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The Action française, Jeunesses patriotes, Unions latines, and the Birth of Latinité, 1919–1931

In the aftermath of the April 1901 Margueritte Affair, the fortunes of the extreme Right dissipated throughout Algeria. Faced with the threat of Muslim violence against Europeans, a constant worry throughout the colony’s history, the population in all three departments abandoned anti-Semitic politics, temporarily eschewing xenophobic rioting and inflammatory rhetoric. Memories of the 1871 Kabyle revolt remained vivid in public memory. In January of that year Berbers in Constantine rose up under the leadership of tribal luminary Muhammad al-Hajj al-Muqrānī, in response to the extension of French civilian control over rural tribal territories and to famine and disease resulting from four years of land seizures, drought, and natural disasters. Fearing the legislative authority of the settlers, whose complete disregard for the rights and properties of Algerians was far worse than the policies of the metropolitan government or the Bureaux Arabes, the 150,000-strong rebel force held out until October, killing 2,686 settlers.¹

These events were greeted with repressive measures, including assessed reparations of 36.5 million francs to all Algerians regardless of their tribal affiliation, along with the summary execution of thousands of rebels following fixed trials. Adding insult to injury, the authorities subsequently initiated land seizures. Laws in 1883 and 1887 voided traditional tribal ownership, replacing it with French legal standards. Courts thus handed entire properties to European colons, and by the turn of the century these rich farmers controlled the wheat and wine industries, in addition to holding over one-third of the seats in the Délégations financières. By 1920, the settlers seized 2.6 million hectares in this manner, leading to poverty and immiseration for Algerian peasants, who now worked seasonally for European owners, paid a pittance for their efforts.² Muslims were also subject

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to the *Indigénat*, a legal system that one historian calls “the juridical incarnation of the violence of the colonizer.” Its 33 criminal acts, not recognized in metropolitan France, covered a range of offenses from insulting a European official to traveling without a permit. Algerians were declared subjects rather than citizens (*indigènes*) became a legal category), brutally punished for any infraction without recourse to a jury trial, and forced to pay *impôts arabes* in addition to French tithes, while the *Statut personnel* placed civil matters under Koranic law rather than Gallic courts.³

Given such harsh measures, it is unsurprising that Algerian violence against Europeans persisted in the fin-de-siècle, evidenced by a murder rate eight times that of the * métropole*, and increasing attacks against law enforcement officials. Fearful for their safety, various communities organized militias to defend local property and the lives of the local *colons*. Banditry also reemerged after 1871, an activity explicitly linked with attacks on French imperial hegemony, engaging hundreds of police officers and gendarmes in manhunts, and fuelling rumors of rising nationalism among the Arab *duwars*.⁴

Yet the threat of violence receded in the aftermath of the Great War, buoyed by the February 1919 Jonnart Law, which rewarded the blood tax paid by Algerian servicemen with the right to vote in a distinct electoral college for 421,000 compatriots. This elite could cast ballots in all regional and local elections, including the *Délégations financières* and the Algerian Supreme Council. To be sure, they elected fewer representatives than their European counterparts and were thus devoid of any real power. The promise of citizenship remained contingent upon a renunciation of Koranic law, unthinkable for devout Algerian Muslims, and even then possible only for the educated elite and war veterans.⁵ Yet if it left Muslims deeply dissatisfied with the paltry nature of the reforms and the nonabolition of the *Indigénat* and the *impôts arabes*—any candidate who participated in the new system was labeled a collaborator—the Jonnart law renewed hope in the possibility of a more just imperial system and the eventual assimilation of Algerians via genuine French citizenship. Thus in the 1920s the grandson of Abd-el-Kadar, the Emir Khaled, whose moderate nationalism and acceptance of imperialism did little to incite the Muslim population, eclipsed the bandits and rebels of the nineteenth century.⁶

Nonetheless, Europeans reverted to the arguments evinced during the 1890s anti-Semitic wave, that the settlers were denied any real voice in Algerian affairs. With only nine *colon* representatives in the Chamber of Deputies, they were forced to accept unilateral decisions emanating from Paris or Alger. If the Jonnart law never truly threatened their position, for only 8,000 Algerians actually applied for