriation of Bastille Day had become routine in the writings and testimonies of Young Algerians, it began to emerge on a larger scale in the activities of all the Congress parties. Their slogans, speeches, and articles were full of references to the Revolution. In such statements the Popular Front stood for the “true,” revolutionary France. Their demonstrations called on the state “to introduce to Algeria the principles of equality and fraternity for which the people of France carried out the great and imperishable Revolution of 1789.”⁸⁵ Historical analogies between their own struggle and that of the revolutionaries of 1789, between French-ruled Algeria and the ancien régime, experienced a virtual boom in the articles and speeches of the Congress parties. To cite one example: Mohammed Bensliman, a Congress supporter, declared on July 14, 1937, that “the Algerian people, too, is moving toward progress and revolution, since the current situation of the Algerian people resembled that of the French before 1789 and that of Russians before 1917. That is why the Algerian people is determined to make its own revolution with the help of the Popular Front, and it has sworn to assert itself with regard to the Charte revendicative. While the year of 1936–37 was a year of apprenticeship, the year of 1937–38 will be a year of struggle and revolution.”⁸⁶

The Many Faces of the Revolution

The fact that all of the (moderate) Congress parties were now broadly applying a strategy that had been formulated predominantly by the Young Algerians

⁸³ See Chief, SD, Oran, to Prefect, Oran, June 15, 1936, ANOM, GGA 7G/31.

⁸⁴ Report, SD, Algiers, July 15, 1937; Report, Commissaire, PSD, Algiers, July 15, 1938; Report, Commissaire, PSD, Algiers, July 14, 1939, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; *El Ouma*, August 1, 1937; *La Défense*, July 19, 1939.

⁸⁵ *L'Entente franco-musulmane*, July 14, 1938.

⁸⁶ Commissaire central, Philippeville, to Prefect, Constantine, July 15, 1937, ANOM, APC 93/B/3/272. See also the articles in *La Défense*, August 28, 1936, and October 20, 1936.

did not imply that the Francophile position had prevailed. In fact, other movements started to integrate Bastille Day and the “revolutionary heritage” into their respective programs. A glance at the activities of the Islamic reform movement, formed in the mid-1920s by intellectuals like ‘Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis, Tayyib al-‘Uqbi, Bashir al-Ibrahimi, and Mubarak al-Mili, illustrates this development.⁸⁷ These reformists played a major role in appropriating July 14 within the Algerian protest of the late 1930s, a role that at first might seem surprising. For the ‘*ulamā* rejected the Young Algerians’ ties to France and the West, promoted a clear orientation toward the (Middle) East, and set about defining Algeria’s religious, cultural, and linguistic “identity” and spreading it as a program of education and “renewal.”

Yet Ben Badis, their undisputed leader in the 1930s, proved to be very active in connecting Bastille Day with central messages of the ‘*ulamā*. At the very core of his strategy stood the notion of “freedom” (*al-ḥurriyya*), as impressively documented in his most spectacular intervention, a speech on July 14, 1938, on Constantine’s main square (the *Brèche*) during a ceremony organized by the new (Popular Front) mayor Bourceret.⁸⁸ In his short address, he used the terms “freedom” (*al-ḥurriyya*) and “free” (*ḥurr, aḥrār*) in almost every sentence, thirty-five times altogether. He conceived of freedom as a universal and natural right and argued that the apolitical and “scientific” ‘*ulamā* society could contribute especially to the “Freedom Day” (*‘īd al-ḥurriyya*):

This is a celebration of human freedom and not one of politics or parties. I thus have the right to represent the ‘*ulamā* society, which is a society for improvement, far from any politics. What we are celebrating here is freedom, natural in the existence (*al-laḥī hiyya (tabī‘a) fī al-wujūd*), a legitimate right of every human being. For freedom is the basis of all the rights every person has within the framework of a system in which one may not violate the rights of others. The one who becomes deprived of his rights turns into an (inanimate) object (*jamād*); he who violates the rights of someone else is an animal (*waḥsh*). A human being is a human being only as long as he is free. If he deprives someone of his freedom or if he is deprived of it, he finds himself in a state between barbarity (*waḥshīyya*) and stupor (*jumūd*).⁸⁹

⁸⁷ On the Algerian reformist movement, see McDougall, *Culture of Nationalism*; Allan Christelow “Ritual, Culture and Politics of Islamic Reformism in Algeria,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 23 (1987): 255–73; Ali Mérad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940* (Paris, 1967).

⁸⁸ For the speech and the different reactions to it, see *Al-Baṣā‘ir*, July 22, 1938; Reports, Chief, PSD, Constantine, July 15 and 23, 1938, ANOM, APC 93//8091; “Bulletin mensuel d’information concernant la politique indigène dans le département de Constantine au mois de juillet 1938,” CIE, Constantine, ANOM, APC 93//4136; *L’Entente franco-musulmane*, July 14, 1938; *La Dépêche de Constantine*, July 15, 1938; *Le Républicain de Constantine*, July 15 and 20, 1938; *Le Radical*, July 16 and 26, 1938; *La Lutte sociale*, July 23, 1938; *Al-Najāḥ*, July 30, 1938.

⁸⁹ *Al-Baṣā‘ir*, July 22, 1938.

Hence, the lack of liberty was harmful for both the colonizer, who became a “barbarian,” and for the colonized. The latter fell into a state of apathy or stupor that the ‘*ulamā*’s agenda struggled against. Thus, the glorification and claims of “freedom” were not only in the interest of France but also matched the ‘*ulamā*’s central demands for the unrestricted exercise of their religious and cultural “mission”:

We hereby celebrate freedom and share the happiness of all free people even though we have not obtained our share of this beloved freedom. And freedom and humanity are by and of themselves beloved and holy. *The imprisoned nobleman is delighted about the freedom of others even though he is in jail. . . .* We are not against France, but we are against the adversaries and enemies of freedom. *We rise against the adversaries of freedom, whether they wear a burnus or a hat* (nuqāwam man yuqāwam al-ḥurriyya, sawā min ahl al-barānis aw ahl al-barānīt). French brothers, who celebrate your freedom: The Algerian nation celebrates with you and shares the celebration of freedom with you! . . . And now they [the Algerian nation] solicit you in the name of freedom to help them to attain their share of it, especially the freedom to learn their religion and their language.⁹⁰

Of course, the freedom referenced here is above all the freedom of thought, of science, and of religion. The ‘*ulamā*’s struggle for “improvement” and “true” faith was therefore closely linked with the freedom struggle celebrated on July 14.

But the Congress parties, moderate in their demands, were not the only ones integrating Bastille Day into their struggle. Messali Hadj’s nationalist party Étoile Nord-Africaine also made this day an important point of reference for its propaganda, a national holiday of a very special kind: it became an occasion to demonstrate for an independent Algeria under the banner of the “revolutionary heritage.” Here, the French Revolution no longer implied a pro- or anticolonial affirmation of the French “civilizing mission.” Instead, it underscored the claim that any such mission should end: “The *Délégations financières* must be replaced by an Algerian parliament. Only then will everyone be able to say that we received justice, for only then can we truly participate in the affairs of our country. At that time, we will say that the democratic France of 1789 and of 1848 has accomplished an act of civilization by liberating the Algerian people from exploitation, oppression, and injustice.”⁹¹

Until the mid-1930s, ENA’s activities were focused on France, where it had established itself as an important political factor within the North African immigrant community.⁹² After mid-1936, it made itself felt in Algeria as well by means of intensive organizing and mobilization. The establishment of the ENA

⁹⁰ Ibid.; original emphasis.

⁹¹ *El Ouma*, May–June 1936.

⁹² On Messali Hadj and his organizations, see Benjamin Stora, *Messali Hadj: Pionnier du nationalisme algérien, 1898–1974* (Paris, 1986); Ali Haroun et al., eds., *Messali Hadj, 1898–1998: Parcours et témoignages* (Algiers, 1998).

in Algeria as the new and most radical protest movement—refounded as the Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA) after being banned in January 1937—was accompanied by massive and systematic efforts to occupy public space, particularly in the colonial capital of Algiers. The expression and climax of these activities was undoubtedly the demonstration of July 14, 1937, in Algiers.⁹³ The ENA had participated in leftist Bastille Day processions in several French cities in 1935 and 1936, and in 1937 Messali headed a group of 3,000 Algerians (according to police reports)—slightly more than one-third of the entire Popular Front procession and composed almost entirely of Algerian Muslims—on the national holiday parade through Algiers.

The PPA assembly did not attract attention just because it was clearly the largest Algerian group on the streets. Already recognizable by the PPA flag and large banners, the protesters also chanted nationalist slogans throughout the entire procession—“An Algerian Parliament!” “Freedom for all!” “Abolition of the *Indigénat!*”—and sang the party’s (nationalist) anthem. In addition, Messali’s group maintained a specific and clearly noticeable distance from the Popular Front’s procession. Furthermore, marching at the end of the parade allowed the group to occupy almost entirely the Place du Gouvernement, the concluding point of the march, turning it into a forum for making its claims. Yet the PPA procession was distinguished most of all by an extreme degree of “discipline,” which was ensured by PPA guards. In accordance with the model of political aesthetics in interwar Europe, the nationalist party aimed to appear as a perfectly organized and “disciplined” mass. As a result, the procession was divided into subgroups designed to represent the entire spectrum of both the organization and the Algerian nation: the leading figures around Messali Hadj were followed by groups of children, workers, students, the unemployed, merchants, and women. It was this discipline that the party’s newspaper *El Ouma* emphasized after the event: “Our procession started in an orderly manner, covered the route in an orderly manner, and disbanded in a calm and orderly manner. Such discipline earned us the enthusiasm of our masses and painfully impressed our adversaries.”⁹⁴

The PPA procession presented a clear challenge, or at the very least a large provocation, to the colonial administration and other Algerian movements alike. For here the party was appealing to the “heritage of 1789,” which demanded nothing less than the “emancipation” of Algeria from colonial rule, a clear break

⁹³ See Report “Activité du ‘Parti du Peuple Algérien’ en Algérie pendant les derniers mois,” August 17, 1937, ANOM, APA 91/4I/3; PPA flyer for Bastille Day 1937, ANOM, APA 91/4I/6; Report, SD, Algiers, July 14, 1937, ANOM, APA 91/2I/37.

⁹⁴ *El Ouma*, August 1, 1937. See also *Lisān al-dīn*, July 15, 1937, translated extract, ANOM, GGA 15H/15, and Moufdi Zakarya’s article in the Tunisian newspaper *Al-Nahḍa* August 2, 1937.

with the reformist program of the recent Second Algerian Muslim Congress (July 9–11, 1937): “Our nationalism is neither imperialistic, nor chauvinistic, nor racist. It is a liberating nationalism, like that of the French revolutionaries of 1789.”⁹⁵ The demonstration shocked the local French press. Leftist and rightist newspapers were equally outraged:

At the very end of the procession there even was the dense crowd of supporters of the ENA, an anti-French association that had been banned by the government! Its followers had their fingers in the air, which is the way of saying in Arabic that we, the 800,000 *Français d’Algérie* who resuscitated this country, have no choice but to take the first boat out of here, leaving the six million *indigènes* to organize their affairs as they understand them. This is how—under the anxious and tired eyes of the authorities and the tricolor flag—Algiers *la Blanche* celebrated July 14, 1937. I saw old *Algériens* next to me whose eyes were filled with tears of shame!⁹⁶

The massive participation of various Algerian protest movements was far from harmonious or unanimous. After all, it was highly contested just which of them might act as the legitimate representative of the Algerian “nation” and its claims. Competition and conflict between the different movements were therefore increasingly carried out in the framework of the Bastille Day celebrations. Each movement sought to appear to France as the defining Algerian protagonist and representative. As with the French parties, the dimensions and “discipline” of their respective processions were of great importance to them, since their objective was to prove which of the Algerian protest parties was best organized and dominant. The latent competition between the groups became manifest at times in the course of the festivities. Leading *‘ulamā* stepped out onto the balcony of their office at the Place du Gouvernement on July 14, 1937, to salute the Popular Front procession, but they ostentatiously withdrew when the PPA passed by. To Messali and his supporters, this gesture was a sharp affront that even raised doubts about the reformists’ religious integrity:

A shameful and ridiculous event that has to be reported to the North African Muslims: The balcony of the Cercle du Progrès was packed with “Nadists,” some *‘ulamā* and delegates of the Congress who frenetically hailed the communist groups, the “Secours Rouge International,” and so on and so forth. . . . But as our group, filling on its own the entire Place du Gouvernement and a part of the Bresson square, powerfully chanted: “Respect to Islam, free the mosques!” these gentlemen on the balcony did not applaud but instead went back inside. The Muslim population was strongly angered by this, and people have been referring to it as the “retreat from the balcony” ever since.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *La Justice*, August 17, 1937.

⁹⁶ *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 15, 1937. See also *L’Echo d’Alger*, July 15, 1937; *La Presse libre*, July 15, 1937.

⁹⁷ *El Ouma*, August 1, 1937. The term “Nadists” refers to the members of cultural clubs (*nādin*), one of the most important organization forms of the *‘ulamā*.

The French authorities and particularly the Popular Front organizers faced a dilemma in view of the massive Algerian participation. On the one hand, both the authorities and the organizers were, as we have seen, interested in and partly responsible for the participation of Algerians. At the same time they quickly realized that they threatened to lose control over the meaning of the holiday and even their own processions. Even though the Popular Front activists and their associated journalists demonstrated a commitment to the ethnic and religious variety within their processions—at least in the first years—they had clearly been making an effort to ignore the existence of certain Muslim subgroups and their specific demands.⁹⁸ Some Popular Front groups, in particular the PCA and the trade union *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), seemed more eager to let the Algerians march with them rather than in their own groups. In struggling for preeminence among the urban working classes, they violently clashed with the PPA on July 14, 1937.

The active participation of the colonized population also led to tensions among the French organizers of the leftist processions. The PCA in particular, because of its efforts to mobilize Algerian demonstrators, faced passionate criticism from other Popular Front parties.⁹⁹ Similarly, the French authorities were visibly divided about how to cope with the Muslim processions. While some cities (like Oran) prohibited political demonstrations of any kind after July 14, 1937, they were tolerated in many other cities, most important among them Algiers. Yet the authorities were not willing to let the provocation posed by the PPA demonstration on July 14, 1937, go unanswered. Two days after the event, the party offices as well as the homes of Messali and Moufidi Zakarya, another leading PPA member, were searched. Just a short time later, on August 27, 1937, Messali and the other members of the PPA executive committee were arrested.¹⁰⁰

IV. CONCLUSION

The activities on July 14, 1939, that were depicted at the beginning of this article only become explicable when accounting for the numerous fault lines outlined here. Within a few years, the French national holiday had become a central field of action for various groups struggling to realign colonial policy. After the official authorities had witnessed, rather helplessly, the massive mobilization of Algerian protesters since 1936, they sought to regain control in 1939. Symbolic actions such as the public display of Muslim veterans and the official reception of collaborating elites in Paris were designed to calm the situation in the light of an impending new war in Europe. But the Algerian oppositional

⁹⁸ See n. 72.

⁹⁹ See, e.g., Report, SD, Constantine, July 3, 1936, ANOM, APC 93/B/3/700.

¹⁰⁰ *El Ouma*, August 1, 1937.

movements also intensified their activities on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the French Revolution, each applying its own strategy. While the moderate *élus* counted on attending the holiday celebrations in Paris and obtaining concessions in negotiations with the government, the nationalists sought to underscore their mobilizing force and presence in the public space. Hence, it was in Algiers that the most spectacular and serious event of the day occurred: despite an interdiction issued by the prefect the night before, about 2,000 supporters of the PPA assembled on July 14, constituting more than one-fourth of the entire Popular Front procession.¹⁰¹ To prevent them from participating in the parade, the police encircled them for more than an hour. As the PPA activists were still not prepared to disband their procession, the police shifted tactics, applying force and making arrests.

This date therefore marked both the climax and the endpoint of a certain period in the confrontations over French Algeria in the field of political symbolism. The massive mobilizations on the French as well as the Algerian (Muslim) side rendered the commemoration the apogee of struggles to redesign colonial rule according to the “principles of 1789.” At the same time, the forced exclusion of the nationalists from Bastille Day, along with the general interruption of efforts within French politics (since 1938) to reform the colonial system, marked the dramatic final point of these processes. The escalating events during World War II and in particular the massacre of May 8, 1945, in Eastern Algeria would ultimately reinforce the tendency foreshadowed on Bastille Day in 1939: the efforts of Algerian protesters would no longer be directed at modifying Algeria within a French framework but instead would be aimed at detaching the country from France. Instead of participating in the French national holiday, nationalist underground activities now aimed at establishing specifically Algerian national holidays.

As a result, July 14, 1939, once again demonstrates the degree to which the “heritage of 1789” and the national holiday—after being officially established in 1880—became part of a range of crucial negotiations and conflicts in French Algeria. On the one hand, the holiday served as a way for (assimilationist) efforts to simulate a distinctly metropolitan and French public in the “new province” of Algeria. In this sense, it hardly differed from the integrating function the republican ritual had for various metropolitan regions at this time. On the other hand, the specific demographic, social, and political structures of colonial Algeria became more and more apparent as new meanings were attributed to

¹⁰¹ For the event and the different reactions to it, see Report, Chief, PSD, Algiers, July 15, 1939; Prefect, Algiers, to Governor-General, July 18, 1939, ANOM, GGA 7CAB/30; Commissaire central adjoint, Algiers, to Commissaire central, Algiers, July 14, 1939, ANOM, APA 91/41/3; *Le Parlement algérien*, July 29, 1939; *La Lutte sociale*, July 28, 1939; *Alger Républicain*, July 15–21, 1939; *La Dépêche algérienne*, July 15, 1939; *L’Echo d’Alger*, July 15, 1939; *Le Rappel d’Alger*, July 28, 1939.

July 14. In very different respects, the public unrest and violent struggles that overshadowed the grand celebrations on the occasions of the 100th and the 150th anniversaries of the Revolution in 1889 and 1939 illustrate the two main dynamics of Bastille Day in Algeria highlighted in this article. First, there were the riots by (primarily) Spanish inhabitants of Oran that broke out on July 14, 1889, because of bullfights that were considered "un-Spanish"—riots that could only be stopped by military force. This event shows paradigmatically how difficult it was for the French administration and French settlers in the 1880s and 1890s to impose their national holiday on a settler community that in many cases was of non-French origin. The (undisturbed) celebration of the national holiday in Algeria was not, as in the metropole, primarily linked with the assertion of republican government. Rather, it was closely associated with the (contested) assertion of French claims of national sovereignty over the colony. In the Spanish-dominated city of Oran, Bastille Day was steadily subject to "hispanization." While this development was heavily attacked in the French press, the French authorities had few means at their disposal to counter it. Near the outbreak of World War I, these intra-European tensions surrounding the national holiday were on the wane, but they still erupted occasionally in the decades that followed.

For its part, the police operation in Algiers on July 14, 1939, signaled the critical climax in the public renegotiation of France's "civilizing mission" in the interwar years, which was seen as growing out of its "revolutionary heritage." Toward the close of the nineteenth century, a number of French observers and official spokesmen were already promulgating a universalizing Jacobin interpretation of the 1789 Revolution that saw a "civilizing mission" and colonial rule as its logical consequence and continuation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this universalizing interpretation became an important point of reference for the emerging Algerian protest movement. Celebrated chiefly at first by the Francophile elites of the Young Algerians, Bastille Day and its legacy were increasingly appropriated by other oppositional movements—ranging from the Islamic reformists to the nationalists—for use in their political (and cultural) struggles. Hence, a universalized French Revolution became a benchmark for very different programs. Among these were efforts toward complete equality and integration, religious freedom and "civilization," complete independence of the colonized country, and even world revolution. The reciprocal escalation of French mobilization and integration efforts and "strong-willed" Algerian appropriations gained momentum amid the maelstrom of Franco-French politics, at least after the advent of the Popular Front government in the mid-1930s. While the leftist parties especially tried to integrate and control the Algerian population in their processions, the Algerian actors used the holiday to represent their demands in the public space of the colony. In the process, July 14 not only became a resource in the political struggle for reform of the colonial sys-

tem: it also served as a venue for the competing claims of the various Algerian protest parties. Along with the increasing conquest of the public space by Algerian nationalism at the end of the 1930s, the issue of national sovereignty reemerged in the context of Bastille Day, yet this time with regard to the sovereignty of a colonized population now on the verge of finding its own national alternatives.

As a result, these case studies of the Bastille Day celebrations lend themselves to more than just an analysis of the accommodations that elements of French commemorative culture underwent in being transferred into the Algerian context. In fact, they also indicate the potential of the approach outlined in the introduction: the use of symbolic practices and ceremonies to examine public interactions between different groups of participants. The energies these actors put into shaping the celebrations show that these symbolic displays were not merely an official masquerade or a quasi-monologic self-adulatory exercise by those in power.¹⁰² These celebrations had a serious impact as an occasion for complex social negotiations over occupying and marking public space. As part of a shared public space, the Bastille Day celebrations (and other forms of symbolic politics) can serve as a point of departure for the study of intercommunal relations between different factions in colonial society, encompassing both colonizers and the colonized. Of course, these interactions were not necessarily harmonious, even if resistance and direct confrontation were only two options among many. They were inseparably linked to power relations and hierarchies within the colonial context. And they were predominantly marked or even driven by conflicts: the Spaniards in Oran in 1889 and Algerian nationalists in Algiers in 1939 clearly felt the fundamental restrictions within colonial public space. It need hardly be said that this is only one approach to the field of intercommunal interactions, as recent inquiries into the cultural history of Algerian nationalism have demonstrated.¹⁰³ One of the main challenges of research on Algerian (colonial) history in the years to come will be to provide a more comprehensive and dynamic image of colonial society by emphasizing the interconnectedness of European and Algerian political cultures.

¹⁰² See, for such a position, Scott, *Arts of Resistance*, esp. 45–107.

¹⁰³ McDougall, *Culture of Nationalism*.