

# Collaboration and Empire in the Middle East and North Africa: Introduction and Response<sup>1</sup>

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In 1801, a great rumpus erupted over the untoward behavior of the British resident to the Court of Hyderabad, James Achilles Kirkpatrick. Rumors in Calcutta claimed that Kirkpatrick appeared in public dressed in Indian Muslim garb, stained his hands red with henna in the manner of a Mughal nobleman, and composed Urdu poetry. Worse still, Kirkpatrick had somehow established a *liaison dangereuse* with a fourteen-year-old girl from one of Hyderabad's *Sharifian* families (i.e., of the Prophet Muhammad's lineage). The girl in question, Khair-un Nissa, had been raised in a harem and kept in strictest purdah; yet, the indefatigable Scotsman had managed to impregnate the Sayyida. Still more rumors maintained that Kirkpatrick had embraced Islam and married the girl. British officials feared that Kirkpatrick could no longer be counted upon to furnish accurate information about Hyderabad politics. Marriage and conversion would transform him into a double agent, at best; or at worst, someone now on the "other" side; or so British officials reasoned.

Cases such as Kirkpatrick's were not uncommon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in India. By revisiting India Office and other records, both C. A. Bayly in his *Empire and Information* and William Dalrymple in *White Mughals* have chronicled a number of instances of "going native," leading to a greater frequency of mixed marriages between British men and local women, and a larger number of mixed race children, than previously thought.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, until very recently, stories about the crossing of cultural and/or sexual boundaries and, therefore, political frontiers—had been largely excised from the historical narrative, and above all from the collective memories of the concerned British families and officials.

Compared to the Gulf native agents, Kirkpatrick's cultural trajectory went in the opposite direction; yet, the Scotsman's case speaks directly to several critical points made by James Onley in his paper, "British Agents in Arabia and Persia, c. 1758 to 1958," as well as

to our panel which revisits Ronald Robinson's notion of collaboration advanced nearly three decades ago.<sup>3</sup> First, by examining Britain's presence in the Gulf from the perspective of local informants and civil servants, Onley undermines the conventional narrative about the nature of British rule. The reliance upon indigenous merchants, whose stories have gone largely untold, was much more prevalent and fundamental to Britain's rule than was formerly acknowledged—in the same way that more British officials became integrated into the social and sexual structures of the countries they worked in than has been previously admitted. Thus, Onley's research represents a welcome corrective to the work of older scholars of Gulf history such as J. B. Kelly.<sup>4</sup>

Onley's second argument is that British residents, ships, and merchants operating in the Gulf had gradually shoved their way into an exceedingly complex, long-standing, and well-established system of trade, political relations, and information-gathering stretching from southwest Asia through the Indian Ocean. To succeed at all, the British had to play by rules developed over centuries by Persian, Arab, and South Asian players who operated in a commercial world economy underwritten by Islamic laws and customs and linked by networks of exceedingly diverse merchant communities. Thus, the handful of British residents established in the Gulf had to, in a sense, "go native"—if not culturally, as James Kirkpatrick had done, then at least in terms of engaging local merchants to transcribe the social field of communication—which deeply informed politics and commerce. The "information order" of the Gulf could only be understood by merchant-dynasties, such as the Safar family, acting as purveyors of intelligence between Gulf shaykhdoms and British officials; the relationship was one of mutual benefit based upon intersecting interests, although subject to inherent tensions, even dangers.

Professor Onley's fine analysis reveals the bonuses as well as the handicaps entailed in relying upon indigenous clans to provide critical services, particularly once

again, in the realm of information-gathering. The native agent closely resembled his counterpart, the *dubash* [translator or informant], in his indispensable role, and also recalls the dragoman—that polyglot intermediary needed for the conduct of business between the Ottoman Porte and Europe in the same period. Indeed, by leaning upon Gulf trading families, the Crown was spared the expense of maintaining large numbers of Metropole officials who might desire to bring along families (which always complicated empire as lived on the ground). Of course, the opposite “threat” was that residencies too sparsely peopled by British expatriates would produce James Kirkpatricks. Onley’s research is part of a larger scholarly effort not only to re-interpret modern European empires but also to reconfigure histories of the Afro-Eurasian ecumene, particularly the regions making up the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean system.<sup>5</sup> Recent works by Jerry Brotton, Nabil Matar, and Patricia Risso, to name only a few, argue that interdependence, interaction, and exchange characterized relations between the Islamic and European worlds as much as did conflict or violence.<sup>6</sup>

My questions for Onley are as follows. First, I wonder if the merchant-brokers did not also function as double agents; in other words, they not only accumulated news and intelligence for their British patrons but also surely furnished local Gulf shaykhs and others with valuable information regarding what the Europeans were up to. Indeed, would these native agents have been able to conserve their pivotal middle-men position in Gulf society had they not furnished something to their other patrons—Gulf elites? In any case, to paraphrase Bayly, fields of social communication by definition have always been dense, flexible, and multi-directional.

Second, one wonders if the imposition in the 1890s of an additional bureaucratic layer of British political officers upon the older system of native informants paradoxically impaired access to information, or at least restricted the flow of certain kinds of information previously available in relative abundance. This pattern is seen in late nineteenth-century Algeria when the growth of civilian bureaucracy, along with the dismantling of the Bureaux Arabes which had depended upon indigenous collaborators, ironically decreased French knowledge of native society. Finally, what impact did rapidly accelerating changes in transportation have upon this culture of surveillance and intelligence gathering? If the London to Bombay mail had been reduced to one month’s time by 1845, then what did the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal mean for British residents in the Gulf trying to accumulate and, more importantly, interpret the ever greater volume of news disseminated by growing numbers of travelers, pilgrims, and traders?

Moroccan soldiers’ service to France is the topic of

Professor Gershovich’s paper. This case would seem to be much closer to the model of collaboration under consideration here, whereas the Gulf agents appear to fit more closely the notion of “accommodation” as first enunciated by Peter von Sivers.<sup>7</sup> Gershovich’s research points to a significant difference between French colonialism as practiced in Algeria, where military conscription was established in 1907-1908, and Morocco, where compulsory military service for native men was never attempted. The Algerian experience had served as a counter-model, a template for what not to do in achieving imperial governance. Resistance by Muslims to forced conscription in Algeria, for example, during World War I, had proven too costly; the huge losses of French nationals in the Algerian colonial army had caused an enormous outcry in the Metropole throughout the nineteenth century. In contrast, Moroccan soldiers were contracted as paid “volunteers” or “perfect mercenaries” for combat in Europe or in other French possessions world-wide. For subduing Moroccan lands and peoples, native troops from specific tribal groups were also recruited. Thus, as hired guns from the most disadvantaged regions, they conveniently deflected two sources of opposition to conscription—one in the Metropole, another from native society. What forces impelled Middle Atlas Berbers to fight under the *tricolore*? As was true for the Gulf agents, economic motives were fundamental—but there were essential differences as well. The Berber recruits constituted what might be termed “subsistence collaborators,” while the native agents were mainly well-heeled merchants doing what they had always done best in the Gulf region and beyond.

I have three questions for the second paper. The first returns to my observation regarding Algeria as imperial model and counter-model for much of French colonial policies elsewhere. In the early conquest period, French military officialdom imitated their Turkish predecessors by hiring tribal groups, such as the *Zawama* or *Zouaves*, which had traditionally served the Turks before them. Thus, I wonder about the recruitment of Middle Atlas Berbers by the French army. Did this practice evolve from an earlier military tradition followed by Moroccan sultans? My second query again evokes Bayly, who noted that in the period before modern nationalism, native agents or informants serving European masters cannot necessarily be categorized as “traitors.” “In fact, it was from the descendants of the informants that many of the future nationalists would be drawn.”<sup>8</sup> Is it possible that the recruits from the Middle Atlas did not see themselves as necessarily Moroccans when recruited, and thus, should not be interpreted as waging warfare against “fellow Moroccans”? Directly related to this, my third question is: how does contemporary Moroccan

society regard veterans of the French army, barely subsisting on their military pensions from Paris—as former colonial collaborators, as less than loyal citizens?<sup>9</sup> And did some of the demobilized soldiers in independent Morocco find employment in the sector of state-organized coercion, such as the gendarmerie, the rural police, or as prison guards? In any case, as was true of Onley’s study, Gershovich’s research raises questions about the staying power, or universality, of the Robinson theory of collaboration since the “European inputs”—military power—in this case were overwhelmingly Moroccan.

In our third paper, collaboration also comes to mean something akin to von Sivers’s formulation of accommodation used in his study of nineteenth-century Algerian resistance movements. James McDougall traces one among many possible paths of accommodation—the appropriation of French educational and association forms—which gave birth to the culturally hybrid “Progress Club.” While this Club might be seen as “marginal,” in fact, it occupied a central geographic location adjacent to the *Place du Gouvernement* in Algiers, a highly visible, symbolic site. The Club also represented what one wing of colonial and Metropole thinkers, a minority to be sure, had long advocated as the very essence of the civilizing mission: a fusion between modern Islam and French universal principles. As director of the Algiers Progress Club, Shaykh `Uqbi interpreted his mandate of “auto-emancipation” as furthering France’s civilizing project through educational innovation as well as sustained intellectual contacts with “enlightened” members of Algerian society. Here, he was referring to *Indigénophile* Europeans, as opposed to the much more numerous *Indigénophobes* or Islamophobes. Fusing a social welfare bureau, the *Khayriyya*, reminiscent of the *Sociétés de Prévoyance* in France, with the older *madrassa shabiba* [youth school], the Shaykh had reconstituted—and in the colonial regime’s most evocative imperial space—the ancient sufi complex or *zawiya*, offering multiple communal, social, and instructional services. What could be more subversive than a liberal, “multi-cultural,” and apparently apolitical Muslim Algerian? Assimilation and the civilizing mission threatened to become a reality. Small wonder that the Office of Indigenous Affairs probably had the mufti of Algiers assassinated in 1936, and then implicated Sidi `Uqbi in this nefarious act. As elsewhere in French North Africa by this period, what colonial governments in Tunis and Algiers and colonial lobbies in Paris wanted most were rejectionist, militant nationalists—not integrationists like Shaykh `Uqbi.

McDougall’s research offers an “inverse” or “inverted” history to Robinson’s theory regarding native mediators and nationalism; it also raises questions about

Robinson’s assertion that a large European settler presence “strangled native politics.” Sidi `Uqbi’s repeated insistence upon the apolitical nature of his educational activities suggests that he might have quietly believed otherwise—Shaykh Ben Badis and the Reformed Ulama also continually proclaimed the non-political nature of their religious schools. By the inter-war period, the classroom and schoolyard in the Maghreb and elsewhere had become major battlegrounds for competing social ideologies and political platforms. For many settlers, modern pedagogy disseminated to the colonized was regarded as an inherently political act endangering empire. As early as 1912, *La Tunisie Française*, a right-wing settler newspaper, observed that: “à quoi bon alors avoir construit cette école [for native children] et dépensé 150.000 francs environ qui auraient été plus utiles ailleurs” [“what was the good of building this school (for native children) and spending 150,000 francs which could have been better used elsewhere”]. Other issues of this same paper often opined that “... les pires ennemis de la France étaient les jeunes bourgeois tunisiens éduqués dans les écoles françaises ou franco-arabes” [“France’s worst enemies come from the ranks of young, bourgeois Tunisians who have been educated in French schools or Franco-Arab schools”].<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, McDougall’s study demonstrates that—below the surface of the monolithic categories structuring the narrative of Algerian history until now—a wide-ranging number of adjustments to, and accommodations with, the colonial regime existed and indeed flourished right up to the end. Thus, his work makes us rethink the seductive thesis first advanced by Jacques Berque in 1962 of Islam as a “refuge” for the beleaguered Algerian society.<sup>11</sup> Along these lines, `Sidi `Uqbi could be conceived of as the Farhat Abbas of one wing or tendency of the Islamic establishments—by no means monolithic; or perhaps he was a sort of James Kirkpatrick, crossing over, or at least muddying the increasingly rigid boundaries of imperial identities and hierarchies.

My questions for the third paper arise from McDougall’s mention of local police informers—the guys who probably ratted on Sidi `Uqbi when he gave public lectures at the *Cercle du Progrès*. Here, we seem to be in the shady company of the collaborator as understood by scholars working in the field of social network analysis: “...recruited from the community on which they prey, only to be banished from it without being admitted into the society of their political masters.”<sup>12</sup> Surely, the shaykh knew that informants were present in his audience when he gave his public lectures, thus, the use of what has been termed the “double discourse.” Sidi `Uqbi brings to mind Shaykh Muhammad and his daughter, Lalla Zaynab, of the Rahmaniyya Sufi Center

at al-Hamil, both of whom praised France's just rule when communicating with French officers, even as they labored to safeguard Algerian religious and moral identity.<sup>13</sup> In any case, declaring one's position to be apolitical represents a political stance and statement in and of itself.

Returning to the panel's theme, Robinson's theory of collaboration as first elucidated exactly thirty years ago, these papers demonstrate the enormous diversity that collaboration—or accommodation, or just getting along, or doing what one had always done—assumed in the British and French Empires: from providing information, to serving under the colonial flag, to attempting to carve out an autonomous space in the realm of association, culture, and education. McDougall, in particular, has raised a number of questions regarding the applicability of Robinson's theory to a settler colony such as Algeria—which is ironic since Algeria is so frequently taken as the quintessential colonial state. How then should we assess Robinson three decades later, particularly in the light of the recent flood—almost a glut—of research on empire? On the negative side, our papers demonstrate clearly that Robinson's formulation has a rather low tolerance for ambiguity or nuance and thus ignores the in-between spaces of colonial encounters—precisely the sites where many significant transactions took place. On the positive side, by tracing his intellectual genealogy and subsequent scholarship inspired by his theories, we may find that Robinson's emphasis upon indigenous actors in empire opened the way for theories of agency.

On a more general level, as examples of the latest and best scholarship on empire, these papers help dispel a pernicious, if enduring, historical myth. This myth is informed by the notion of an age-old Christian-Muslim frontier stretching from the Mediterranean and Red Sea-Gulf region across the Indian Ocean, a frontier allegedly shaped by implacable hatreds and impervious to all, or most, exchanges, with the exception of warfare and violence. Thus, our papers represent a timely antidote to Bernard Lewis's polemical writings which for decades have sought to discredit Muslim societies and states by portraying them as innately hostile to Europe, to things European, to Western civilization, particularly from the early modern and modern periods on.<sup>14</sup> In its most recent incarnation, this myth has been transformed into, and pedaled as, the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis so fashionable in certain American imperial circles at present as the U. S.'s informal global empire gives way to formal empire.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The essays in this section are drawn from a panel pre-

sented at the American Historical Association Meeting, January 2003.

<sup>2</sup>For information on Kirkpatrick, see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91-93; and William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (New York: Viking Press, 2003). Previously regarded as oddities at best, individuals who "went native" in the context of European empires are being subjected to recent scholarly scrutiny. For example, Linda Colley, "Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire," *Past and Present* 168 (2000): 170-193; and Owen White, "The Decivilizing Mission: Auguste Dupuis-Yakouba and French Timbuktu," in Alice L. Conklin and Julia Clancy-Smith, eds., *French Historical Studies*, special issue, "Writing French Colonial Histories," 27: 3 (Summer 2004): 541-568.

<sup>3</sup>Douglas M. Peers, in his recent "Is Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again? The Revival of Imperial History and the *Oxford History of the British Empire*," *Journal of World History* 13:2 (Fall 2002): 451-67, credits Robinson and Gallagher with triggering one of the most persistent scholarly debates regarding informal and formal imperialism and its many guises.

<sup>4</sup>For example, J. B. Kelly's *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); and his *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), in which Kelly sums up the predominant view of the Pax Britannica in the Gulf during which time Great Britain had borne the responsibility during 150 years "for the maintenance of peace and security," vii.

<sup>5</sup>Heather J. Sharkey's *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), examines indigenous functionaries in Sudan—clerks, technicians, teachers, etc.—whose daily labors undergirded the colonial state.

<sup>6</sup>Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), and *Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995). See also Touraj Daryaee, "The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity," *Journal of World History* 14:1 (March 2003): 1-16, in which he argues that the earlier Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean trade system was constructed and maintained by merchants—rather than by states; thus comparisons with the modern British Empire and its navy in the region are misleading.

<sup>7</sup>Peter von Sivers, "Insurrection and Accommodation: Indigenous Leadership in Eastern Algeria, 1840-1900," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6:3 (1975): 259-275.

<sup>8</sup>Bayly, *Empire and Information*, ix.

<sup>9</sup>For a similar case study, see Ruth Ginio, "Colonial Memory, Colonial Amnesia: The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in Post-Colonial Senegal." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society, Toulouse, France, May 2003.

<sup>10</sup>Julia Clancy-Smith, "L'École Rue du Pacha à Tunis: l'éducation de la femme arabe et 'la plus grande France' (1900-1914)," *Clio: Histoire, Femmes, et Société* 12 (Décembre 2000), 34.

<sup>11</sup>Jacques Berque, *Le Maghreb entre deux guerres* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962).

<sup>12</sup>Jessica Warner and Frank Ivis, "Informers and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century London: A Comparison of Two Communities," *Social Science History* 25:4 (Winter 2001), 564.

<sup>13</sup>Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup>Christian Windler, in his recent *La Diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre: consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)* (Geneva: Droz, 2002), argues that French and other consular representatives to the court of the Bey of Tunis participated in a common diplomatic culture shared by Tunisian Muslim notables; moreover, European consuls depended upon local intermediaries and brokers for access to, and initiation in, that culture.



# Britain's Native Agents in Arabia and Persia in the Nineteenth Century<sup>1</sup>

JAMES ONLEY

This paper examines British imperial involvement in the Gulf region. It analyzes the infrastructure that enabled Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf and his small cadre of British officers to manage political relations with dozens of rulers and governors in Eastern Arabia and Southern Persia, to maintain the Pax Britannica on the waters of the Gulf, and to protect British interests throughout the region. This analysis reveals a significant difference between the traditional view of Britain's informal empire in the Gulf and the reality of how it actually functioned during the nineteenth century.

The secret to the Gulf Residency's effectiveness was the extent to which its infrastructure worked *within* the indigenous political systems of the Gulf. Arab rulers in need of protection collaborated with the Resident to maintain the Pax Britannica, while influential men from affluent Arab, Persian, and Indian merchant families served as the Resident's "native agents" in over half of the political posts within the Gulf Residency. The result was a collaborative power triangle between the Resident, his native agents, and the rulers that sustained Britain's informal empire in the Gulf during the nineteenth century. This paper employs a neutral definition of collaboration: either 'working with another' in the case of ruler-Resident and ruler-agent relations, or 'working for another' in the case of agent-Resident relations.<sup>2</sup>

Examining two of the three sets of relations within this collaborative triangle — those of agent-Resident and agent-ruler — the paper shows how the Resident was able to effectively employ affluent Gulf merchants as his political agents throughout the region. Table 1 illustrates how extensive Britain's employment of native agents was:

**Table 1: Britain's native agents in Arabia and Persia**

LOCATION / OFFICE	IDENTITY	DATES
<b>Kirman (Persia):</b>		
Native Agent	Persian, Arab	c.1720s, 1840s?-94
<b>Muscat (Arabia):</b>		
Native Broker	Indian	c.1758-1800

Native Agent	Indian	1810-40
Native Agent	Arab, Persian	1843-61, 1866-7
<b>Bushire, Gulf Residency HQ (Persia):</b>		
Native Resident	Persian	1798-1803
<i>Munsbis</i> (1-2)	Arab, Persian	1822-1946
Native Assistant	Indian	1882-99
<b>Shiraz (Persia):</b>		
Native Agent	Indian	1800?-1903
<b>Bahrain (Arabia):</b>		
Native Agent	Indian	1816?-34
Native Agent	Persian, Arab	1834-1900
<b>Qatif (Arabia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab	1820?-3
<b>Mughu (Persia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab	1823-30
<b>Sharjah (Arabia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab, Persian	1823-1949
<b>Lingah (Persia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab, Persian	1830-1910
<b>Kirmanshah (Persia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab	1840s?-1903
<b>Basidu (Persia):</b>		
Slave Agent	Arab	1860-74
Native Agent	Indian	1872-82
Coal Agent	Arab	1872?-1911
<b>Gwadar (an Omani enclave in Pakistan):</b>		
Native Agent	Indian	1879-1951
Consular Agent	Indian	1952-8
<b>Kuwait (Arabia):</b>		
Native Agent	Arab	1899-1904
Native Agent	Indian	1905

Until now, these agents have gone largely unnoticed in the history of the Gulf.<sup>3</sup> To correct this imbalance in the historiography, this paper draws upon the private papers of four native agents and interviews with the descendants of three native agents:

**Table 2: Private paper collections in Bahrain<sup>4</sup>**

PRIVATE PAPERS OF	POSTS HELD
<b>Hajji Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Safar (1778-1845):</b>	
	British Agent in Bahrain, 1834-42
<b>Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan Safar (c.1803-84):</b>	

British *Munshi* (Political Assistant) in Bushire, 1850s–71

British Agent in Bahrain, 1872–84

**Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (c.1830s–1900):**

British *Munshi* in Bushire, 1860s–93

British Agent in Bahrain, 1893–1900

**Agha Muhammad Khalil Sharif (c.1870–1940):**

Deputy British Agent in Bahrain, 1893–1900

British *Munshi* in Bushire, 1900–4

British *Munshi* in Kuwait, 1904–9

British *Dragoman* (Head *Munshi*) in Bushire, 1909–24

**Table 3: Oral histories in Bahrain**

ORAL HISTORIES OF / POSTS HELD

**Hajji Ibrahim bin Rajab (c.1820s/30s–?):**

Bahrain Agent in Bahrain, 1862–4

**Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan Safar (c.1820s/30s–91):**

British *Munshi* (Political Assistant) in Bushire, 1857–72

Deputy British Agent in Bahrain, 1872–84

British Agent in Bahrain, 1884–91

**Agha Muhammad Khalil Sharif (c.1870–1940):**

Deputy British Agent in Bahrain, 1893–1900

British *Munshi* in Bushire, 1900–4

British *Munshi* in Kuwait, 1904–9

British *Dragoman* (Head *Munshi*) in Bushire, 1909–24

Native agents not only had an extensive knowledge of local cultures, languages, and politics, which anyone recruited from outside the Gulf could not possibly possess, but also could obtain, through their family, social, and business networks, the intelligence the British needed to operate their informal empire in the Gulf. As wealthy merchants, these agents also enjoyed considerable influence with local rulers and governors. The contacts and influence of the agents enabled the Gulf Resident to tap into local political systems to an extent that would have been otherwise impossible, while at the same time the British connection allowed the agents to increase their wealth and their political influence. These native agents played a crucial role in Arabia and Persia: without them, the British would have been unable to maintain the Pax Britannica in the Gulf in the nineteenth century.

**Robinson's theory of collaboration**

Britain's employment of native agents is best explained by Ronald Robinson's theory of indigenous collaboration.<sup>5</sup> More than thirty years after its first publication in 1972, this ground-breaking theory is still the most comprehensive explanation of how European imperialism worked on the ground. Robinson uses the word 'collaboration' in its original, neutral meaning of 'working jointly with another', as it is used in this paper. His intention is to explain the non-European foundations of European imperialism, not to imply a value judgement.

Robinson explains how Europeans in imperial bureaucracies and supporting institutions overseas were expensive for the European imperial powers to employ.

In order for empire to be affordable and sustainable for the imperial metropolises, costs had to be either reduced or passed on to the colonized. Most European powers maintained a policy that, "if empire could not be had on the cheap, it was not worth having at all."<sup>6</sup> Because imperial governments were reluctant to commit metropolitan resources to their empires, European proconsuls such as the Gulf Resident had fairly limited means with which to operate.<sup>7</sup> They had relatively small military forces at their disposal and imperial governments were reluctant to send reinforcements, the need for which was regarded as a sign of administrative incompetence. Coercion was expensive and regarded as counter-productive, except in case of emergencies.<sup>8</sup> The less proconsuls interfered with traditional authority and institutions, therefore, the safer they were.<sup>9</sup> The scarcer the imperial resources and the less formal the imperial arrangements, the more the proconsuls had to work within indigenous political systems to achieve imperial ends, and the more they depended upon local intermediaries.

Robinson argues that the form and extent of imperialism was determined as much by non-European collaboration and resistance as it was by European activity and Europe's political economy. He sees it as a "political reflex action" between two European and one non-European components: (1) the economic drive to integrate newly colonized regions into the industrial economy as markets and investments; (2) "the strategic imperative to secure them against rivals in world power politics"; and (3) "indigenous collaboration and resistance."<sup>10</sup> Much of imperial historiography is unbalanced, he believes, because it has traditionally focused on only the first two components. By giving full recognition to the non-European elements of imperialism, Robinson aims to replace the traditional Euro-centric (metropole) view with an ex-centric (peripheral, non-metropole) approach. Imperialism's controlling mechanism, he explains, was made up of relationships between the European agents of external expansion on the one hand, and indigenous agents of internal collaboration on the other.<sup>11</sup> Without the voluntary or enforced collaboration of the élites within a local indigenous society, "economic resources could not be transferred, strategic interests protected, or xenophobic reaction and resistance contained."<sup>12</sup> It was the collaboration and mediation of indigenous élites in the invaded countries themselves that provided the imperial administrations with their military and administrative muscle. Imperialism's central mechanism was the system of collaboration established locally to integrate imperial interests with indigenous politics, achieving a balance between the two.<sup>13</sup>

Imperial actors and historians have downplayed the extent to which imperialism depended upon the work of

local collaborators. In the case of South Asia, for example, British India has been portrayed as an empire run by Britons, rather than an empire run by Indians for Britons<sup>14</sup> — a type of misportrayal Robinson calls the “grand illusion.”<sup>15</sup> The more limited an imperial power’s resources, the more extensive its dependence on indigenous collaboration and mediation. In the Gulf region, the British were so light on the ground that they had no alternative but to rely heavily on native political agents. Yet this reliance is not reflected in Gulf historiography. The reason for such omissions, Robinson believes, is that historians have placed too much emphasis on the formal European aspects of imperial activity. For example, most historians writing on imperial administrations, such as the Gulf Residency or the Government of India, tend to take a top-down approach. They examine how imperial administrations imposed themselves on regional politics, ignoring the important role regional politics played in assisting them. The result is a tendency to focus only on Europeans, ignoring the majority of the people within the imperial administrations.

What determined how imperialism worked in a given location was not the metropole, Robinson asserts, but “the indigenous collaborative systems connecting its European and Afro-Asian components.”<sup>16</sup> All systems of mediation consisted of two sets of relationships: the relationship between the Europeans and the indigenous élites, and the relationship between these élites and local interests and institutions.<sup>17</sup> This is why Robinson believes “the choice of indigenous collaborators, more than anything else, determined the organization and character of colonial rule.”<sup>18</sup> Without collaborators to mediate locally, imperialism was unsustainable.

From the perspective of the collaborators, the imperial powers were an alternative source of wealth and power. Association with an imperial power enabled the collaborators, especially those who acted as imperial agents, to increase their personal wealth, prestige, and influence.<sup>19</sup> In unstable and insecure environments, such as the Gulf, association with an imperial power could also secure much-needed protection and assistance.<sup>20</sup> These were key factors in attracting indigenous collaborators.<sup>21</sup> Systems of collaboration and mediation were normally ones of interdependence and mutual interests. The rest of this paper examines Britain’s employment of native political agents in the light of Robinson’s theory.

### Merchants as native agents

Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants trading in the nineteenth century Gulf had to be constantly on guard against pirates and bedouin raiders. If they fell out of favor with the local ruler, their property might be confiscated by members of the local ruling family. To gain

protection for themselves, their businesses, and their families, members of merchant families frequently allied themselves with European governments or companies by working as “native agents” or “native assistants” (*munshis*). When referring to these agents, the Europeans used “native” to indicate that they were indigenous to the general region and were, therefore, non-European.<sup>22</sup> Today, native agents are known as honorary consuls, but their role is now confined, for the most part, to non-political duties.<sup>23</sup> The British employed native agents extensively throughout the Gulf in the nineteenth century, as detailed in Table 1. The earliest known British native agent in Southern Persia was an unnamed man posted to Kirman in the 1720s. In Eastern Arabia, the earliest known agent was an Indian merchant named Narottam Ramachandar Joshi, the East India Company’s Broker at Muscat during c.1758–98.<sup>24</sup> Britain’s last native agent in the Gulf region retired two hundred years later: he was Khan Bahadur ‘Abd al-Qaiyum, Britain’s Consular Agent at Gwadar during 1952–8.<sup>25</sup>

### Advantages and disadvantages for the merchants

Membership on the staff of an American, Belgian, British, French, German, or Russian consulate or company in the Gulf usually carried with it the much sought-after status of “protected person.” All non-Britons in the employ of the British Government or British companies, for example, were known as “British-protected persons” and were entitled to the protection and “good offices” (diplomatic representation and mediation) of British civil and military officers around the world. If an injustice occurred against a British-protected person or his family in the Gulf, the Gulf Resident was obligated to intervene on his behalf. This practice discouraged harassment of British employees and protected their private businesses as well. Their ships, goods, families, and staffs were all protected, giving them the same advantages British merchants enjoyed in the Gulf. They had a right to the Resident’s good offices if their goods were seized and were entitled to the protection of the Indian Navy and Royal Navy in times of trouble. In Bahrain, they were also entitled by treaty to receive “the treatment and consideration of the subjects and dependants of the most favoured people”, including the right to pay no more than five per cent *ad valorem* on imported goods.<sup>26</sup>

The merchants chosen to be native agents had extensive regional networks of business associates, relatives, and friends. The information that could be obtained from these networks was of great value to the British, as indicated by this letter of commendation from a British political officer in Bushire (the Gulf Residency HQ):

As I am shortly proceeding to India, I take this op-

portunity to express my sincere thanks to Agha Mahomed Rahim ibn Hajee Abdun Nabee [Safar], who has repeatedly proved of great use in obtaining correct information, the securing of which required much tact, delicacy of management, and personal influence. I have found him trustworthy, sincere, zealous and ever willing to carry out any work entrusted to him to the best of his ability. He is well informed about local matters and, having a large circle of friends at Bushire, Busreh, & other ports in [the] Persian Gulf, correct information can always be obtained through him, & I feel quite certain that as a Confidential Agent his services are indispensable to the Bushire Residency. The influence which he has acquired locally makes him a very useful person in certain negotiations of delicate nature. I do, therefore, with pleasure bear this testimony to his worth, expressing my sense of esteem and sincere regard for him.<sup>27</sup>

While merchants like Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (British *Munshi* in Bushire c.1860s–93, British Agent in Bahrain 1893–1900) already enjoyed status, influence, and wealth, association with the dominant power in the region offered prospects for further improvement, as Robinson's theory explains. A native agent's privileged status was symbolized by the Union Jack which flew outside his house to proclaim that he was the local representative of the East India Company (1600–1858) or British Government of India (1858–1947). The powerful symbolism of the Union Jack would have reinforced the impression that he was the most influential man in a ruler's domain outside of the ruler's family. He represented the dominant power in the region and had regular, direct access to the most powerful men on the Arab and Persian coasts: the local rulers and governors. If Britain's Resident in Bushire was "the Uncrowned King of the Persian Gulf", as Lord Curzon dubbed him,<sup>28</sup> then his locally-recruited agents were the Gulf's uncrowned princes. This would explain why native agents were willing to run the British agencies at what appears to be a financial loss to themselves. The Agency-related expenses of Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Safar (British Agent in Bahrain 1872–84), for example, were over four and a half times what he received from the British Government of India.<sup>29</sup> But this loss was a small price to pay for the protection he received and the enhanced status, influence, and contacts he enjoyed as a British Agent. These benefits profited his business, enabling him to recoup the Agency operating expenses as part of his larger business profits.

There were only two disadvantages to being a native agent. First was the risk of being scapegoated by an unsupportive Resident and removed from the post. In such a situation, a native agent stood to suffer both socially and financially. He would likely have to leave the

shikhdom in which he had been posted. Second was the risk of personal attack by those who resented British power and authority. As both of these occurrences were rare, the advantages of being a native agent far outweighed any possible disadvantages.

### Advantages for the British

Gulf merchants were highly effective as British agents in the Gulf. Britain's Resident in Bushire was responsible for maintaining contact with the dozens of rulers and governors in Arabia and Persia, enforcing the treaties, staying informed about events throughout the region, and protecting British interests. Local merchants were not only willing to work for small salaries, totally incommensurate with the value of their services, they were also well-suited to help the Resident with these duties. They generally had extensive social and business contacts throughout the Gulf and beyond. Most had relatives with whom they were in regular communication handling the family business in many of the region's ports and market towns: Baghdad, Basrah, Muhammarah, Bushire, Shiraz, Isfahan, Lingah, Bandar 'Abbas, Manamah, Muscat, Aden, Mocha, Hudaydah, and Bombay. The Safar family, for instance, had family members in eight of these towns in the nineteenth century, as Table 4 shows:

**Table 4: Safar family locations**

MEMBER	DATES
<b>Baghdad (Iraq):</b>	
Hajji Muhammad Jafar	1870s–1885 or 1895
<b>Bushire (Persia):</b>	
Hajji Hasan	late 1700s
Hajji Mirza Muh'd 'Ali (Br.)	1778–1802, c.1844–5
Bibi Nuri Jan	early 1800s–early 1900s
Hajji Muhammad Hasan	?–1881
Hajji Muhammad Jafar	mid 1800s
Hajji Muhammad 'Ali (Br.)	c.1830s–?
Agha Muhammad Rahim (Br.)	c.1830s–1893
Muhammad 'Ali	c.1830s–92
Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan (Br.)	c.1844–71
Muhammad Saddiq	1845–?
Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan (Br.)	1857–71
Agha Muhammad Khalil (Br.)	c.1870s–93, 1900–4, 1909–24
Bibi Khair al-Nisa	c.1870s–93, 1900–4, 1909–24
Agha Muhammad Saddiq	c.1884–c.1911
Muhammad	late 1800s–?
<b>Shiraz (Persia):</b>	
Hajji Muhammad Hasan	late 1800s–mid 1900s
<b>Manamah (Bahrain):</b>	
Hajji Mirza Muh'd 'Ali (Br.)	1829–42
Umm al-Khair	mid/late 1800s–1934
Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan (Br.)	1872–84
Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan (Br.)	1872–91
'Abd al-Rasul	c.1880–1928
Khadajah	late 1800s–?
<b>Muscat (Oman):</b>	
'Abd al-Wahhab	early–late 1800s
'Abd al-Khalil	early–late 1800s
'Abd al-Razzaq	early–late 1800s

**Mocha (Yemen):**

Hajji Mirza Muh'd 'Ali (Br.)	1809–29
Hajji 'Abd al-Nabi Khan (Br.)	1809–29
Hajji 'Abd al-Rasul (Br.)	1809–c.1856
Hajji Mirza Ahmad Khan (Br.)	c.1820s/30s–56
Hajji Muhammad (Br.)	c.1820s–mid 1800s

**Hudaydah (Yemen):**

Hajji Muhammad (Br.)	?–c.1883
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**Bombay (India):**

Muhammad Saddiq	late 1700s–1845
Hajji Muhammad Hasan	early–mid 1800s
Hajji Muhammad Jafar	early–mid 1800s
Agha Muhammad Saddiq	c.1820s–c.1884
Hajji Mirza Muh'd 'Ali (Br.)	c.1842–4

**Key:** (Br.) = served as a British agent or *munsbi*

The top merchant families in the Gulf still operate in this way.<sup>30</sup> Gulf merchants were well placed to be the eyes and ears of the Gulf Resident. They knew the region better than the British, spoke the languages of the Gulf better, and had better local and regional intelligence networks. It was only by tapping into the mercantile networks of the Gulf that successive Gulf Residents were able to maintain political contacts, stay informed, and protect British interests as well as they did in the nineteenth century.

Wealthy Gulf merchants enjoyed a high status within Gulf society and a resulting influence with the Gulf rulers that was independent of their association with the East India Company or British Government of India. By employing men of this caliber, the Resident was able to take advantage of their influence with the rulers. Jill Crystal and Fatma Al-Sayegh have studied this sphere of influence in Kuwait, Qatar, and Dubai, but the patterns they identify can be seen in other parts of the Gulf as well, including the Arab-ruled ports of Southern Persia.<sup>31</sup> Crystal argues that merchant influence stemmed from the Gulf rulers' economic dependence on the merchants. A substantial portion of the rulers' revenues came from the merchants through the customs dues and taxes that flowed from a prosperous entrepôt economy. Gulf rulers also depended upon occasional loans from the wealthiest merchants. Beyond this, pearl merchants also had economic control over large portions of the local population through employment and indebtedness. All this gave the wealthiest merchants considerable political influence with the rulers, which meant that the rulers could not afford to ignore their opinions. A wealthy merchant's status ensured him regular, predictable access to his ruler's *majlis* (court) and gave him input to decision-making. The merchants' access to decision-making, Crystal notes, "was primarily informal. Their influence on the policies of the ruler was casual and left no written record. The most common kind of informal influence was proximity: the influence of those with everyday access to the ruling family through marriage, friendship, and court presence."<sup>32</sup> The political

dynamics of a given issue could see a merchant united with his ruler against other merchants, or united with other merchants against his ruler. Politically, the power relationship between the rulers and the merchants was one of counterbalance; economically, it was one of interdependence.<sup>33</sup> The result, says Crystal, was a political structure consisting of "a ruling Shaikh, whose pre-eminence was secure, but constrained by the merchant élite, tied to the economy of pearling and trade."<sup>34</sup> By employing wealthy merchants as local agents, successive Gulf Residents were able to take advantage of the political relationship between the merchants and the rulers. The result was overlapping traditional and utilitarian relationships in a dynamic power triangle between Resident, agent, and ruler that formed the core of the infrastructure of informal empire in the Gulf.

The financial advantage for the British of employing native agents on small salaries was tremendous. The Gulf Residency was forever being run on a tight budget because of Britain's unwillingness to spend much on political representation there. With very limited financial resources at his disposal, the Resident somehow had to maintain contact with dozens of rulers and governors and stay informed about events throughout the region. Native agents were a cost-effective solution to his problem. For the salary of just one junior British political officer, the Resident could employ five or six locally recruited agents to do more or less the same job, as Table 5 makes clear:

**Table 5: The Gulf Resident's monthly political staff budget for 1834 and 1860–1<sup>35</sup>**

OFFICER	IDENTITY	SALARY (RUPEES)	
		1834	1860–1
Resident, Bushire	British	2,400	2,400
Assistant, Bushire	British	<u>500</u>	<u>500</u>
		2,900	2,900
<i>Munsbi</i> , Bushire	Persian	122	122
<i>Munsbi</i> , Bushire	Arab	122	122
Agent, Shiraz	Indian	...	122
Agent, Sharjah	Arab	120	120
Agent, Bahrain	Arab	80	80
Agent, Lingah	Arab	<u>50</u>	<u>50</u>
		494	616

This table reveals that Arabs, Persians, and Indians accounted for around three-quarters of the Gulf Residency's political staff, yet their salaries consumed just 14.5% of the political staff budget in 1834 and 17.5% in 1860–1.

Another reason for the use of native agents was the political flexibility it gave the Resident. Native agents were informal appointments from Bushire rather than officially gazetted appointments from Calcutta. They were rarely, if ever, invested with official power, that is to say, the authority to make undertakings binding on

the British Crown,<sup>36</sup> but they were usually allowed to use their discretion as to how they mediated, as long as they achieved the results desired by the Resident. This informality enabled the Gulf Resident to disavow the actions of a native agent if it was politically expedient to do so, giving the Resident a measure of flexibility in the conduct of political relations without appearing dishonest. In other words, the Resident had deniability because he could use his native agents as convenient scapegoats.

### Disadvantages for the British

There were a number of disadvantages, however, to employing local merchants as native agents in the place of British political officers. The most obvious was the possibility of a conflict of interest between an agent's official duties and his private business pursuits. In 1773, the British Parliament passed the Regulating Act, which forbade the East India Company's administrative and political officers to engage in private trade — an indication of how the Company's involvement in South and Southwest Asia had become more political and less commercial. In 1822, at the outset of the Gulf Residency, the Company issued an order forbidding private trade by Company officers in the Gulf.<sup>37</sup> British policy generally was that trade and politics were not to be mixed. Indeed, the Governor of Bombay removed one Gulf Resident, Captain Felix Jones (1855–62), when he discovered that the Resident had, among other things, engaged in private trade at Bushire.<sup>38</sup> However, native agents were permitted to trade because their high status and influence depended upon a personal wealth derived from trade. A ban on private trade would have undermined the very qualities that made these men useful to the Resident. Furthermore, there would have been little incentive for Gulf merchants to work as native agents if their association with the East India Company or British Government of India did not benefit their business interests. The British admitted that the salaries they paid native agents did not reflect the true value of their services. Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Pelly (Gulf Resident 1862–72), for example, considered Rs.80 (rupees) per month “a small salary” for the Bahrain Agent in 1871.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, Rs.80 was a pittance compared to the Rs.1,000 per month a British political officer received for doing the same job.<sup>40</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Meade (Gulf Resident 1897–1900), writing about Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar (British Agent in Bahrain 1893–1900), admitted that

He has the reputation of being a well-to-do merchant, and it would, I may say at once, be difficult to get a man of his position to carry on the duties he performs on the pay of the post, Rs.100 per mensem, if he were not allowed to trade. Mohamed Rahim and his predecessors no doubt have only held it be-

cause it gave them prestige and assisted them in their private commercial undertakings.<sup>41</sup>

Because the Gulf Residency was always run on a tight budget, the Resident could not afford to pay native agents the same salaries as British political officers. By both permitting native agents to engage in trade and allowing their businesses to benefit from their association with the Gulf Residency, the Resident compensated them for their inadequate salaries. This was an acknowledged aspect of native agent employment throughout South and Southwest Asia.<sup>42</sup> Whatever conflicts of interest there were in mixing trade with politics, most of the Residents and their superiors in India seem to have considered this a price that had to be paid for the services of these well-connected and influential men.

Another disadvantage of employing native agents was that the agents' intelligence reports were not consistently accurate. Their reports to the Resident were colored by their personal interests from time to time. They occasionally reported rumors as facts and, in rare instances, even suppressed, distorted, or falsified information if it benefited them to do so. For example, Britain's first Native Agent in Bahrain, Sadah Anandadas (c.1816–19), made a number of false and contradictory reports in February 1819 that led the Senior Naval Officer in the Gulf, Captain Francis Loch, on a wild goose chase and caused him to destroy an innocent dhow that Sadah had claimed was a pirate ship.<sup>43</sup> In his report to Bombay about the Agent, Loch bitterly remarked,

I can only say it is much to be regretted that men [accustomed] to falsehood ... [are] trusted with situations where they have so much in their power and may do so much mischief. Bahrein is an Island where an English Agent ought to reside, particularly after what has happened .... [Many more] lives might have been lost and much [more] damage done in consequence of the false information of that individual .... [W]e must admit ourselves to have been duped by a man without character, truth, or respectability.<sup>44</sup>

Experiences like this taught the British to be cautious. Residents had to be on guard against misleading information and did not always accept their agents' reports at face value. If a report were serious enough, a Resident might despatch one of his British political assistants to investigate — assuming, of course, that he could spare him. Take, for example, Meade's comments to his (British) First Political Assistant about a report from Muhammad Rahim in 1899:

The Agent's information is not of course as yet more than hearsay news, but when you go to Bahrein I think you will not have any difficulty in making the Bunnies [Indian Hindu merchants] admit if it is true .... If the Agent's report is true, the Sheikh has grossly broken his word to us.<sup>45</sup>

Considering the number of native agents stationed throughout the Gulf Residency, the small number of British political officers on the Residency staff, and the slowness of travel in the nineteenth century, the Resident's ability to confirm reports was fairly limited. Nevertheless, the Resident depended heavily on the information provided by his native agents and he could not have operated the Residency effectively without it.

A third disadvantage of employing native agents was that they were not professionally-trained men bound by a British civil service code of conduct. But as long as the ends justified the means, the British authorities seem to have made allowances for this. On rare occasions, however, they felt compelled to dismiss a native agent for misconduct.

A fourth disadvantage was, ironically, the informality of the native agents' political presence. While this was an advantage for much of the nineteenth century, as discussed above, it later became a liability when the British felt a need for a more formal presence in the Gulf. For example, the Ottoman Government, which claimed Bahrain as an Ottoman dependency, refused to acknowledge Britain's Native Agent in Bahrain as an official British political representative. Furthermore, because the native agents were not invested with official power, they sometimes lacked the necessary authority to carry out certain duties and had to refer matters to the Gulf Resident, which caused delays.

### **Conclusion: the replacement of native agents in the twentieth century**

This paper has placed the Pax Britannica in the Gulf within the context of indigenous collaboration by examining Britain's extensive employment of native political agents and assistants. It has shown how, contrary to popular belief, British political representation and the protection of British interests in the Gulf relied heavily on native agents before the twentieth century. These indigenous collaborators were attracted to British service because of the benefits involved: British protection, a higher social status, increased power over others, and enhanced business prospects. The British recruited non-Europeans to serve as agents in the Gulf because of the lack of British officers, because of the agents' local knowledge, and because of the agents' willingness to work for nominal salaries. They recruited wealthy merchants from the Arab, Persian, and Indian merchant communities in, or with connections to, Bushire, where the Gulf Resident resided. These merchants had extensive social and business contacts throughout the region, and an intimate knowledge of the region's languages, cultures, and politics. Many of them enjoyed political influence in Arabia and Persia because of their financial relationships with the local rulers and governors. By employing such men as agents, the Gulf Residents were

able to operate *within* the local political systems of the Gulf to obtain the intelligence and mediation necessary for the maintenance of British hegemony in the region. The disadvantages inherent in the employment of native agents — mainly the possibility of a conflict of interest between trade and politics and the occasional inaccurate intelligence report — were tolerated as long as these men remained influential with the local rulers and governors and protected British interests.

Native agents were an effective form of informal political representation in the Gulf until the mid 1890s, when international rivalry in the region began to threaten Britain's Indian Empire. In the face of this threat, the informal status of Britain's native agents became counter-productive, a development that prompted the British Government of India in the 1900s to replace most of its native agents with a stronger political presence in the form of British political officers. However, the replacement of the agents did not entail the abolition of the entire system of collaboration. Members of the same merchant families continued to be employed in political roles under the direct supervision of British officers in the Gulf Residency and political agencies, as they always had been. British political agents in the Gulf continued to rely heavily on the intelligence and mediation provided by their native political assistants, and on the various other services provided by large native staffs, until the end of the Gulf Residency in 1971. The crucial importance of indigenous support is abundantly clear from the Residency and agencies' annual staff photographs. Take, for instance, the staff photograph of the Political Agency in Bahrain from 1929, which still hangs in the British Embassy in Manamah: it shows twenty-three men, only one of whom, the Political Agent, is British. When the political agencies were converted into embassies upon the independence of the Gulf shajhdoms, the British Government kept these men on. Some continue to serve the British Government in the Gulf to this very day.<sup>46</sup> In other parts of the Middle East and Asia, native agents continue to represent Western governments, but as honorary consuls not political agents, their role now confined to commercial relations and administrative duties.

Robinson's analysis of imperialism finds that the greater the informality of an empire, the greater the level of local collaboration and mediation needed to sustain it, and the greater the need to work within indigenous political systems. His theory of collaboration holds that it was the breakdown of indigenous systems of collaboration that led to more direct forms of imperial involvement. In the case of the Gulf Residency, the indigenous system clearly did not break down. Men from Gulf merchant families were no longer employed as agents, except at Sharjah and Gwadar, but they continued to work in subordinate political roles. Britain's

informal empire in the twentieth century Gulf continued to rely heavily on indigenous collaboration for its existence, just as it had during the nineteenth century. Thus, the history of Britain's native agents in Arabia and Persia not only illustrates Robinson's theory of collaboration but also modifies it by showing that an indigenous system of mediation does not have to break down to lead to more direct forms of imperial control.

## NOTES

### ABBREVIATIONS

Asst.	Assistant
H.M. Govt.	Her/His Majesty's Government (the British Government)
IOR	India Office Records, British Library, London
Ks.	Krans (principal unit of currency of Persia)
PRPG	Political Resident in the Persian Gulf
reg.	register
Rs.	Rupees
SNOPG	Senior Naval Officer in the Persian Gulf (the Commander of the Gulf Squadron)

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on research conducted in Bahrain, funded by the Bahrain-British Foundation; in London at the India Office Records (IOR) of the British Library, funded partly by the Society for Arabian Studies; and in Oxford at the Middle East Centre of St. Antony's College. I am grateful for the interest and assistance I received from the descendants and relatives of Britain's native agents in Bahrain (in alphabetical order): Khanim Behbehani, Khalid Kanoo, Khalifah Khalfan, Khalil Rajab, 'Adel Al-Safar, Fatimah Al-Safar, Jan Al-Safar, Nader Al-Safar, Thoraya Al-Safar, Wadi' Al-Safar, and Mirza Isma'il Al-Sharif. I owe a special debt of gratitude to 'Ali Akbar Bushiri, caretaker of the Safar and Sharif family manuscripts in the Bushiri Archive, Bahrain. For reading drafts of this article and offering helpful comments, I am indebted to 'Ali Akbar Bushiri, Nader Al-Safar, Jan Al-Safar, Gloria Onley, James Piscatori, Michael H. Fisher, Wm. Roger Louis, David Washbrook, and Nelida Fuccaro.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the word 'collaboration', see A. E. Atmore, "The Extra-European Foundations of British Imperialism: Towards a Reassessment", in C. C. Eldridge (ed.), *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 124–5; J. Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), 64.

<sup>3</sup>I discuss Britain's native agents in the Gulf in *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), the book version of my D.Phil. dissertation, "The Infrastructure of Informal Empire: A Study of Britain's Native Agency in Bahrain, c.1816–1900" (University of Oxford, 2001). This paper is a summary of one part of that book.

<sup>4</sup>These papers are held in the Bushiri Archive (owned by 'Ali Akbar Bushiri) in Bahrain.

<sup>5</sup>See R. Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration", in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 117–42 reprinted in Wm.

Roger Louis (ed.), *The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (London: New Viewpoints, 1976), 128–51; Robinson, "European Imperialism and Indigenous Reactions in British West Africa, 1880–1914", in H. L. Wesseling (ed.), *Expansion and Reaction* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1978), 141–63; Robinson, "Imperial Theory and the Question of Imperialism after Empire", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12 (Jan. 1984), 42–54; Robinson, "The Excentric Idea of Imperialism, with or without Empire", in W. J. Mommsen and J. Osterhammel (eds.), *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 267–89. For two case studies, see G. R. Warbury, "British Rule in the Nile Valley, 1882–1956, and Robinson's Theory of Collaboration", *Asian and African Studies*, 15 (1981), 287–322; Atmore, "The Extra-European Foundations of British Imperialism: Towards a Reassessment", 106–25.

<sup>6</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism", in Louis (ed.), *The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, 131.

<sup>7</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 142.

<sup>8</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 142.

<sup>9</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 143.

<sup>10</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 130.

<sup>11</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 130.

<sup>12</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 130.

<sup>13</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 131.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of this point, see B. S. Cohn, "Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: The Banaras Region", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 82/3. (1962), 312–20; S. Bose and A. Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1998), 57–66; Marshall, "Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: Part III, Britain and India", 1–16.

<sup>15</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism", 129.

<sup>16</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 147.

<sup>17</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 132.

<sup>18</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 147.

<sup>19</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 143.

<sup>20</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 131.

<sup>21</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations", 131.

<sup>22</sup>For a history of the word 'native', see R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 215–16.

<sup>23</sup>Foreign and Commonwealth Office, H. M. Govt., *Consular Work Annual Review, 2001* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2001), 13.

<sup>24</sup>Bombay Public Dept. diary no. 31 (1758), entry for 28 Feb. 1758, in J. A. Saldanha, *Selections from State Papers, Bombay, regarding the East India Company's Connections with the Persian Gulf, with a Summary of Events, 1600–1800*. (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1908), 124. The diary refers to "the Broker at Muscat", who, in subsequent pages (pp. 164, 335), is identified by name.

<sup>25</sup>Gwadar was an Omani enclave on Makran Coast, which the Sultan of Oman sold to Pakistan in 1958.

<sup>26</sup>Article 4, Convention of 1861, in C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, 11: *The Treaties, Etc., Relating to Aden and the South Western Coast of Arabia, the Arab Principalities in the*

*Persian Gulf, Muscat (Oman), Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1933), 235–6.

<sup>27</sup>Statement by R. Halier (Uncovenanted Asst. Resident), 2 Mar. 1889 (Bushiri Archive, Bahrain).

<sup>28</sup>G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 2 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1892), 451.

<sup>29</sup>Between June 1872 and June 1875, ‘Abd al-Nabi received Rs.1,039-0-2 (Ks.2,597.6) in salary — Rs.346-5-2 p.a. — yet his Agency-related expenses were Rs.4,772-3-1 (Ks.11,930.5) — an average of Rs.1,590-11-2 p.a.. ‘Abd al-Nabi Safar, “Account of Personal Expenses, 1872–75” (Bushiri Archive, Bahrain). The amounts are recorded in krans. The exchange rate at the time was roughly 1 kran = 0.4 rupee (26 Pice), 1 rupee = 2 \_ krans. L. Pelly, *Report on a Journey to Riyadh in Central Arabia (1865)*, reprint edn. (Cambridge: Oleander Press, n.d.), appendix viii: “Riyadh Currency”, 84.

<sup>30</sup>M. Field, *The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States* (New York: Overlook Press, 1984), 16–18, 126, 162, 218, 248, 280; J. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*, rev. edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

<sup>31</sup>Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 4, 9, 13, 21, 26, 56–7; F. Al-Sayegh, “Merchants’ Role in a Changing Society: The Case of Dubai, 1900–90”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34/1 (1998), 90–1.

<sup>32</sup>Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 56.

<sup>33</sup>Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 57.

<sup>34</sup>Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 26.

<sup>35</sup>J. A. Saldanha, *Précis of the Affairs of the Persian Coast and Islands, 1854–1905* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1906), 69. The Muscat Agency is not listed because it maintained a separate budget.

<sup>36</sup>E. Satow, *Satow’s Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 5th edn., ed. Lord Gore-Booth (London: Longman, 1977), chap. 8, sec. 8, 58.

<sup>37</sup>J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, 1: *Historical* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1915), 213; A. T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf: An Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 260–1.

<sup>38</sup>For details, see J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 566–75.

<sup>39</sup>Pelly to Bombay Govt., 28 Jan. 1871, P/759 (IOR), 290. Pelly wrote this at a time when he was considering re-establishing the Native Agency in Bahrain, abolished six years previously.

<sup>40</sup>Rs.1,000 was the monthly salary of the First Assistant Resident during 1866–79. First Assistant Residents were sent to Bahrain as Residency Agents on at least five occasions: 1871, 1872, 1873, 1874, and 1879. Note entitled “Resident” by Prideaux (Asst. PRPG), 14 Aug. 1899, R/15/1/330 (IOR), 19–20.

<sup>41</sup>“Report on the arms trade at Bahrein” by M. Meade, 18 Nov. 1898, reg. no. 364/1899, L/P&S/7/112 (IOR).

<sup>42</sup>For Bahrain, see Field, *The Merchants*, 265–6. For Sharjah, see R. S. Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 167–9. For Persia, see D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians during the Qajar Period, 1787–1921* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 78; J. Calmard, “The Iranian Merchants: Formation and Rise of a Pressure Group between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Cen-

tures”, in D. Lombard and J. Aubin (eds.), *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97. For India, see D. L. White, *Competition and Collaboration: Parsi Merchants and the English East India Company in 18th Century India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995), 44–5, 47–8, 54, 59, 128–9, 141, 148; S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650–1740*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 227–8, 234, 258–64; P. J. Marshall, “Masters and Banians in Eighteenth-Century Calcutta”, in B. B. King and M. N. Pearson (eds.), *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia before Dominion* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 193.

<sup>43</sup>For a full account of this incident, see Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1: *Historical*, 845–6; C. E. Davies, *The Blood-Red Arab Flag: An Investigation into Qasimi Piracy, 1797–1820* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 85–7.

<sup>44</sup>Loch (SNOGP) to Bombay, 28 Feb. 1819, P/384/43 (IOR), 2655–6.

<sup>45</sup>Meade (PRPG) to Prideaux (Asst. PRPG), 17 Oct. 1899, R/15/1/315 (IOR).

<sup>46</sup>Interviews with Yusif Al-‘Ali (Consul 1958–98), 24 Aug. 1999 (British Embassy, Bahrain) and Rui Falco (Accountant, Gulf Residency 1966–1972 and British Council 1972–present), 20 July 1999 (British Council, Manamah, Bahrain).



# Collaboration and “Pacification”: French Conquest, Moroccan Combatants, and the Transformation of the Middle Atlas

MOSHE GERSHOVICH

In his seminal essay, “Non European foundations of European Imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration,” Ronald Robinson delineates the process by which early nineteenth century “informal” imperialism transformed itself into the “New Imperialism” of the latter part of that century. He emphasizes “the crucial role of collaborative systems in the transition from external imperialism to the takeover” and identifies the collaborating mechanism as “mutual interests and interdependence” between European interest groups and indigenous ruling elites. The rationale for this relationship derived from the Eurocentric concept according to which, “if empire could not be held on the cheap, it was not worth having at all.” Hence, “without indigenous collaboration... Europeans [could not] have conquered and ruled their non-European empires.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Robinson has provided us with a rudimentary “theory of collaboration” that should serve as “a programme for future study.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, over the three decades that separate us from the publication of his article, much work has been done both on the theoretical aspects of empire-building, colonialism and decolonization,<sup>3</sup> and on specific case studies, including that of France in Morocco.<sup>4</sup> Some of this research has ventured beyond the boundaries outlined in the Robinson article to incorporate not merely the collaboration or resistance of elites, but also the involvement of subaltern groups in the process.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this essay is to reexamine the nature of Franco-Moroccan collaboration through the prism of French military strategy and “native” policies,” specifically insofar as they involved the utilization of Moroccans as military manpower. The questions to be developed herein include the following:

- What policies and methods did the French army implement in its twenty-year campaign (1907-1934) to conquer (or “pacify”) Morocco?
- In what ways did French strategy depend on the collaboration of indigenous groups?

- How and why did the French become increasingly dependent upon Moroccan troops in the latter stages of the conquest drive?
- Who were the Moroccans who enlisted in French military formations? What motivated them to do so? What rapport did they develop with their French superiors and counterparts?
- What effects did the service of thousands of Moroccans in the French army have on their lives and on their native communities?
- What relationship could be established between French recruitment practices and the transformation of the indigenous population, specifically the Berberophone tribal inhabitants of the Middle Atlas mountain range?

## Lyautey and the Moroccan Elites

Any discussion of French policy in Morocco ought to begin with Marshal Louis Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), France’s first resident-general in Morocco (1912-1925). In his actions, Lyautey fits well Robinson’s characterization of “a handful of European pro-consuls [who] managed to manipulate the polymorphic societies of Africa and Asia.”<sup>6</sup> While Lyautey’s actual tenure in Rabat spanned less than a third of France’s “moment” in Morocco, indirectly his influence perpetuated to the end of the Protectorate era through a number of his self-proclaimed disciples who succeeded him at the summit of the French administration.<sup>7</sup>

Lyautey’s personal convictions provide the key for the understanding of his colonial philosophy in general and his approach to collaboration with indigenous Moroccan groups in particular. A staunch royalist and devout Catholic, Lyautey was somewhat of a misfit in the *fin-de-siècle* militantly secularist atmosphere of the Third Republic. His progressive social views made him equally unpopular in the metropolitan army’s supreme command.<sup>8</sup> In a way, Lyautey may have sought not only a

refuge in the colonial world, but also a new terrain upon which to recreate his image of France, the one irreversibly altered by the Revolution of 1789. If such was the case, then Morocco could be argued to have been the ideal laboratory for a royalist experiment, with its long-established and solidly legitimized system of government at the summit of which stood the 'Alawi Sultan and his administration (the *Makhzan*). Having successfully neutralized the former to a mere figurehead in the person of Mawlay Yusuf,<sup>9</sup> Lyautey moved to assure the good will of the latter, whom he regarded as Morocco's natural leadership, its aristocracy.<sup>10</sup>

Lyautey's colonial philosophy called for a lasting collaboration, or "association" as contemporary terminology would have it,<sup>11</sup> between French officials and their indigenous counterparts, drawn from among the various elites: tribal, clerical, mercantile, etc. In order to assure the sustainable cooperation of the Moroccan "aristocracy" and its ability to maintain its control over society, Lyautey initiated a francophone educational system designed primarily if not exclusively for *fils de notables*. The jewel of these schools was the Royal Military Academy (located at the Dar al-Baida palace in Meknes) that was inaugurated in 1919 and outlasted French rule in Morocco. As I have shown elsewhere, the primal purpose of the school, which was the only one of its kind throughout the French colonial empire, was not to train first-rate Moroccan officers for the French army, but rather to prepare its handpicked cadets to succeed their fathers as tribal and urban chieftains at the end of their military careers.<sup>12</sup>

### **Destruction, Seduction, Alteration: "Pacific Penetration" of the Moroccan Countryside**

Behind the lofty rhetoric about "indirect rule" and "respect" of indigenous customs (not to mention the "civilizing mission") uttered by Lyautey and other "enlightened" French colonialists, stood a clear self-serving motive (endorsed or even demanded by the metropolitan government and public) to minimize costs and keep an empire "on the cheap." However, the ability of the Protectorate to ensure the tranquility (and hence economic exploitation) of what Lyautey had termed "*Maroc utile*"<sup>13</sup> necessitated a solution to the problem of the armed resistance ("dissidence" in contemporary colonial terminology) exercised by Moroccan tribal groups.

Lyautey's reputation as an effective and progressive colonial administrator relied in part upon his professed adherence to non-violent methods in his dealing with armed resistance. This "oil-stain" strategy, originally attributed to Lyautey's mentor Joseph Gallieni,<sup>14</sup> called for the implementation of a variety of services such as field infirmaries and markets on the verge of the rebellious territory in order to attract hostile populations and

convince them to switch sides. Otherwise, Lyautey preferred a brief, decisive demonstration of French military might hoping to spare its protracted, expensive use. A fictional "Native Affairs" officer, hero of a contemporary novel, summarized this concept of colonial warfare based on "peaceful penetration:"

The dissidents are not our enemies and our mission is not to destroy their land by fire and blood, but to study them, understand them, and to bring them to our side...we use force only as a last resort...but once the battle is over you must use all means to negotiate and begin the politics of taming. Conquer and then extend your hand to the conquered.<sup>15</sup>

Lyautey himself was categorical in stressing the differences between colonial warfare and a European-style campaign of annihilation. "One does not fight Abd el-Krim as one fights Marshal Hindenburg," he remarked cynically in 1925, referring to the heavy-handed tactics used by his fellow *Maréchal de France*, Philippe Pétain, in his dealing with the Rifian revolt.<sup>16</sup>

Pétain's ability to wage such a lavish campaign was facilitated by the flow of metropolitan troops, which doubled the French order of battle in Morocco from 75,300 men in April 1925 to about 150,000 four months later. These reinforcements came equipped with advanced weapon systems including some making their debut on the Moroccan scene such as tanks, attack planes, and heavy artillery. Lyautey and his subordinates could only dream of employing such a magnitude of military force in their handling of Moroccan armed resistance. Not only were they frequently challenged with cuts of their manpower due to demobilization and the overstretching of French overseas military commitments, they also had to take into account the metropolitan public's sensitivity to casualties and the need to "spare French blood" in the wake of the Great War.<sup>17</sup>

### **"Perfect Mercenaries": Moroccan Soldiers in French Uniforms**

The obvious solution for both problems was to enlarge the size of the Moroccan contingent within the French occupation corps in Morocco. Moroccan soldiers, particularly those labeled as "auxiliaries" (*supplétives*), were cheaper to maintain and their attrition in battle would not cause as great a stir in Paris as would the loss of French conscripts. Hence, by the time the "pacification" campaign reached its peak and conclusion in the early 1930s, it evolved, as Daniel Rivet aptly phrases it, "from a war against Moroccans to a war among Moroccans."<sup>18</sup>

The increase in the number of Moroccans mobilized by the French for the conquest of their own country manifested itself in their growing share of casualties. For example, a compliment of reports on casualties

sustained by the *groupe mobile* of the Tadla region in the summer of 1923 put the total of killed and wounded at 231, of whom 194 (eighty-four per cent) were Moroccans, mostly auxiliaries (154). Nine years later, a summary of the 1932 summer operations throughout southern Morocco listed 651 casualties of whom 429 (sixty-six per cent) were auxiliaries.<sup>19</sup> Another indicator of the growing contribution of Moroccans to the conquest drive concerns the awarding of citations. As shown in Table 1 (see below), Moroccans (mostly “back-up” troops by a 2:1 ratio) constituted twenty-five per cent of all decorated troops during the last phase of combat in Morocco. Indeed, their share seemed to increase as the conquest of their country reached its zenith. In sum, the ability of the French army to consolidate its control over the Moroccan countryside could not have been achieved without the contribution of Moroccan combatants.

**Table I: Citations awarded to Moroccan Soldiers and Members of Back-up Formations, 1912-1933**

Data drawn from periodic listings in the *Ordres Généraux* of the Protectorate’s monthly publication, *Bulletin Officiel*, available at the archives of the French Protectorate archives, located at the annex of the French Foreign Office archives (MAE) in Nantes.

Years	Total Citations	Moroccan Recipients			Percentage of Total
		Total	Regulars	Back-up	
1912-1918	1,502	151	84	67	10
1919-1926	2,787	439	234	205	15
<u>1927-1933</u>	<u>5,662</u>	<u>1,430</u>	<u>451</u>	<u>979</u>	<u>25</u>
<b>Total</b>	9,951	2,020	769	1,251	20

**Note:** Moroccan regular units included some Algero-Tunisian elements. Precise determination of nationality based on Arabic names alone could not always be made. Officers who were not identified as Moroccan were not included, as were members of units whose identity was uncertain

\* \* \*

The distinguished service record of Moroccan riflemen (*tirailleurs*) and cavalymen (*spahis*) in the trenches of the Western Front and other theaters of operations during the “Great War” of 1914-18 helped to erase earlier misgivings about their loyalty and reliability.<sup>20</sup> Unlike other French overseas possessions such as Algeria and Senegal, compulsory conscription was never introduced in Morocco.<sup>21</sup> Moroccan recruits were thus enlisted as contracted volunteers who were eligible to serve up to (and in some cases even beyond) fifteen years. They were regarded as professional career soldiers, “perfect mercenaries” as their French commanders liked to refer to them. Thus, a 1934 study on the utilization of Moroccan soldiers in the French army states:

Comparison between pre-war and current units of the *armée d’Afrique* shows great decline in quality. Luckily, ‘our’ Moroccans are still mercenaries and we can still find among them the virtues which made the glory of the old *armée d’Afrique*.<sup>22</sup>

Reputed for their superb physical endurance, courage and resiliency, submission to rigorous discipline (often attributed to their presumed “fatalism”) and overall dependability, Moroccan soldiers became a popular choice for interwar overseas assignments in sensitive locations such as the Levant and the Rhineland,<sup>23</sup> as well as being stationed in metropolitan France. They were also used in the Rif campaign where they helped suppress the anti-Spanish revolt.<sup>24</sup> Still, the arena where Moroccans serving the French military cause during the interwar period gained most of their combative experience involved the conquest of their own country.

In addition to the enlisted soldiers who served within the regular ranks of the French army,<sup>25</sup> there were thousands others recruited as “auxiliary” or “back-up” troops. They included dozens of small-scale company-size units (150-165 men, including a handful of French commanding personnel) known as *Goums* whose origins could be found in the French conquest of the Algerian countryside in the 1840s and who made their debut in Morocco in 1908.<sup>26</sup>

### The Utility and Limitations of the “Partisans”

In addition to these regular and semi-regular troops were various formations of Moroccan irregulars, collectively labeled “partisans.” Most “partisans” were mobilized on an ad-hoc basis for specific operations and discharged at the end of the annual fighting season. These “partisans” were raised from among the recently subdued tribal population as part of the protection treaty (*aman*) that regulated its formal surrender. Other “partisans” were organized in more permanent formations that were commanded by indigenous chieftains who had allied themselves with the French, such as the “*Grand Qa’ids*” of the South, notably the Glawa clan.<sup>27</sup>

Who were those “partisans” who took part in the annual operations orchestrated by the French army to eradicate the tribal resistance in the Moroccan countryside? What motivated them to fight on the French side against their fellow countrymen? How were they used by the French and in what ways did they contribute to the success of the conquest drive? A contemporary article written by Captain Tarrit, a French intelligence and “native affairs” officer (*Affaires Indigènes*; henceforth AI) who participated in these operations sheds interesting light on these questions:<sup>28</sup>

It could be said that the partisans often form the basic shock inflicted against the enemy and it is thanks

to them that the regular troops do not suffer higher casualties. [However] this does not mean that the partisans could replace the regular soldiers. Such a conclusion will be a great error. The irregulars perform better when they know that behind them exist a solid force, capable of helping them in attack and provide cover in case of failure.

According to Tarrit,

The partisan's departure for combat is made with joy. The women are chanting and they encourage the fighters to kill as many [of their] enemies as possible. Once he smells gunpowder, the partisan knows nothing but combat. He becomes extremely impressionable, capable of running straight towards the enemy.

The propensity of the "partisans" for unruly conduct on the battlefield had its advantages as "Sometimes this could cause complete panic within the enemy's ranks." However, it also carried a risk to the French officers who may be "exposed to the serious danger of being left behind and falling into the enemy's hands." Hence, the military's AI apparatus attempted to discipline the "partisans" and to incorporate them solidly within the structure of the *groupe mobile* that included various regular and auxiliary formations of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Specifically, "the [French] intelligence officer employs with the partisans a mounted *goum*, which serves as his 'personal guard,' a solid reserve to restore order and combat panic. The *goumiers*," notes Tarrit, "are excellent soldiers as long as they are together, but they tend to lose themselves when left alone in unfamiliar surroundings."<sup>29</sup>

### Born Warriors or Glorified Shepherds? Image and Realities of Moroccan Combatants

The French attitude towards the Berberophone tribal population they encountered in battle or mobilized to serve in their armed forces was thus based on the perception that they were "born warriors" (*guerriers par atavisme*<sup>30</sup>), trained from infancy to use the rifle. For the mountainous Moroccan, notes Captain Maurice Durosoy,

[W]ar is a permanent state. At a young age he accompanies his father and learns to shoot the rifle he would later carry with him as a sign of his courage. He loves to appear brave in the eyes of women; he loves danger, loves attacking the enemy, and he loves to plunder.<sup>31</sup>

One can find resonance of this imagery in the stories told of Moroccan *tirailleurs* charging barehanded against German tanks during the futile Belgian campaign of 1940, shouting "*Yallah el-Maghreb*,"<sup>32</sup> or in accounts of the brute savagery, mad bravery, and gross mistreatment

of civilians (mostly women) exercised by the *goumiers* in their battles in Italy during the latter parts of that war.<sup>33</sup> Authentic and reliable as some of these anecdotes may be, they smack of an anachronistic and distinctly paternalistic colonial attitude that ought to be treated with a degree of skepticism.

Missing from these broad characterizations is any meaningful reference to Moroccans as individuals with a distinct personality, concrete biography, and purposeful existence. My current oral history project of Moroccan veterans of the French army is meant to address this omission.<sup>34</sup> Through dozens of interviews conducted with Moroccan war veterans, most of whom enlisted during the 1930s and fought in World War II, I intend to reconstruct the collective biography of this group and examine the validity of the colonial perceptions presented above. While the full scope of that project exceeds the boundaries of this paper, some of my provisional conclusions may provide a useful perspective on this matter. Such is the case with respect to the reasons that led young Moroccans of Middle Atlas tribal origins to enlist in the French army.

When asked about their time in the French army, nearly all my interviewees denied any quest for glory or other warlike tendency. Their prime motivation was socio-economic in nature; they regarded a military career ("working for the French," as virtually all veterans would term it) to be their best if not their sole opportunity to escape the poverty and deprivation in the Moroccan countryside. Recounting his enlistment as a *goumier* in 1943, Timour Ali Oubassou<sup>35</sup> speaks for many other veterans when he says: "I wanted to have money and to escape misery and oppression. At the time I knew that the world had been at war and that we would be sent abroad where the war was more difficult. However, I didn't have any other choice."

Very few of the veterans I met and interviewed had enlisted in the French army prior to the end of "pacification" in 1934, and therefore encountered direct combat against "dissidents." Those who did tend to express no particular feelings about the "job" they were assigned to do. Having enlisted in 1926 and fought against the Rifians in 1926, Saoudi Salah Ben Ibrahim<sup>36</sup> recounts:

In 1933 and early 1934 I was involved in the war against the Ait Baamran. They were less fierce than the Rifians, although Moroccans like us. Fighting amongst ourselves, we were executing orders and trying to stay alive.

One should note in this respect that most rural Moroccans (notably those of the Berberophone regions) had a vague notion at best of collective "Moroccan" identity. According to one veteran, Morabet Moha Ouala, prior to his enlistment in the French army he had never been

“in contact with Arabic-speaking Moroccans.”<sup>37</sup> It is also worth mentioning that many Moroccans who served in the French army originated in communities and families that had resisted fiercely the intrusion of French colonialism and their incorporation within the orbit of the protectorate. Indeed, the line separating resistance and collaboration appears to have been very fine, almost non-existent sometimes, as yesterday’s foe became today’s friend. Best exemplifying this ambiguity perhaps, was the switch made by Assou ou Ba Slam, leader of the heroic struggle of the last factions of the Ait ‘Atta at Bou Gafer (Jabel Saghro) in 1933, to *qa’id* and loyal supporter of the Protectorate until its end in 1956.<sup>38</sup>

Assou ou Ba Slam’s loyalty to France manifested itself during the last days of the Protectorate when he helped save the life of a French AI officer who had been besieged in his field bureau at Iknioun. This incident and others that erupted throughout the Moroccan countryside during the second half of 1955 marked the culmination of the brief nationalist uprising that resulted in the French decision to terminate the Protectorate and restore Moroccan independence. Torn between their professional duty to their colonial master and their sympathy to their brethren fighting to free themselves were thousands of Moroccan soldiers, many among whom had fought for the liberation of France a decade earlier and had just returned from a grueling tour of duty in Indochina where they had been exposed to extensive indoctrination efforts by the Vietminh.<sup>39</sup>

Most Moroccan soldiers remained in the service of France and continued the exercise of their duties. A few, however, deserted and joined the ranks of the Liberation Army that staged a brief guerrilla campaign against French targets during the last year of the Protectorate.<sup>40</sup> Only a handful of the scores of veterans I interviewed claimed to have joined the ranks of the resistance movement, although many more declared (retrospectively) sympathy for its cause and resentment at the repressive actions undertaken against it by the French.

### **Conclusions: The Transformation of the Middle Atlas**

France’s departure from Morocco marked the end of the Franco-Moroccan military relationship and sent thousands of its former indigenous agents, military and civilians alike, to retirement. For those who had found their livelihood fighting for France, reintegration into civil society often came with some difficulty since, as one veteran put it, “people were against France and rejected anyone who had served France. People considered those who had worked for France to be traitors. Even my wife used to think that way.”<sup>41</sup> Faced with such

negative perceptions, retired Moroccan veterans have tended to keep to themselves.

The overwhelming majority of veterans live in deplorable conditions. Aged, sick, frail, they pass the remaining years of their lives in poverty and purposelessness, desperately reliant upon the assistance of their offspring to survive. The medals and other citations they earned as tokens of their heroism and loyalty, while carefully guarded and proudly displayed in front of the foreign visitor, can hardly make up for the insultingly meager pensions and disability payments that the veterans receive from France. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the single common opinion on which virtually all veterans seem to agree is that France has mistreated them and ought to compensate them better for the sacrifices they made on its behalf.

The deplorable conditions of most veterans’ lives, a painful contrast to the confident, healthy gaze emanating from their youthful pictures, can serve as a metaphor to the transformation of their native communities of Berberophone Middle Atlas tribes from virtual freedom to forced integration within a centralized state structure. As one poem recited among those rural, mountainous dwellings states:

Could I but rub my cheeks with mud  
Or be carried away into the hereafter in the fullness  
of time  
Now that cowards are supreme in the land of heroes<sup>42</sup>

The passage of the “heroic age” was the inevitable outcome of the systemic and efficient French “pacification” campaign of 1907-1934 that disarmed the tribes and brought an end to their perpetual conflicts. Along with the imposition of submission to the central government (namely the Protectorate) came the paving of roads and other infrastructure developments that made their once isolated hamlets accessible and thus more easily controllable from the outside. Those roads would be used not only to stifle any future separatist attempt by the region’s inhabitants,<sup>43</sup> but also to attract its youth to leave it amidst continued economic hardship in search of a better future elsewhere in Morocco and in recent times overseas.

The Moroccans who enlisted and fought within the ranks of the French army during the 1930s and 1940s were among the first Middle Atlas inhabitants to have encountered the outside world and experienced firsthand its lure and opportunities. Many demobilized soldiers declined to return to their native communities, finding instead a second career as police agents and permanent residence in special housing projects erected by the French authorities during the late 1940s in Morocco’s largest cities, most notably Casablanca. Some

veterans, whose post-military careers led them to other parts of Morocco and the world, have chosen to retire back to their Middle Atlas families to discover at the twilight of their lives that their stories of courage and sacrifice are often forgotten by a new generation for whom the age of heroes is nothing more than a blurred history.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald Robinson, "Non European foundations of European Imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration," in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 117-141

<sup>2</sup>Robinson, "Non European foundations," 138 and 141.

<sup>3</sup>Examples of works on Imperialism and European empire-building include Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain, and the late industrializing world since 1815* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, trans. Shelley Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997); Alice L. Conklin and Ian Christopher Fletcher, eds., *European Imperialism, 1830-1930: Climax and Contradictions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999). On the process of decolonization, see Raymond F. Betts, *Decolonization* (London, Routledge, 1998).

<sup>4</sup>A useful general introductory work on the history of French colonialism is Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). On the painful process of the dismantling of the French empire see Anthony Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization* (London: Longman, 1994).

The best study of the transition of Morocco from informal imperialism to direct European domination remains Edmund Burke III, *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860-1912* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976). The most recent study of the evolution of Franco-Moroccan relationship during the course of the Protectorate era is Daniel Rivet, *Le Maroc de Lyautey à Mohammed V: le double visage du protectorat* (Paris: Denoël, 1999).

<sup>5</sup>The study of subaltern history as past of the "postcolonial" or "post-orient list" discourse is most commonly associated with South Asia and the Indian subcontinent, although recently it began to be applied to other cases of post-colonial societies. For an application of this discourse in the context of Moroccan soldiers see Driss Maghraoui, "The Moroccan Colonial Soldiers: Between Selective Memory and Collective memory," in Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, ed., *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave, 2000), 49-69.

<sup>6</sup>Robinson, "Non European foundations," 118.

<sup>7</sup>It should be noted that Lyautey's immediate successor at the residency, Theodore Steeg actually committed himself to policies that sharply contradicted Lyautey's concepts about imperialism, particularly insofar as the encouragement of the migration of European settlers was concerned. That policy is often referred to as the "Algerianization" of Morocco. On the implication of Steeg's approach to French agricultural planning in Morocco see Will D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions, 1912-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 51-54.

<sup>8</sup>The conventional view of Lyautey's biography used to regard his departure overseas to Indochina in 1894 as an act forced upon him by the army's general staff. See for example William A. Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 5. However, in his study of Lyautey's early career (*Lyautey avant Lyautey* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997], 53-63), Pascal Venier argues that the decision to go overseas was initiated by Lyautey himself.

<sup>9</sup>Lyautey regarded his choice of the mild-tempered Mawlay Yusuf to replace his independent-minded brother, 'Abd al-Hafiz in August 1912 to be his "loveliest invention." See Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l'institution du protectorat française au Maroc* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988), 1: 170.

<sup>10</sup>See Daniel Rivet, "De la société française à la société marocaine: l'itinéraire aristocratique de Lyautey," in *Actes du colloque Doctrine, Sciences ou Pratiques Sociales* (Nancy: PUN, 1985-1986), 3: 235. On Lyautey's shaping of the dual Protectorate-Makhzan bureaucracy see also Alan Scham, *Lyautey in Morocco: Protectorate Administration, 1912-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>11</sup>On the evolution of French colonial philosophy see Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

<sup>12</sup>Moshe Gershovich, "A Moroccan St.-Cyr." *Middle Eastern Studies* 28:2 (1992). In that article I also discuss the mutation of Lyautey's initial intention to make enrollment in the military academy exclusively available to members of the Moroccan elites. By the late 1920s the school had to "democratize" and enlarge its social base in order to justify its existence.

<sup>13</sup>Lyautey coined this term in his General Directives for 1922 that was submitted on 14 December 1921; included in Pierre Lyautey, ed., *Lyautey l'Africain: Textes et Lettres du Maréchal Lyautey* (Paris: Plon, 1953-1957), 157. In that directive Lyautey stated that "The goal to achieve is not the occupation...of the entire *Maroc géographique*, but...to spread the effective French Protectorate over all of *Maroc utile*." Under the latter rubric he included all parts of the country that he had deemed indispensable for internal security and development. He refrained, however, from delineating the specific boundaries of those two units.

<sup>14</sup>The "oil-stain" concept called for a slow, methodical progression in the process of "pacification," in a manner that would allow for French influence to spread through a "dissident" area with minimal resistance. On the evolution of that concept see Douglas Porch, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare," in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). An earlier edition of the article, written by Jean Gottman, appeared in the 1952 edition of the volume.

<sup>15</sup>Jacques Weygand, *Goumier de l'Atlas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), 42 and 101. The son of the French Chief-of-Staff at the time, Lieutenant Weygand served as a "Native Affairs" officer in the Moroccan *bled* (countryside) during the 1930s.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Hubert-Jacques, *L'Aventure rifaine et ses dessous politiques* (Paris: Bossard, 1927), 292. On the Rif War see C.R. Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: the Rif War in Morocco, 1921-1926* (Outwell, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England, Middle East and North African Studies Press ; Boulder, Co.: L. Rienner, 1986).

<sup>17</sup>An example of this line of thinking could be found in a note sent by Lyautey to the War Ministry in Paris, dated 23 November 1924. Asking for metropolitan reinforcement to meet a projected attack from the Rif (that did eventually materialize in April 1925), Lyautey states that as of the 1920 campaign he has attempted to make use of indigenous troops in order to "avoid the shedding of French blood, the sparing of which is our greatest interest." A copy of the note can be found in file 66 of *série 3H: Maroc* at the French military archives (*Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre* [SHAT]) at Château de Vincennes.

<sup>18</sup>Rivet, *Lyautey et l'institution du protectorat française au Maroc*, 2:79.

<sup>19</sup>These reports can be found in files 271 and 281 of *série 3H: Maroc* respectively.

<sup>20</sup>The history of Moroccan units during the two world wars, and other overseas operations falls beyond the scope of this essay. For information on that subject see Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988), 94-105, 262-306 and *passim*; Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* (London: Cass, 2000), 172-177.

Initial metropolitan doubts were based on the April 1912 uprising of several units from the pre-colonial Moroccan army that were stationed in Fez. On this issue see Burke, *Prelude to Protectorate*, 180-187; Jacques, Hubert, *Les journées sanglantes de Fez, 17-18-19 avril 1912 : les massacres, récits militaires, responsabilités* (Paris: Librairie Chapelot, 1913).

<sup>21</sup>The introduction of conscription to Morocco was seriously considered by an inter-departmental commission, headed by General Mangin, which studied the matter between 1920-1922. However, Lyautey ruled the idea out citing the incomplete "pacification" of Morocco as his main cause. Information related to the deliberations of the Mangin Commission can be found in file 2352 of *série 7N* at SHAT/Vincennes.

<sup>22</sup>The study, dated 25 October 1934 was prepared by colonel de Saint Julien and captain Ouenand, both of whom served at the time in the 5<sup>th</sup> *Régiment des Tirailleurs Marocains* (RTM). It is available in file 162 of *série 1K*, containing papers of Marshal Franchet d'Espèrey at SHAT/Vincennes.

<sup>23</sup>On the integration of three Moroccan battalions within the ranks of the French *Armée du Rbin* see Moshe Gershovich, "The Sharifian Star Over the Rhine: Moroccan Soldiers in French Uniforms in Germany, 1919-1925," *Morocco: Journal of the Society of Moroccan Studies* 2 (1997): 55-64.

<sup>24</sup>Moroccan recruits from the northern Spanish occupation zone were also used as combatants in the service of their

colonial masters, including a significant participation on their part in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s in which they fought on the Fascist side. See Maria Rosa deMadariaga, "The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: A Reconsideration," *European History Quarterly* 22:1 (1992): 67-97.

<sup>25</sup>The size of the interwar Moroccan contingent in the French army was originally set in 1920 by an inter-ministerial commission that examined the future recruitment of colonial soldiers. The commission established a quota of 32,000 Moroccan recruits. However, by the outbreak of the Second World War the actual size of the Moroccan contingent nearly tripled in size to 90,000, as noted in a detailed study on the history of the Moroccan *tirailleurs*. See part two of Lt. Col. Lugand, "Historique des Tirailleurs Marocains," *Revue Historique de l'Armée* 8:3 (September 1952): 32.

<sup>26</sup>The full title of this corps was Moroccan Mixed Goums. Originally it was designated to be "a temporary back-up tribal force raised for specific operations," as defined by a 7 December 1909 memorandum by the *Section d'Afrique* of the metropolitan General Staff, *Série 1H (Algérie)*, file 1013, SHAT/ Vincennes. The *goums* proved to be highly useful, flexible and cost-effective, so much so that their number was doubled within six years and kept climbing until it reached fifty by the early 1930s. They operated side-by-side with regular French troops and were fully integrated within French operations aimed at "pacifying" the Moroccan countryside.

The rich history of the Moroccan *goums* has been the subject of numerous works, the latest being Edward L. Bimberg, *The Moroccan Goums: Tribal Warriors in a Modern War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999). For a French perspective see also Jacques Augarde, *La longue route des tabors* (Paris: France Empire, 1983); Yves Salkin, Jacques Marineau and Jean Saulay, eds., *Histoire des Goums Marocains* (Paris: Kaumia, 1985).

<sup>27</sup>On the Glawa see Maxwell, Gavin, *Lords of the Atlas. The Rise and Fall of the House of Glaoua 1893-1956* (London: Arrow, 1991). Being left in complete control over parts of southern Morocco where French presence had been weak or nonexistent, the Great *Qa'ids* took full advantage of the situation to dominate and abuse the native population under their command. The French authorities were well aware of the mischief, but tended to dismiss it to maintain the support of their local allies.

<sup>28</sup>Tarrit (Capitan), "Emploi des partisans au Maroc," *Revue de Cavalerie* 33 (March-April 1923): 197-211.

<sup>29</sup>Tarrit, "Emploi." The principle that "partisans" and other irregulars should never operate without regular units at their side appears in the writings of other officers who were involved in combat in Morocco. See for example Schmidt (major; commander of the Bou Denib autonomous *cercle*), "Considérations sur les Djiouch." *Renseignements Coloniaux* (annex of the *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française*), January 1933.

<sup>30</sup>See for example C. Damidaux (captain), *Combats au Maroc 1925-1926* (Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1928), 27.

<sup>31</sup>Maurice Durosoy, "Soldats Marocains," published in the July 1932 issue of *Renseignements Coloniaux*, 286-290.

<sup>32</sup>This story appears in the official history of the 10<sup>th</sup> RTM, available in file 308 of *série 34N* (regimental history) at the

French war archives in SHAT/Vincennes.

<sup>33</sup>See Bimberg, *The Moroccan Goums*, 63-64, 115-116.

<sup>34</sup>For further information about this project and some of its initial findings see Moshe Gershovich, "Stories on the Road from Fez to Marrakesh: Oral History on the Margins of National Identity," *Journal of North African Studies* 8:1 (Spring 2003): 43-58.

<sup>35</sup>Interviewed in Beni Mellal in January 1998.

<sup>36</sup>He was born in 1908 and served in the French army between 1926-1943, mostly as a *tirailleur*. My interview with him took place at his residence in Ksiba in January 1998.

<sup>37</sup>My interview with Mr. Morabet, who was born in 1913 and enlisted in the French army in 1936, was conducted in September 2000 at his residence in Khenifra.

<sup>38</sup>See David Hart, "Assû Bâ Slâm: de la résistance à la 'pacification' au Maroc," in Charles-André Julien et. al., eds., *Les Africains* (Paris: Éditions J.A., 1977), 5, 77-105.

<sup>39</sup>Among the means used by the Vietminh to convince North African soldiers to defect was a former World War II veteran and committed member of the Moroccan Communist Party, M'Phammed Ben Aomar Lahrech. His instrumental role in the insurgency led to his rising to the rank of general in the revolutionary North Vietnamese army. On this episode see Abdallah Saaf, *Histoire d'Anb Ma* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

<sup>40</sup>See Zaki M'Barek, "La désertion des soldats marocains de l'armée française à l'Armée de Libération du Maghreb (A.L.M.): Rôle militaire, impact psycho-politique (1955-1956)," *Maroc-Europe* 7 (1994): 235-271. An interesting fictional character—representing the soldiers who switched to the side of the resistance at this time is *Faqih* in Leila Abouzeid's novella, *Year of the Elephant*, trans. Barbara Parmenter (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). A veteran of Indochina who had lost a leg at Dien Bien Phu, he is helped by the novella's heroine to escape from Casablanca to the Spanish occupation zone in northern Morocco.

<sup>41</sup>Tafdoute Elarbi ou Hammou, interviewed in Ouaoumanna in February 1999.

<sup>42</sup>*Isafeen Gbbanin (Rivières Profondes): Poésies du Moyen Atlas Marocain* (Casablanca: Waliada, 1993), 197. This collection of orally recited Berber poems was gathered and translated into French by Michael Peyron. The translation to English is mine.

<sup>43</sup>On the last attempts to reestablish Berber self-control after the end of the colonial era see David Hart, "Rural and Tribal Uprisings in Post-Colonial Morocco, 1957-60: An Overview and a Reappraisal," in *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco*; special issue of the *Journal of North African Studies* 4:2 (Summer 1999): 84-102.

# The *Shabiba Islamiyya* of Algiers: Education, Authority, and Colonial Control, 1921-57

JAMES MCDUGALL

Ronald Robinson's "excentric" theory of imperial rule apparently applied most strongly at either end of what might be seen as a spectrum of modalities of colonial control. At one extreme, collaborative mediation was crucial in those territories where fewest metropolitan resources were deployed—in coastal enclaves or rural peripheries incorporated into the informal empire by handfuls of administrators or agents working through indigenous political systems whose societies had not (or not yet) experienced the disarticulation and dispossession of military conquest, or large-scale settlement and colonization. (Examples would be India in the early-mid eighteenth century, the Persian Gulf in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,<sup>1</sup> and most of West Africa throughout the colonial period). At the other extreme, in the pure-settlement colonies established in supposedly *terrae nullius* like Australia, where indigenous populations were either exterminated or confined to hinterland reservations, the white settler assumed the role of "ideal prefabricated collaborator." In territories of the first type—most of Asia and Africa—cooperative systems, Robinson suggests, "remained comparatively ineffective and unstable," leading by degrees to more far-reaching penetration, conquest and the imposition of more direct domination, whereas in the second, "collaboration proved both stable and effective," so much so that colonial rule in these areas (he is obviously thinking primarily of the "white Commonwealth") gradually receded and gave place to local self-rule by the colonial community. In both types of territory, at every point in the imperial process from the onset of influence to decolonization, the role of collaboration is seen to be crucial for the establishment, maintenance, and transfer of rule.<sup>2</sup>

Robinson has less to say about colonial territories which might be seen as falling somewhere around the midpoint of this spectrum—that is, those where substantial European immigration led to the formation of distinct colonial societies with direct political ties to the metropole and a local economy thoroughly integrated

into the imperial network, but where a more substantial local population remained, dispossessed, disenfranchised, and dominated, but nonetheless a demographic majority. In such cases, where the "European inputs" (Robinson's term)—economic and military power, settler numbers, and metropolitan political commitments—were comparatively great but could not, by contrast to the so-called *terrae nullius*, create the new homelands of emerging, exclusively white-settler societies, indigenous collaboration, says Robinson, was relatively unimportant. In these areas, the metropole's principal interlocutor in the colony was the settler, whose presence and interests "strangled native politics," and so in, for example, Algeria, Kenya, and the Rhodesias, at least before the 1950s, "imperial control could ... dispense with native cooperation to a great extent." Robinson also points out, however, that "even in these special cases, native mediators later became more necessary to colonial rule as African nationalist organization grew."<sup>3</sup>

This paper addresses one of Robinson's "special cases," taking as its focus an altogether atypical history within the history of colonial Algeria, which is itself in many respects a colonial case *sui generis*, in order to explore further the position of collaborative mediation in a context where, precisely, such collaboration was neither instrumental to the maintenance of colonial control and nor, correspondingly, was its breakdown a crucial step in the process of decolonization. The case at hand, in fact, might be seen as an inverse history of that presented by Robinson and also as an inverted history of nationalism. Its interest is thus partly that of an exception that proves the rule, although it might also be seen to modify the "rule" in certain important respects...

## The Context: Education and Social Authority in Colonial Algeria

It is not possible in the space available here to give anything like an adequate account of the complex politics of education in colonial Algeria.<sup>4</sup> Three elementary points should, however, be made to clear the ground.

First, at no time was French educational policy a single, coherent, much less a single, coherently, and systematically *implemented*, doctrine. Like other aspects of European colonial rule (and of domination generally<sup>5</sup>), education was a site of multiple, contradictory discourses and demands articulated by different groups with competing intentions and agenda within colonial hierarchies. To reduce these complex, inconsistent, intractably factional struggles to a monolithic grand design, whether as would-be enlightening “civilisational mission” or as actually Machiavellian “depersonalising project,” is simplistic in the extreme. If anything, such reductions (and I labor the point only because they are encountered so frequently in the literature on Algeria) naïvely take the pronouncements of colonial ideologies far too seriously, retroactively according them a power and integrity which in reality they never possessed—the undoubted severity of the catastrophic effects of actually-occurring, however incoherent and contradictory, colonial practices notwithstanding.

Second, the one overriding characteristic of the colonial educational system was, as is well known, its extremely limited scope. Even if the total number of Algerian children in colonial schools (the figures concern mainly boys between six and thirteen years of age) almost quintupled between 1890 and 1918, rising from 10,577 to 49,071, these figures represented only about 1.7 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively, of the estimated total school-age population. 1918, too, was a record year in the development of schooling—attendance numbers fell in 1919 and only began to rise again after 1923.<sup>6</sup> In 1961, there were still only some 300,000 children out of an estimated school-age population of 1.8 million in classes<sup>7</sup>—and this despite the substantial multiplication of educational provision undertaken by the Fifth Republic’s last-ditch rafts of reform measures, administrative reinforcements, and the work of the army’s *Sections Administratives Spécialisées* in the countryside, alongside the increased willingness of many Algerian families to acquire the education thus offered, eager as many doubtless were to get ahead in anticipation of independence and the improved opportunities it would bring.

Third, outside the purview of the French Ministry of Public Instruction and the Government General, and despite what is said and repeated about the “depersonalization” of Algerians by supposed procedures of “assimilation,” there remained, throughout the colonial period, provision of independent Islamic education centered on the Qur’an and dispensed in Arabic. Certainly, the forty-years’ war of conquest, the confiscation of land and particularly of *hubus* (i.e., property endowed for the maintenance of religious institutions) and of mosque and school buildings, the catastrophic mortality rates, massive dispossession, and pauperization of the

population, the flight of significant numbers of religious notables and lettered families out of Algeria, and the repressive measures taken against a religious infrastructure considered the prime fomenter of revolt in the countryside, all contributed to a cultural impoverishment which is impossible to quantify. To get a sense of the significance of these events for the people who experienced them, we have to look to the popular songs and oral literature from the conquest period which speak cataclysmically of the end of the world, of a startling undoing of the natural order of things. However, in the very idioms of this literature we can see Algerians encoding and narrating the calamity which had befallen them within the logic of a recognizable cultural system, whether as the judgment of the saints on the community or their flight from, and abandonment of, it.<sup>8</sup> That is to say, despite the extreme adversity of their situation, Algerians and their cultural creativity nonetheless survived under colonialism, found new ways of *coping* with the situation, of safeguarding their considerable patrimony, including a venerable scriptural tradition.<sup>9</sup> Far from simply disappearing under the shock of “depersonalization,” or, alternatively, regressing into some sort of inviolable, primitive societal cocoon, untouched and untouchable by Europe and its “progress,” Algerians created means and strategies for “working the system to their least disadvantage.”<sup>10</sup> Education was one of the most visible sites where this took place, and independent schools, among them the *Shabiba Islamiyya* of Algiers, were notable examples of such a strategy.

After World War I, and throughout the period up to the outbreak of the revolution in 1954, the school provided a key site in which a complex field of contest over social authority was crystallized. The actors in this contest all sought to establish and to extend their claimed authority through educational apparatuses—both the physical institutions and their personnel, and particular pedagogic programs—aimed at the “enlightenment and improvement” of Muslim Algerian children. Needless to say, the “progress” which each professed to bring about was conceived by each in quite different, though subtly interlinked, ways. For its part, the official educational establishment spoke of opening minds to modern civilization and of creating the conditions for the ever-anticipated “*évolution dans le cadre français*,” the evolution of Algerian society within the French orbit, while itself remaining the hostage of an intractable system of—after 1945—increasingly repressive minority rule whose first reflex remained “the instinctive prevention of the colonist towards the *indigène* whose revolt he fears,” as a report on public instruction in Algeria had put it in 1886.<sup>11</sup>

There also existed the three officially-sanctioned institutes of Islamic secondary education, the *médersas* (Gallicized from Arabic *madrasa*) of Tlemcen in the

west, Algiers, and Constantine in the east, reconstituted on the ruins of their pre-colonial predecessors by a decree of September 1850 in an attempt to remedy a critical lack of competent Muslim juridical personnel. These schools, often criticized in some of the literature, nonetheless dispensed an excellent level of instruction in French and Arabic and they were all at certain times the centers of activity for very accomplished and notable men of learning. These were the schools where the functionaries of the Muslim branch of the civic judiciary, as well as the officially-appointed personnel of mosques, were trained. Beyond the administration's own system, there remained the *ḡawāyā* (more or less, "lodges") of the Sufi brotherhoods, the most notably flourishing of which remained, at least into the late 1940s, that of al-Hamel in the southern Algérois.

The most vocal competitor for all of these, as for both the colonial establishment's presumed right to guide the Algerians' "moral and material progress" and the older prerogative of the established forms of Islam in Algerian culture to express their sacred faith and worldview, was the movement of Islamic reformism, incipient in Algiers and Constantine since the last decade of the nineteenth century, and rapidly coalescing both intellectually and institutionally after 1920. A proselytizing movement of pedagogy and doctrinal reform (*islāh*) aiming both at the "purification" of Islam by a return to the supposedly uncorrupted fundamentals of the "pious ancestors" (*al-salaf al-sāliḥ*, whence the movement's Arabic appellation, *al-salafīyya*) and Islam's rational articulation in the modern world, reformism was conceived by its protagonists as a sacred "revolution against ignorance" (*ṭawra didd al-jābil*); its vocation was educational above all else.<sup>12</sup> The reformists' modernism decried what they, no less than the colonial ideologues, considered the backwardness, stagnation and degeneracy of Algerian culture, and sought to recover what to them seemed the lost vigour of Islam through its austere puritanical and "scientifically" rational application to the modern world.

### Modernism and Auto-Emancipation: Tayyib al-'Oqbi and the Algiers Progress Club

Among the leading figures of the Algerian *salafīyya* was *shaykh* al-Tayyib al-'Oqbi, born in the pre-Saharan oasis of Sidi 'Oqba in or around 1890 and brought up largely in the Hijaz (the western coastal region of the Arabian peninsula where Mecca and Medina lie), where he became an *'ālim* (pl. *'ulamā*, learned juridical-religious scholar of Islam). He was an early enthusiast for the "party of religious reform," as he called it, and a founding member of the reformists' organization, the Association of Algerian Muslim *'ulamā*, (AUMA) founded in Algiers in May, 1931. In July of that same year, al-'Oqbi moved from the desert to Algiers, settling

with his family in Kouba, a pleasant and largely European suburb of the city on the heights to the southeast of Algiers.

Fifty minutes' tram ride from Kouba was the center of the colonial capital, the Place du Gouvernement (after independence renamed Place des Martyrs / *sābat al-shuhadā*), on the southern side of which stood a rather grand building which had, since July 1927, housed the *Cercle du Progrès / al-nadi al-tarraḡī*, the Algiers "Progress Club." It was this institution that al-'Oqbi had come to Algiers to direct. The Progress Club was established, so its statutes declared, "to assist the civilizing action of France through the pursuit of the intellectual, economic and social education of the Muslims of Algeria."<sup>13</sup> The language of this declaration is thoroughly conventional—we shall shortly try to evaluate to what degree it was also perfectly sincere. The principal feature to note about the Club is that it was established by Algerians as an institution of auto-emancipation; that is, as a meeting place for discussion, debate, and learning where the "leading elements" of indigenous society would come together with enlightened Europeans—as in the meetings of Monotheist Believers with leading rabbis and members of the Catholic community, a development influenced by the great French Orientalist, Louis Massignon—to further the education of Muslim Algerians and to develop understanding, sympathy, and partnership among the different communities of the colony.

The club's physical location was itself telling. Its chandeliered and oak-paneled rooms opened onto the central square, created for military reviews, which had been carved out of the old lower Casbah by the earliest colonial refiguring of the city, near the buildings of the Government General and its directorates (which later moved to more modern premises about ten minutes' walk away to the south) and between the Ottoman New Mosque (in French called the *Mosquée de la Pêcherie* for its waterfront situation) on the eastern side, and the cathedral (originally, and again after independence, the Ketchaoua mosque) which stood at the foot of the Casbah and on the old intersection of the principal arteries of Ottoman Algiers, on the western side. The Club was thus a space at the heart of colonial Algeria, mediating its different and antagonistic social powers at the point where they met, and hoping to serve as a forum for their development in complementarity rather than in conflict.

The Progress Club had taken under its wing, in pursuit of these goals, two other important institutions of Algerian auto-emancipation. The *jam'īya al-khayrīyya*, the Algiers Benevolent Society, was the social charity arm of the Club, founded by al-'Oqbi in 1933 "to provide material and financial aid for Muslims finding themselves without resources of their own."<sup>14</sup> It provided food and shelter to the needy at premises in the place Randon.

The other institution dependent on the Progress Club had in fact pre-existed it, having been originally founded on 25 November 1921—this was the *madrasat al-shabiba 'l-islamiyya* or School for Islamic Youth, universally known as “the *Shabiba* school.” The earliest history of the Shabiba is somewhat obscure, but its official registration on 11 January 1922 makes it one of the very first, if not actually *the* first,<sup>15</sup> independent modernist-reformist Islamic school in Algeria. After 1930, the school occupied a building, let to it rent-free by a philanthropically minded association of Algerian petits-bourgeois dealing in real estate, at number seventeen Rampe Valée, at the northern edge of the Casbah opposite the Marengo gardens. The separate girls’ section would later have premises at number twenty, rue des Abderames in the Casbah itself.

The school became one of the largest and best-known such establishments, recognized for the quality of its teaching staff and the education they provided, committed to a bilingual instruction which was intended to equip its students for life in, and progressive emancipation through, their hoped-for reformed and more liberal, multicultural, and multilingual Algeria. The particular originality of the Shabiba, however, besides its precocious foundation at the very earliest moment of the interwar Algerian “revival,” and its notable success, lies in its durable *independence* from the nationalist movement which was beginning to emerge at the same time—most particularly in the radical-populist politics of the Algerian émigré workers in France, but also in the ethno-cultural interventions of the reformist *‘ulama*—and which would gradually take over the development of Algerian society, and Algerian schemes of emancipation, in the subsequent three decades.

In the competition over the symbolic goods of civilizing education, the reformists initially established the Progress Club as their flagship institution. It was there that the Association of *‘ulama* was founded in 1931, and there that it was officially registered with the colonial authorities. A report of 1938 considered that “the *Cercle du Progrès* has become synonymous with the reformist movement.”<sup>16</sup> But in fact, the relationship of the Progress Club and its guiding spirit, al-‘Oqbi, to the wider reformist movement was already at that date under some strain.

Al-‘Oqbi made his presence felt in Algiers from the moment of his arrival. Already a noted orator and journalist, celebrated both for his eloquent handling of classical written Arabic and for his ability to hold an audience, whether intellectual or illiterate, in thrall for hours on end, his preaching at the *Cercle du Progrès* drew capacity crowds, inflamed vibrant polemics with the Sufi leaders whose practice and belief, along with the politicking of the populist nationalists, he vilified, and (needless to say) attracted systematic and diligent atten-

tion from the informers of the local political police, (for whose assiduity in following his courses, and writing up their notes, cultural historians of Algeria must be forever guiltily grateful...).

Immensely popular and impenitently controversial, al-‘Oqbi was a natural focus for the suspicions, and a target for the plots, of the colonial police. When on 4 August 1936 the mufti of Algiers, Mahmud ben Dali, known as “al-Kahhul,” was stabbed to death in the rue de la Lyre, one of the self-confessed assassins, after his arrest, named al-‘Oqbi as having inspired the attack. Kahhoul had been one of the prominent signatories of a telegram sent to Paris, protesting against the presumed competence of the delegation of that summer’s Algerian Muslim Congress, of which al-‘Oqbi was a member, to represent the demands and aspirations of Algerians to the metropolitan government. Such was the supposed motive for the mufti’s elimination. The statement implicating al-‘Oqbi was eventually retracted, his name cleared, but not before he had been arrested and obliged to endure three years of legal proceedings. The true facts of the Kahhul affair remain uncertain, but it seems most likely that the implication of al-‘Oqbi, at the very least, was a maneuver of the colonial police.

The result of these machinations was al-‘Oqbi’s partial retirement from the public stage. Disappointed at the paucity of the support he received from his colleagues in the AUMA—although publicly the Association had emphatically defended his innocence—the shaykh broke with the reformist organization in 1939. He would thereafter pursue his doctrinal and educational vocation independently of the Association, and the institutions which remained under his patronage—the Progress Club, the Kheiria Society and the Shabiba—would also remain independent of the organized reformist movement and the nationalism which, after 1938, it increasingly espoused. Although this partial eclipsing of al-‘Oqbi was doubtless the objective of the suspicious spirits at the Government General, the Kahhul incident and its repercussions are highly ironic when al-‘Oqbi’s own political positions are considered.

Within the tendency of Algerian Islamic reformism, al-‘Oqbi was the one voice who most consistently and intransigently insisted, from the moment of his journalistic entrance onto the scene in the mid-1920s, on the strictly apolitical nature of the sociocultural work to be undertaken. The regeneration of what, to him, appeared a weak and decadent Algerian society depended on a recovery of religious integrity and a regeneration of Arabic pedagogy through which a “modern, moral Islamic education” might be given the people.<sup>17</sup> Of course, in describing such a project as “apolitical,” al-‘Oqbi was espousing a perfectly political position—what he meant by the refusal of “politics” was a refusal, which he would maintain to the end of his life, to be

drawn into the dangerous and undignified position necessarily taken up by any Algerian who, however moderate and “loyal,” in demanding explicitly “political” change was, by the very fact of “getting involved in politics,” immediately identified as an enemy of the state. The “salvation” of colonized Algeria could, he thought, best be achieved in *partnership* with France, whose own powerful modernity was to be harnessed by Algerians for their own emancipation in a wished-for *appropriation* of the colonial project. “Politics,” he declared as early as December 1925, meaning that arena of public debate which was forbidden to Algerians by the ruling order, was a corrupting force of division which never failed to “turn what is good into evil.”<sup>18</sup> Explaining what he meant by “reform” (*islah*), al-‘Oqbi wrote in 1939:

Reform encompasses all labours in the service of Good, of which the best kind is that which accords with what is both rational and legal....In our writings we will consider the improvement of our religious, social, economic, and even political situation, but we will never address that politics which is identified, in the language of the Administration, with hostility against the government and action against its interests. We are not among those who preach the duty of throwing the foreigner into the sea....Our opinion, which accords with reality, is that the Algerian nation ... is, in its moral and material deprivation, the nation which [of all] has most need of a powerful, enlightened and civilised state to care for her, protect and educate her so as to guide her towards progress, happiness, civilisation and perfection....This Power [i.e., France] can be assured of, and rejoice at, the friendship and devotion of the Algerians. May she only think of them as her children who address to her their just demands and who seek refuge in her when they are victims of injustice. The French government should know that those who are most anxious that France should remain in Algeria for Algeria’s greater benefit are the learned scholars, the reformist writers who recognise only what is right and who bow only to its truth. They have never been, and will never be, enemies of France or of French civilisation. But they are enemies of injustice and arbitrary rule, of despotism and tyranny, of iniquity and inequality of rights—enemies, in a word, of all that is repugnant to human nature, to science and to reason.<sup>19</sup>

The textual strategy here is dense but perfectly apparent. Such invocations of the ideal, democratic, rational, and egalitarian France against the colonial reality of a seemingly capricious, inconsistent, oppressive, and despotic France, were ubiquitous in the earlier literature of the reformist tendency. Only al-‘Oqbi, though, would maintain this line beyond the late 1930s. Speaking to the committee of the *Kheiria* Society in March 1945—two

months before the bloody repression of a half-cocked insurrection in eastern Algeria—the shaykh repeated the same convictions, and declared that he would leave “to the mad and the brainless the ridiculous object of pursuing mirages.”<sup>20</sup>

Al-‘Oqbi’s “loyal opposition,” his gradualist rationalism, his horror of populist demagoguery (and, let it be said, popular culture) and his frank disdain for what he saw as an absurd independentist radicalism, might have made him a profitable interlocutor for the colonial establishment. But the colonial system, at its height in these years, could dispense with Algerian mediators—moreover, any such attempts at self-expression, at the establishment of independently minded figures and projects seeking to draw the shabby behavior of imperial France up to the heights of her own self-proclaimed civilizational grandeur, were immediately marked down as suspect, subversive, and subject to repression. This applied even to the “apolitical” al-‘Oqbi; for all his desire to avoid the trap of “being involved in politics” which might serve to set him up as a target, he became the system’s most prominent victim of the interwar period.

### “Sociological Cell” of Nationalism or Site of Colonial Control? The Singular Trajectory of the *Shabiba*

What are we to make, then, of al-‘Oqbi’s school, the *Shabiba*? It was unquestionably part of the shaykh’s strategy for a renewal of Muslim Algeria through a partnership of purified Islamic morality and rational modernity, as a means to the mediation of colonial power into Algerian society and culture for the emancipation of Algerians from their own “backwardness” and frailty. But in the absence of a partnership to this end with the colonial state, the school paradoxically became, during the 1930s, a major source of energies that would be directed, instead, via the promotion of an Arab-Islamic renaissance, into the nationalist movement.

Itself institutionally independent of the political parties and the Association of ‘*ulama*, all of which (and most notably the AUMA) proceeded to establish small independent primary schools of one sort or another throughout Algeria from the early 1930s onwards, in the interwar period the *Shabiba* was nonetheless a place frequented by some of the leading creative intellectuals of Algerian nationalism. The leading Algerian poet, Muhammad al-‘Aid Al-Khalifa, whose unabashedly nationalist verses appeared in the Arabic-language press and who counts as one of the first outstanding figures of contemporary Algerian Arabic literature, was for a while the school’s director. History classes were taught by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jilali, a noted member of the AUMA whose *Ta’rikh al-jazá’ir al-‘amm* (*A General History of Algeria*), published in 1954 and reprinted several times

since in Algiers and Beirut, counts as the last notable pre-revolutionary work of Algerian history in Arabic, succeeding the earlier works of Mubarak al-Mili and Tawfiq al-Madani in the 1920s - 1940s.

Mostefa Lacheraf, later to become perhaps the most notable intellectual of the FLN, a member of the National Council of the Revolution and then a distinguished diplomat who participated in drawing up both the Tripoli platform in 1962 and the National Charter of 1976 and who would be briefly (and unhappily) Minister of Education in 1977, attended Thursday and Sunday classes at the Shabiba while a student at the nearby Algiers *lycée*. Among his contemporaries were the poet Tahar Bouchouchi, and the musicians and singers 'Abd al-Rahman Aziz, "who would become a great singer of the religious and patriotic repertoire,"<sup>21</sup> and 'Abd al-Hamid ibn Muhammad Ababsa, who was also a student of Mahieddine Bachetarzi, one of the founding fathers of the Algerian theater, and who drew attention to himself in the late 1930s by undertaking tours of the interior towns in the course of which he performed "works of a subversive tendency."<sup>22</sup> Lacheraf writes of the Shabiba in his memoirs that it was

a kind of sociological cell in full cultural bloom and [where] the contrasting currents of nationalism in the Algeria of those days awoke together...; [where] men, young and not-so-young, met...guided only by the desire to learn their literary language. Each of them would choose a different political orientation without ever losing an *Algérianité* which they held in common ....<sup>23</sup>

The emancipatory aims of the school, however, still seemed best served by working with and through the system. By 1951, the Shabiba was regarded by the administration as one of the most significant independent schools for Algerians in the country, one of only seven such schools in the Department of Algiers considered "real schools" dispensing a primary education (as opposed to those where teaching appeared to be essentially limited to the Qur'an and elements of Arabic), and of those it was the largest, with 300 pupils (225 boys and seventy-five girls) and twelve teachers. Of the latter, eight taught in French and four in Arabic. Of the francophones, three were paid entirely by the school's own funds, the other five being regular employees of the French *rectorat* detached from the public system to assist at the Shabiba at the request of the school's directors.<sup>24</sup> By the autumn of 1956, the school reportedly taught some 600 children (400 boys and 200 girls), and was in receipt of financial assistance as well as personnel from the colonial administration.

It is possible that the rapid increase in attendance at this date was due, at least in part, to an influx of Muslim children who had previously attended the regular public school system, but who in October 1956 followed the

instructions of the FLN (engaged since November 1954 in an armed insurrection) to boycott all French institutions, as of the beginning of the new school year, and were sent by their families to the Shabiba, the only independent Muslim school to open on 1 October 1956, instead.<sup>25</sup> Although only forty boys turned up for classes on the first morning of school, seventy-three attended that afternoon and the next day 200 pupils arrived. On that same day, 2 October 1956, the director of the school, Ahmed Benhoura, one of whose colleagues had already been assassinated (presumably by the FLN) in June, received an anonymous note warning him that "the teaching of French at the Arab Shabiba must be broken off and the French teachers on its staff dismissed," and noting that once he had substituted "your brother teachers of Arabic for those who are unclean, God will have satisfied the believers who are fighting" (*wa 'awdatum dhawî al-aqdâm al-qadhira bi-mu'allimî al-'arabiyya ikhwânikum fa-qad kafâ allah al-mu'minîn al-qitâl*).<sup>26</sup> That evening, parents of the school's pupils were reportedly threatened, and the next day the school was practically empty. Benhoura and al-'Oqbi pragmatically decided to prolong the vacation until 1 November. The school eventually reopened in March 1957 and continued to function, tied more tightly than ever to the administration, throughout the war. Al-'Oqbi refused to terminate the teaching of French; on the contrary, in the summer of 1957, Benhoura wrote to the administration to request its reinforcement: the Minister for Algeria wrote to the official in charge of the colony's education that "desiring the generalisation of the teaching of French in his establishment, [*Monsieur* Benhoura asks] you to envisage the possibility of detaching a greater number of teachers or instructors in October."<sup>27</sup> The school was attended in May 1957, by 635 pupils,<sup>28</sup> and in December of that year, reportedly, by some 800.<sup>29</sup> That winter, Benhoura, who was a veteran of World War I and had been a *qadi* before becoming al-'Oqbi's private secretary and interpreter, requested a subsidy so that the Kheiria might establish a canteen at the school. Noting that "a large number of these children belong to needy families," the office responsible for psychological warfare in the capital approved the request with the observation that "this form of psycho-social action would considerably assist the Kheiria society, and its counterpart the Shabiba, whose pro-French activities are well known in the area."<sup>30</sup> The school's "teaching and good conduct," the head of that office had previously noted, "contribute very efficaciously to the improvement of Franco-Muslim relations"<sup>31</sup> [sic]. The latter comment was penned only four days after the first bombs of the Battle of Algiers had exploded in the center of the city.

## Conclusion

The collaborative enterprise examined here, the *ma-*

*drasat al-shabiba 'l-islamiyya* or School for Islamic Youth, and the associated enterprises of Tayyib al-'Oqbi in Algiers, came into being at precisely the moment when, it appeared, colonial control and imperial authority could most safely dispense with "native collaboration," that is, at the high-water mark of self-confidence in the colonies and colonial enthusiasm in metropolitan France, at the beginning of the interwar period. Its relationship to the administration was at its most ambivalent in these early years. In the final phase of its existence, however, when, with the growth and increasingly successful imposition of an insurgent, nationalist counter-order and counter-authority, such sites of mediation suddenly appeared necessary to colonial rule—only to be found wanting in most cases—this institution became tied and identified more closely than ever with the system. Despite the superficial appearance of its remarkably flourishing student numbers and the extension of its activities, however, the Shabiba was an exceptional, isolated and marginal institution in a society profoundly worked upon by powerful currents of contest. It could thus no longer serve as any kind of effective support for the colonial control which had believed for too long that it could survive indefinitely on the strength of its own univocal authority.

Caught between revolutionary nationalism and the colonial establishment, the Shabiba illustrates both the persistent effort to establish, and the ultimate impossibility of, "collaborative compromise," or meaningful mediation, in colonial Algeria. It was not so much, as Robinson thought, that the system "could dispense with native cooperation"—in the long term, of course, it could not, although officials only began to realize as much when the bombs had already begun to explode. What the regime, suicidally, did manage to do was to outlaw any form of indigenous initiative, any potential mediator between itself and the Algerian population, even the avowedly "apolitical," which did not abide strictly by the rule of obeisance.<sup>32</sup> The only kind of "collaboration" possible was the kind practiced, not by al-'Oqbi and his wished-for partnership in development, but by the police spies who informed on him, or the *beni oui-oui*, the "administration's candidates" in local elections who represented no interests but their own.<sup>33</sup> By strangling, not "native politics" as a whole, which would prove irrepressible, but loyal opposition and reform-minded emancipation, the colonial regime drove itself and its subjects inexorably to violence (with the logical culmination of this suicidal tendency in the settler community eventually finding its nihilistic expression in the OAS).

One of the most remarkable aspects of al-'Oqbi's combination of educational, spiritual, and welfare mission was the extent to which it reinvented, in the heart of the modern urban capital of the colony, the older,

and more particularly rural, form of the Islamic *zawiya*. His modernist, auto-emancipatory initiative, building on this locally-established associational and educational form, and intended to create a space where the conflicting populations of colonial Algeria might come together in partnership and mutual recognition in pursuit of a gradual overcoming of "injustice and arbitrary rule, despotism and tyranny, iniquity, and inequality of rights," was pursued to the end in defiance of its own impossibility, and at the risk, ultimately, of becoming the tool of colonialist psychological warfare. Refused the possibility of assuming a mediating authority of its own, its historical significance could only be as a conduit of colonial control, or as a school of future nationalists. That it became both, while wishing to be neither, is a striking illustration of the way in which, in Algeria at least, colonialism drove a logic of extremes, obliterating the possibility of meaningful, moderate mediation.

## NOTES

Archive material cited is held at the Centre des Archives d'outre mer, Aix-en-Provence, France. References follow the usual form: *fonds/série/carton/dossier*. (ADA—Fonds des Archives du Département d'Alger. AGGA—Fonds des Archives du Gouvernement Général de l'Algérie.) All unattributed translations are my own.

<sup>1</sup>Onley, "Britain's Native Agents in Arabia and Persia in the Nineteenth Century," this volume.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration" reprinted in Wm. Roger Louis ed., *Imperialism. The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1976), 128-48.

<sup>3</sup>Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism," 133.

<sup>4</sup>See, for the early period, Yvonne Turin, *Affrontements culturels en Algérie coloniale—Écoles, Médecine, Religion, 1830-1880*, (Paris: Maspéro, 1971) and for the crucial first phase of the Third Republic, Ch-R Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1870-1919* (2 vols., Paris: PUF, 1968), chs. 12 and 33; also Fanny Colonna, "Le Système d'Enseignement de l'Algérie Coloniale," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 13 (1972), 195-220 and her pathbreaking *Instituteurs algériens, 1883- 1939* (Paris: FNSP, 1975).

<sup>5</sup>See Philip Abrams' brilliant and unjustly little-known text, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1:1 (March 1988): 58-89.

<sup>6</sup>Ageron, *Algériens Musulmans*, 2: 949-50.

<sup>7</sup>John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 226.

<sup>8</sup>I discuss this at greater length in my book, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), ch. 4.

<sup>9</sup>On this, see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup>To paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1973-4): 3-22.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Turin, *Affrontements culturels*, 414.

<sup>12</sup>A detailed discussion is presented in my *History and the Culture of Nationalism* (note 8). For the reformists "revolution against ignorance," see Fanny Colonna, *Les Versets de l'Invincibilité. Permanence et changements religieux en Algérie contemporaine* (Paris, FNSP, 1995), ch.9.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in "L'Activité des cercles créés par les ulemas," unsigned [CIE, Prefecture], Algiers, 10 Feb. 1938, (7 pages), 3. ADA/4I/13/2/3 statutes of the school (3 pages, typed), in ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>14</sup>"L'Activité des cercles" (note 13), 4.

<sup>15</sup>Mostefa Lacheraf notes that it was «la première du genre» in his *Des Noms et des Lieux* (Algiers Casbah Éditions, 1998), 261. I am unaware of any earlier such creation, either in Algiers or elsewhere.

<sup>16</sup>"L'Activité des cercles" (note 13), 3.

<sup>17</sup>*al-Islab*, (28 Dec. 1939), translation in AGGA/15H/21/2.

<sup>18</sup>*al-Shibab*, (31 Dec. 1925), quoted in S. Sellam, B. Younessi, and J-L Planche, "Un réformateur venu du désert, cheikh El Okbi," in J-J Jordi and J-L Planche, eds., *Alger, 1860-1939. Le Modèle ambigu du triomphe colonial* (Paris: Autrement, 1999), 204.

<sup>19</sup>*al-Islab*, (28 Dec. 1939), translation in AGGA/15H/21/2.

<sup>20</sup>"Mouvement Réformiste et Culte Musulman," unsigned note [SIDM, Prefecture], Algiers, March 1945. ADA/4I/14/8.

<sup>21</sup>Lacheraf, *Des Noms et des Lieux*, 262.

<sup>22</sup>Governor-General to Prefect of Algiers, 13 Oct. 1937 n°17866<sup>B</sup>, a/s "Musiciens ambulants," ADA/2I/32/2.

<sup>23</sup>Lacheraf, *Des Noms et des Lieux*, 262.

<sup>24</sup>Prefect, Algiers to Governor General, 16 July 1951 n°964 SLNA, report on "médersas" and Qur'anic schools, (5pp), ADA/4I/68/3.

<sup>25</sup>Intelligence note, Commissaire Divisionnaire, PRG, Algiers, 18 Oct. 1956 n°12256 (valeur: bonne), ADA/4I/16/1.

<sup>26</sup>Photocopy of MS letter, ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>27</sup>Minister for Algeria to Inspecteur de l'Académie, Algiers, 20 June 1957 n°543 AP/AG-2E, ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>28</sup>Minister for Algeria to Inspecteur de l'Académie, Algiers, 20 June 1957 n°543 AP/AG-2E, ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>29</sup>SLNA, Prefecture, Algiers to Minister for Algeria, 6 Dec. 1957 n°1651/SLNA (Action Psychologique), ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>30</sup>SLNA, Prefecture, Algiers to Minister for Algeria, 6 Dec. 1957 n°1651/SLNA (Action Psychologique), ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>31</sup>Intelligence note, Chef du SLNA, Prefecture, Algiers, 4 Oct. 1956 n°1143/CAB SLNA, ADA/4I/88/10.

<sup>32</sup>There is a very small number of distinguished exceptions, notably Chérif Benhabylès, who ultimately became a senator of the Fifth Republic.

<sup>33</sup>This is not, however, to suggest that their case, too, might not prove instructive in terms of the possibilities they, for whatever reason and with whatever ultimate success, pursued.