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1. HISTORY AND FRANCO-MUSLIM RECONCILIATION

French Colonialism in Algeria

Westerners do not seem to have understood that, for us, the problem of blocs and zones of influence is, for the moment, secondary. Because we are debating and struggling to resolve the problem par excellence: that of our existence.

AHMED TALEB from prison in Algeria,
December 10, 1957

On June 22, 1957, a teacher in an Algiers primary school asked his class of thirty-two Muslim children to respond to the following question: "What would you do if you were invisible?" [1] In nearly every case, the students responded like this ten-year-old:

> If I were invisible, the first thing I would do would be to go and take revenge on the paratroopers ["paras"] who have brought plenty of misery to my brothers. I would take a rope, I would strangle the last of the paratroopers who patrols the corridors in our area, and I would take his weapons from him, and then I would run up behind the other paratroopers and kill them. And if they dared to do what they usually do, I will torture them twice before I kill them. And it's not all, I would sabotage all their plans; I would put bombs in the French areas, I would go all the way to Mollet and Robert Lacoste, I would kill them, I would go to Djebel-Aures, I would give courage to my brothers the GLORIOUS FIGHTERS [GLORIEUX MOUDJAHIDINNES] who I would find there, I would throw grenades at the paratroopers who come from there, in that sacred place, and until we win Independence, I will carry the flag myself, and, if I die, that's nothing, for I will have finished the mission that Allah charged me with. (Response 1)

Another student wrote that, in addition to stealing "apricots" and "oranges," he would steal jewelry and "kill all the French and the soldiers" (Response 2). One student wrote that he too would steal "apples," "figs," "bananas," but that he would also put twenty-three bombs in the "rue bab azoune," and "rip up his school notebook" (Response 3). Without exception, these children's responses target French civilians, the French police,

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and the French military in Algeria. These attacks from the "invisible" young fighters illustrate that even children were traumatized by the violence of the French paratroopers. When these thirty-two responses were written, it was already well known that the French military and police had used torture liberally throughout Algeria to end the conflict. Responses such as these from Algerian children help us to understand how deeply rooted the divisions were between Algerian Muslims and the French and to see why Franco-Muslim reconciliation was already doomed.

Franco-Muslim reconciliation had not always been a futile idea, at least for the vast majority of French intellectuals and politicians, and it had powerful proponents. One of the best-known and most respected supporters was the French sociologist and ethnographer Germaine Tillion. When the "What would you do if you were invisible?" responses were penned, Tillion was part of an international commission charged with investigating the violation of human rights in Algeria. As it happened, the children's teacher (a Muslim) gave Tillion the class work assignments of his young students and asked her to take the responses to the French politicians as proof of the war's irreparable damage to the future of Franco-Algerian relations. When Tillion received these letters, her immediate reaction was disbelief. An exemplary advocate of peace, she had worked long and hard in Algeria and in France to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the two communities. However, considerations of how violence had affected the Muslim and French populations had forced her to reevaluate the possibility of reconciliation. After looking over these letters, she took them to the socialist prime minister, Guy Mollet, in order to show him what his policies had accomplished in Algeria and "to show him his future Algerian electorate."[2] Mollet, too, read the letters in shock and acknowledged he had no appropriate response.

After members of the French press found out about these letters, Tillion states, both Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Jean Daniel (two of the most important journalists in France) wanted to publish them in *L'Express*. Aware of the reprisals that would surely await the Algerian teacher, Tillion refused to allow the letters' publication. She admits that she herself was nearly devastated by the letters because it was now clear that Franco-Muslim reconciliation had been overrun by the brutality of military and police action (repression, pacification, and torture) in Algeria. Tillion did not finally relinquish all hope for Franco-Muslim reconciliation until the end of the war, though after reading the letters her thoughts were couched in cautionary, if not openly pessimistic, language.[3] The children's letters were all the more

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shocking because, when the war began on November 1, 1954, very few, if any, intellectuals advocated a complete divorce between France and Algeria.

Yet, from the French-Algerian War's beginning until its conclusion with the signing of the Evian Accords on March 18, 1962, reconciliation remained an extremely powerful narcotic and the dominant peace paradigm for moderate left- and right-wing intellectuals; few intellectuals who worked for this reconciliation could accept the idea that the Algerians did not aspire (culturally and politically) to remain French. The French army's repression increased, as the French vigilantes and the fascistic Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS) began to murder indiscriminately, and as revolutionary violence against France escalated, pro-reconciliation intellectuals acquiesced to the idea of an independent Algeria, but grudgingly and only after hurling many caveats at the Algerian nationalists and the French *ultras*.[4]

Reconciliation did not suddenly appear ex nihilo in the debates over the decolonization of French Algeria. In fact, the idea grew out of French colonial history, was a theoretical cousin of the mid-nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates over "assimilation" and "association," and fed directly into the mid-twentieth-century identity debates and the French government's policy of "integration."[5] By the time the war was over, the idea of Franco-Muslim reconciliation had been relegated to the dustbin of history, and it had lost support on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Since the conquest of Algeria in 1830—when the French monarch Charles X attacked the Ottoman Hussein Dey and overthrew his government—France had maintained an ambivalent relationship with the Muslim population. Algeria first became a military colony; by April 1845, it was divided into three provinces. In the 1860s and 1870s it began to experience a new wave of European colonists who expropriated most of the best lands, leaving the Arabs and the Kabyles with the leftovers. After conquering Algeria, France never fully opened its cultural and political arms to Algeria's indigenous population, at least not without attaching unacceptable strings to the idea of rapprochement.

But just where did the idea of reconciliation come from, and how was it used during the war? According to theorist and historian Tzvetan Todorov in his seminal work *On Human Diversity*, two dominant themes about human identity emerged in French thought just prior to and during the Enlightenment: monogenesis, which presented identity as universalist, and polygenesis, based on particularistic representations of identity.[6] According to Todorov, the universalism of monogenesis gave way to ethnocentrism,

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which he maintains had “two facets: the claim to universality on the one hand, and a particular content (most often national) on the other” (2). Some thinkers (La Bruyère, for example) were universalistic in their approach to identity but were not truly ethnocentric; others (such as Pascal) embraced universalistic and ethnocentric views of French cultural superiority because Western values and beliefs claimed to be universal and therefore superior. During the Enlightenment, Diderot, Condorcet, and others put unity above plurality and consequently moved French thought toward a universal absolutism that encouraged ethnocentrism. Todorov argues that Diderot's syllogism, for example, began with his general idea of the unity of nature and ended by making particular claims about human diversity.

Todorov locates this syllogism not in the Enlightenment project itself (since other leading figures did not share Diderot's deductions) but in Diderot's science-based desire to dissolve human variation. Montesquieu and Rousseau (to take two alternative thinkers) moved French thought in a different direction and offered formidable critiques of ethnocentric doctrines during the Enlightenment. Whereas Diderot began with science, which led to an ethics based on science, Rousseau and Montesquieu based ethics on human freedom and saw the perils inherent in scientific ethics.

If Diderot's scientism was dangerous for human diversity, Condorcet's was even more so. As the “last of the Encyclopedists,” Condorcet wanted to eradicate divisions between different peoples through the “transformation of the world from an agglomeration of countries into a single State.” Ignoring the historical and cultural conditions of each country, Todorov argues, Condorcet's scientism rested on a totalizing universalism: “since the principles of justice are everywhere the same, laws must be the same as well” (24). After Condorcet's death in prison during the French Revolution, his project was adopted by the ideologue Destutt de Tracy, was carried still further by Henri de Saint-Simon, and eventually went on to affect the writings of Auguste Comte.

What is important here, Todorov stresses, is that Comte, the father of positivism, called for a return to Condorcet's scientism. This scientism would, of course, displace diversity and replace it with homogeneity. “Comte believes it is possible to establish—with the help of science—the one and only ‘correct’ constitution, which will rapidly impose itself on all peoples transcending national differences” (27). Conveniently, in Comte's theory, France would be the epicenter and would export its cultural and intellectual goods to other countries (29). Furthermore, white Frenchmen

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alone would be able to export their cultural and intellectual goods. In this new "universal state," Comte made important divisions between the "white," "yellow," and "black" races. "Whites are most intelligent, yellows work the hardest, blacks are the champions of feeling" (31). Comte's positivist theories eventually affected other major French thinkers such as Émile Durkheim and Gustave Le Bon.

Most specialists of French colonial theory would agree with Todorov's assessment of the connection between universalism and ethnocentrism within French thought. Most would also concur with his distinction between "racialism" and "racism," a distinction central to the theoretical foundations and justifications for French colonialism.[7] Todorov locates the "flowering" of racialist ideology in the period between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. During this time there were many active racialist theorists, the best known of whom were Ernst Renan, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, Gustave Le Bon, and Hippolyte Taine. According to Todorov, the idea of polygenesis united these four theorists. Understandably, Todorov has few kind words for them because in their own way they each privileged white Europeans over other, non-Europeans. He says that for Renan "The white race alone is endowed with the dignity of the human subject" (111); that Le Bon in the spirit of scientism constructed hierarchies of race that combined with hierarchies of class and gender (113); that Taine's racialist determinism created hierarchies that rejected the notions of a unified human race and equality; that Gobineau, like the others, remained at odds with the humanistic aspirations of the Enlightenment and, like Taine, subscribed to the idea that "men's behavior [was] entirely determined by the race to which they belong" (123).[8] De Gobineau's work, Todorov continues, is particularly disturbing because he proposes a theory of social history that "postulates that a society's quality must be judged by its capacity to assimilate other societies, to subjugate by absorption" (135). The consequences of scientism are there to be drawn: "for Hitler, as for Gobineau, civilization was identified with military superiority" (160).[9]

Raymond Betts offers a similar criticism of scientism as he traces the genesis of the two seminal doctrines of colonial theory, assimilation and association, in his landmark *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914*. Like Todorov, Betts underscores the importance of the idea of universalism in French intellectual history and colonial theory. Furthermore, Betts demonstrates that the French imperial drive toward assimilation was based on the idea that the French could bring other civilizations

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into their universalistic credo. This drive toward French or European universalism was felt in both ideological and political arenas. Before the French Revolution France's relations with indigenous populations (in North America, for example) were based on religious assimilation, but afterward the "idea of religious conversion evident during the *ancien régime* was now translated into political assimilation."[10] What made this transition possible, according to Betts, was the belief first in human reason and second in the notion of "universal man" (14), or, as Todorov would have it, monogenesis.

This particular Enlightenment conception of reason and universal humankind led the French to posit that it is not only possible but also better for the natives to assimilate into French civilization because it alone was capable of ensuring human progress. Betts argues that Condorcet gave the idea of French superiority and universalism form in his "expression that 'a good law is good for all men,' " which in turn came to form the bedrock for French colonial policy. By 1848 France was clearly moving toward assimilation without much resistance by intellectuals. In 1863, Emperor Napoleon III wrote to the governor general of Algeria, Peissier, that he wished to see the idea of an "Arab Kingdom" act as proof for the Arabs that the French "have not come to Algeria to impress and exploit them, but to bring them the benefits of civilization" (10).[11] Two years later, Napoleon issued the *senatus consulte*, which essentially granted Algerian Muslims French citizenship on the condition that they relinquish their civil status under Islamic law, a measure tantamount to rejecting Islam, which by 1936 fewer than three thousand Muslims agreed to do.[12] Nevertheless, by the time the Third Republic was in full swing during the 1880s and 1890s, the notion of assimilation had become part and parcel of France's imperial (and national) identity, not only in Algeria, but throughout its colonial possessions.

The idea of assimilation reached its zenith during the Third Republic, precisely when French sociologists and psychologists were beginning to sketch the characteristics of the French psyche. As Betts shows, men like Alfred Fouillé, the author of *Psychologie de l'esprit français*, spearheaded the move away from assimilation. Fouillé was instrumental in helping formulate the notion that the French people were rational, logical, and universal-oriented. Not surprisingly, he argued that France had reached this stage of development through a gradual evolution passed down from the Romans and mutated into the Christian notion of universalism.[13]

In fact, it is possible to argue that the notion of the innate superiority of French society had become commonplace among most *fin-de-siècle* French

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intellectuals. For example, Émile Sedeyn in his preface to Edgard Denancy's 1902 *Philosophie de la colonisation* celebrated the notion of colonialism and went on to describe the French psyche in positivistic terms. "Two particularities dominate all definitions of the French psyche: intelligence and impressibility."[14]

According to Alice Conklin, in her brilliant study *A Mission to Civilize*, the urge to civilize the world was unique to the French Third Republic and thus rendered a unique form of European imperialism. From about 1870, when France began to enlarge its holdings in Africa and Indochina, French publicists, and subsequently politicians, declared that their government alone among the Western states had a special mission to civilize the indigenous peoples now coming under its control—what the French called their *mission civilisatrice*.[15]

The civilizing mission, then, generally defined France's relations with its colonies and always left France in the paternalistic position of the educator. After all, France could impress itself on others with its intelligence. Most Third Republican theorists were convinced that the people in the colonies could learn from the more advanced, rational, and modern French civilization. Moreover, because republicanism had been victorious at the beginning of France's modern colonial ventures, French theorists had no difficulty in reconciling republicanism with the civilizing mission. In fact, according to Betts, "The vocabulary relating to the doctrine of assimilation and that relating to these republican ideals were the same."[16]

While republican rhetoric seemed to justify the French notion of superiority over indigenous populations, new theories tying back to the idea of polygenesis were beginning to erode support for the doctrine of assimilation and giving way to the idea of association. De Gobineau's idea of the inequality of races was resuscitated to give credence to the idea that there were elements of civilization that could not simply transmigrate into the psyches of the so-called less advanced civilizations. Ernst Renan's linguistic analyses echoed de Gobineau's racialist distinctions, and Le Bon weighed in on de Gobineau's racialism by arguing that not all races were the same. In his most significant work, *Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, Le Bon claims that "each people possesses a constitution as fixed as its anatomical characteristics." From this, Betts notes, Le Bon went on to draw up his typology of races: "primitive," "inferior," "intermediate," and "superior" (67).

Other theorists began to follow Le Bon's lead, and the French scientific

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community grew antagonistic toward the idea of assimilation. Perhaps the most notable skeptic of assimilation as it relates to Algeria was Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, who in his *De la Colonisation chez les peuples modernes* attempted to set the record straight with regard to Franco-Algerian relations. While insisting that some type of "fusion" was still needed between the two peoples, he "used 'fusion' interchangeably with 'rapprochement' and emphasized that what he meant was not a physical union of Europeans and Arabs, but a specific progress of cultural change."[17] Further, he suggested that various remnants of the so-called Arab aristocracy must be destroyed. This destruction could be accomplished by importing European institutions (schools and government offices) and everyday conditions (hygiene, agricultural reforms, and infrastructure).

According to Conklin and Betts, Leroy-Beaulieu can be seen as one of the most important representatives for the French impulse to civilize through ideology. As he phrased it in the preface to the second edition of his work, "Colonization is for France a question of life or death: either France will become a great African power, or, in a century or two, it will be a second-rate European power."[18] Moreover, echoing Le Bon's positivism, Leroy-Beaulieu described the French psyche and its relationship to colonialism in the following manner: "That which has been missing from French politics until now is uniformity [*l'esprit de suite*] in colonial thought. Colonialism has been relegated to the back seat of the national conscience; today it should be moved to the front seat" (xxiii). Although he argued that France should continue to exercise "intellectual and moral influence on the indigenous youth" in Algeria (513), he also suggested that Arabic should be taught in the colony's *lycées* (514).

Associative civilizing (my term for the phenomenon as it applied to Algeria) was a nice compromise for colonial theorists because it allowed the French to maintain the idea of their racial and cultural superiority and encouraged them to expand on the notion of an evolutionary and permanent separation between the European and Muslim populations. Imperialism was simply the natural expression of the Europeans' superiority over the indigenous populations under their control. Precisely this qualitative distinction between those who were lowest on the evolutionary and positivist's scale (indigenous) and those who were highest (French) allowed for a practical shift from assimilation to association.

Association, according to its proponents, allowed for a separate form of evolution for the indigenous population because it allowed for the types

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of variation de Gobineau, Le Bon, and Leroy-Beaulieu advocated. It also allowed theoreticians to mark out another key concept in the identity puzzle: time.

According to Raoul Girardet, the most important aspect of the French colonial idea was the French insistence that they were indeed the bearers of a new category of time for the indigenous populations. With the advent of the French empire, the French argued that they were responsible for bringing progress, technology, education, and order to an otherwise chaotic world. In Girardet's words:

> The Empire is celebrated only to the degree in which it permits France to rest true to its historical vocation, to not diminish in its stature, to maintain security, independence and grandeur. It is celebrated to the degree to which it can assure to the people placed under the protection of the tricolor flag the immense benefits of peace and progress, which allows them to educate themselves, to overcome sickness, to triumph over ignorance, to traverse as quickly as possible the stages of human history, and finally to attain the supreme values of dignity and liberty. There is nothing as constant in the colonial literature between the two world wars, official or unofficial, as the opposition of "before" and "after." "Before" means the time preceding the establishment of French sovereignty, which for Africa and Asia translates into the oppression of man by man, the subjection of the weak to the strong, slavery, the despotic and bloody reigns of the black kinglets or the greedy domination of the mandarins. . . . "After" means after the establishment of French sovereignty, which translates in Africa and Asia into the possibility that everyone can liberate themselves from the old terrors and subjugation, the ideal of profound fraternity substituted for an archaic past and degradation, oppression replaced by protection, newfound security, hospitals for the sick, and schools for the children.[19]

This notion that historical time miraculously began after the European conquest of Africa was not new to the history of imperialism. In fact, it related directly back to the old Roman notion of colonialism and assimilation; remnants of this notion of time can be found in Hegel's depiction of history. What is important is the degree to which the French believed they would be able to change indigenous cultures for the better simply by bringing them into European, progressive time.

By the 1940s and 1950s, a new understanding of history and time was

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