

Julia Clancy-Smith

INTRODUCTION

This special issue originated in a series of conversations two years ago with *IJMES* editor Beth Baron regarding the Maghrib's positioning in historical scholarship on the Middle East generally and in our field's flagship journal more specifically. While *IJMES* has published a number of solo articles devoted to North Africa from a range of disciplines, we concluded that the journal's readers would welcome a corpus of recent work in the historical sciences for the modern period from roughly the late 18th century on. Emphasis upon the modern does not imply that other eras in North Africa's long history have languished for lack of renewed scholarly interest—far from it. The Punic and Roman empires are currently subject to vigorous reinterpretation in order to dismantle dominant colonial and Orientalist interpretations.¹ Moreover, the literature on Muslim Spain and on medieval and early modern North Africa and Iberia, particularly the hotly contested idea of *convivencia*, has gone from artisanal to industrial production in terms of output.² The regionalist frame for the special issue admittedly acknowledges a form of geographically informed “otherness,” but it does so in order to question that distinction. And although the call for papers had invited research whose primary (but by no means sole) focus was the peoples, societies, and states in what we now know as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, regrettably no submissions on Tripolitania/Libya were received.

Less than two decades ago, North Africa remained somewhat marginal to, because it was seen as disconnected from, the histories of adjacent regions. Edmund Burke III's observation: “not quite African, not quite Arab, not quite European, the Maghrib inhabits a space between the essentialisms evoked by each” still held more or less true.³ Since then, however, the Maghrib's alleged liminality has paradoxically yielded a rich vein of questions, problems, and sources that have nurtured debate and theorizing. All of the papers in this issue deal in one fashion or another with “empire from below,” principally by attention to the local and global—and all the registers in between—as well as to various kinds of networks, thus favoring the web over the line. Whether looking afresh at the early conquest decades of French Algeria or at student uprisings in postcolonial Tunisia, the papers argue for reconsidering notions of rupture—temporal, spatial, and otherwise.⁴ Directly related, the significance of border crossers and crossings (in many senses of the terms) to the fabric of precolonial states and therefore colonial

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and postcolonial regimes emerges. Shifting labels and taxonomies of belonging and exclusion betray not only unstable identities and categories fashioned from below, and above, but also the daily uncertainties of legal and cultural pluralism engendered by empire itself. That individuals such as the merchant Jacob Lasry, the “pseudo-Algerian” Mas’ud Amoyal, and the musician Edmond Yafil could all manipulate uncertainty for both preservation and advancement draws us to some of the prime vectors for doing “history from below”—subalterns, minorities, anticolonial Catholic activists, and people from the provinces such as the self-taught poet Salih Suwaysi.

The papers illustrate the widening appeal of comparative/world history, whose methodologies offer frameworks for laying bare unsuspected connectivities, processes, and contingencies. Such an approach in turn challenges older interpretations that sought causation principally through the “European tunnel of time,” the “colonizer’s model of the world,” or the nationalist version of history that curiously reproduced the Eurocentric historiography it aimed to dismantle.⁵ The comparative methodology complicates conventionally “bounded” units of analysis, such as the state, the tribe, or religion. Also called into question are mutually exclusive binaries—Arab versus Berber, rural versus urban, colonizer versus colonized, and *bilād al-siba* (“the land of dissidence”) versus *bilād al-makhzan* (lands ruled by the political center)—that constituted the stock-in-trade of colonial and nationalist historians.

Just as important, research in the past ten years has blurred the lines between previously discrete disciplinary subfields. The borders of scholarly associations have shifted considerably as changing fields encourage intellectual migrations and trans-associational traffic.⁶ A reawakened interest in empire together with burgeoning research on women and gender, transnationalism, and contact zones has moved North Africa to a more prominent place in the historical and social sciences as well as in comparative literatures. New research calls for new paradigms to rethink the North African past in its constant dialogue with present and future. Borderlands constitute a favored haunt of world historians precisely because they often beget powerful displacements. In different ways, the seven articles presented here address various kinds of frontiers—political, economic, and cultural—that converged in, and were produced by, the modern Maghrib. However, we avoided grouping the papers in national lineages in order to stress transnational connections and highlight the fact that history matters. Of course, alternative mappings and readings could be imagined—for example, these pieces might have been grouped thematically to bring to the fore minorities, music and poetry, or religion and empire.

Joshua Schreier’s “From Mediterranean Merchant to French Civilizer” takes us on a journey into a moment resonant with both rupture and continuity. The merchant Jacob Lasry represented a social type from older trans-Mediterranean traditions in which people endlessly trafficked protections and identities of various sorts in order to trade commodities legally, illegally, or somewhere in between. Lasry’s transformation from a cagey financier and procurer of desperately needed military goods and cash during the French conquest of Algeria into an agent of the civilizing mission two decades later sheds considerable light on Jewish communities and the birth of a new category, “indigenous Jews” (which ultimately came with a high price). The article demonstrates the power of biography for studying “empire from below” as it argues that the civilizing mission was an emerging imperial idea in dire need of ideological content that local actors helped to

elaborate. In addition, the utter chaos of France's military conquest opened the playing field to cunning entrepreneurs who not only carved out lucrative niches in the colonial hierarchy but also shaped its very contours.

Jessica M. Marglin's "The Two Lives of Mas'ud Amoyal" also employs a biographical approach to tackle a tough subject—new legal regimes, trans-border movements, and manipulations of protection/subjecthood. For border crossers, strategic migration demanded reinventing their place of birth and origins in order to "get a better deal" or at least to not forfeit accumulated economic and social capital. Algerians residing outside of French territory gradually became subjects (or citizens after 1870, in the case of the Jews), but French officials in neighboring states such as precolonial Morocco (and also Tunisia) often made it up as they went along: some of the legal meanings and taxonomies attached to Algerian expatriation and French subjecthood were forged in the rest of the Maghrib (and of course in France), varying from place to place and over time. Indeed, "protection," *protégée*, and *himāya* had variant connotations across the Mediterranean world in the 19th century, and individuals seeking "protection" and those conferring or extending it frequently had different mental maps and sociolegal expectations. As a pair, the articles by Marglin and Schreier suggest a view of colonialism as continually "in the making," the product of an unstable succession of inventions, adjustments, contradictions, and maneuvers.

Jonathan Glasser argues in his study, "Edmond Yafil and Andalusi Musical Revival," that the new musical associations formed in Algeria prior to World War I reflected the efflorescence of associative activity in the country more generally—in sports, clubs, and literary or benevolent societies. Moreover, locating Yafil in a broader trans-Maghrib context might point to how the revival, or *sauvegarde*, of music in colonial Algeria was part of concerted efforts to "save" the nearly moribund handicraft sectors in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, because colonial officials across the Maghrib viewed un- or underemployed urban artisans and laborers as a grave sociopolitical danger. As Glasser shows so compellingly, Yafil's complex ventures into musical performance, recording, composition, associations, and printing reveal early 20th-century Algeria to be "a polyglot colonial society, peopled by agents who often complicate the binary of colonizers and resisting nationalists." Along the way, the article poses a theoretical challenge to scholars to historicize as well as disaggregate—and therefore problematize—the powerful notion of revival itself.

Kimberly Katz's "Urban Identity in Colonial Tunisia" makes important contributions not only by focusing on local encounters with foreign rule but also by employing the poet Salih Suwaysi's *maqāmāt* as a historical source. Most treatments of Tunisia in the modern era tend to be "Tunis-centric," but she presents a "voice from al-Qayrawan" and the interior as well as the worldview of an individual who was not even a member of the provincial elite much less that of the capital city. Katz's work speaks to several other articles in the issue by illustrating the operation of transregional religious currents and influences. Thinking comparatively about Suwaysi's forced "exile" in the Tunisian oases invites us to consider different manifestations of colonial violence. A large number of Tunisian nationalists, including Bourguiba, was sent into exile in the desert, which functioned as a vast open-air prison in Algeria as well. This form of internal exile as a disciplinary mechanism seems to have often backfired for the colonizers—in the case of Suwaysi (and others) it rather worked to inspire and empower.⁷

The two articles on the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) remind us that the country tends to receive the “lion’s share” of scholarly attention on the Maghrib, with much of it still focused on the struggle for liberation. Indeed a plethora of scholarly colloquia, conferences, and publications organized in 2012 have aimed to commemorate the Évian accords and Algerian independence as well as to reconsider dimensions of the colonial past.⁸

In “‘Humanize the Conflict’: Algerian Health Care Organizations and Propaganda Campaigns, 1954–62,” Jennifer Johnson Onyedum examines the politics of humanitarianism from a perspective that offers a new point of entry into the conflict and a novel way of grasping how and why the Algerian war marked so deeply the Cold War and the end of empire. Drawing upon oral history, under-utilized nongovernmental organization documentation, and national archives, she argues that medicine and public health often undergirded the military struggles and diplomatic campaigns of the National Liberation Front (FLN), which sought to engage the international community and thereby discredit claims that Algeria was a problem internal to France. Just as important, the provision of efficient and modern health care to the Algerian populace conferred authority upon the national state in gestation and contradicted hostile accusations of “backwardness” and “barbarity.” In effect, three propaganda campaigns mesh in this compelling story. The first two are those of the French colonial authorities, on the one hand, and Algerian nationalists, on the other hand, to win hearts and minds through health care delivery and the claimed observance of the Geneva Conventions and International Red Cross rules governing POWs and refugees. The third struggle continues today over historical memory of the FLN’s effectiveness in providing health care during a time of murderous combat.

Darcie Fontaine looks afresh at the war in her “Treason or Charity? Christian Missions on Trial and the Decolonization of Algeria,” which also draws upon oral interviews in addition to underutilized court testimonies and private archives. In recent years, research has increasingly taken issue with older presentations of a conflict that pitted “Algerians” against “French” or “colonized” against “colonizer.” While the secular militant activism supporting the FLN, and condemning torture, by members of the French intelligentsia and left, notably, the French Communist Party and the French Socialist Party, was front-page news from the start, Fontaine draws our attention to another group of European activists in Algeria: “Christian progressivists.” These people assumed a radical position, based on their leftist Christian theology, not only on the futility of maintaining French Algeria but also on colonialism worldwide, which earned them charges of treason as well as incarceration and torture. They were threatening precisely because they advocated justice, dignity, and independence for Algerians on moral principles derived from their own reading of Christianity and because they forged local communal ties with Algerian Muslims through interfaith dialogue and social welfare associations that predated the outbreak of hostilities. Darcie argues convincingly that the untold story of Christian progressivists should be folded into a wider, transnational—indeed, global—frame of decolonization and religion. In a sense, these two articles on the empire’s demise harken back to earlier periods of imperial expansion across North Africa, the Middle East, and the globe in which both missionaries and medicine played complex, and often contradictory, roles.

The upheavals of our own time have demonstrated that Algeria can no longer claim a monopoly on the study of militant political action. The timeliness of Burleigh

Hendrickson's "March 1968: Practicing Transnational Activism from Tunis to Paris" scarcely needs stating. The author teases out multiple connections—colonial and postcolonial—between the events of May 1968 in France and those of March 1968 in Tunisia, by putting students, intellectuals, and other activists on both sides of the Mediterranean onto center stage. A major irony emerges from this work: that older colonial connectivities, communications, and modes of exchange were remobilized to express social grievances and facilitate student unrest against the "independent" Tunisian regime. The problem of the archive explains in part why March 1968 remained largely unexplored until now; unhampered research on the politics of contestation in post-1956 Tunisia was discouraged, if not suppressed, by the nationalist elites controlling the state, the party, and collective visions of past and present.⁹

Representing but a fraction of recent and in-progress research on the many histories of modern North Africa, these articles as an ensemble point to an emerging paradigm shift in understandings of where and what the Maghrib is and how it came to be.¹⁰ An older tenacious canon informed by binaries, monolithic constructs, and teleological interpretations of the past is gradually being laid to rest. What impact Tunisia's revolution as well as the related movements comprising the "Maghrib Spring" will exert on future historical research remains an open question.

NOTES

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¹ See, for example, Leslie Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010); and Peter van Dommelen, ed., *Rural Landscapes of the Punic World* (London: Equinox, 2008).

² This scholarship now links the histories of Muslim- and Norman-ruled Sicily with that of pre-1500 Iberia principally by viewing the entire western Mediterranean basin as a potential field of social action and interaction, in opposition to frameworks that quarantine the Muslim shores of the sea from larger historical narratives and processes. See, for examples, Brian Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); and Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010). For an overview of recent scholarship on Muslim Spain, see Anna Akasoy's review article, "Convivencia and Its Discontents: Interfaith Life in al-Andalus," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 489–99.

³ Edmund Burke III, "Theorizing the Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib," in *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Ali Ahmida (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 17.

⁴ Julia Clancy-Smith, "Ruptures? Expatriates, Law, and Institutions in Colonial-Husaynid Tunisia, 1870–1914," in *Changes in Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures*, ed. Veit Bader, Annelies Moors, and Marcel Maussen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 65–87; Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History," *International History Review* 33 (2011): 573–84.

⁵ Julia Clancy-Smith, ed., "Introduction," in *North Africa, Islam, and the Mediterranean World from the Almoravids to the Algerian War* (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2001), 1–10; and idem, "Mediterranean Historical Migrations: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, ed. Dirk Hoerder and Donna Gabaccia (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).

⁶For example, fellow scholars from the Society for French Historical Studies and the French Colonial Historical Society, whose interests have extended to the Mediterranean's Muslim shores, are increasingly visible at MESA.

⁷Scholarly attention increasingly focuses on violence in general, and colonial violence in particular, as a subject in need of theorizing and definition. See, for example, the special issue on *Colonial Violence* edited by Samuel Kalman in *Reflexions historiques* 36 (2010); and Benjamin C. Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁸The recent French translation of Matthew Connelly's work, *L'Arme secrète du FLN: Comment de Gaulle a perdu la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Payot, 2011), is emblematic of this interest, as is the work of like-minded scholars in the rapidly changing field of transnational historical scholarship, whether on Algeria, the Maghrib, or other regions. See, for example, James Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Allan Christelow, *Algerians without Borders: The Making of a Global Frontier Society* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2012).

⁹After 1956, Bourguiba himself removed documents from the national archives pertaining to his arch rival, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Tha'alabi, and rendered research into the Husaynid Dynasty all but taboo.

¹⁰It is regrettable the issue does not include articles concentrating on two of the most dynamic subfields in the historical sciences: environmental history and women's/gender history. Readers are directed to Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke III, *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011); and Amy Kallander, *Family Fortunes: Women, Gender, and the Palace Households in Ottoman Tunisia* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, forthcoming).