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Domesticating the Médersa:

Franco-Muslim Education and Colonial Rule in Northwest Africa, 1850–1960

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Samuel DeJohn Anderson

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Domesticating the Médersa: Franco-Muslim Education and Colonial Rule
in Northwest Africa, 1850–1960

by

Samuel DeJohn Anderson

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Ghislaine E. Lydon, Chair

This dissertation examines the place of the *médersa*, a Franco-Muslim school offering both European and Islamic instruction, in the colonial history of northwest Africa. It pays particular attention to the trans-Saharan nature of the institution, as it expanded from its original context in Algeria to an eventual presence in the West African colonies of Senegal, French Soudan, and Mauritania. It also demonstrates how the *médersa* evolved over the course of major changes in colonial policy from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, from the “Arabophilia” of Napoléon III to the civilizing mission of the Third Republic to the era of the French Union and decolonization. Tracing the *médersa*’s history over this span of space and time reveals a process of domestication, a negotiation between African Muslim societies and French administrators that resulted in institutional adaptations and what I call a “multi-local” institution. In other words, the *médersa*’s core mission, providing Franco-Muslim education and producing a class of Muslim

intermediary employees for the colonial administration, remained the same while certain practices changed to suit local imperatives. Two of these “practices of order” receive special scrutiny in the dissertation. These are the curriculum, which evolved to include certain local practices of Islamic knowledge transmission, and student recruitment, which determined the makeup of the colonial intermediary corps in tandem with local and colonial ideas of religious, racial, and social identity.

Most scholars have dismissed the *médersas* as a colonial curiosity. The dissertation argues that the *médersa*’s domestication in fact had a major impact on the intellectual, political, and institutional histories of northwest Africa, and that its influence is best understood through a new multi-local, trans-Saharan framework. Adopting this comparative perspective demonstrates how the *médersa*’s institutional practices, and the *médersa*’s students, influenced other developments in colonial society. As such, the dissertation argues for the importance of Franco-Muslim education as a mode of connection across northwest Africa in the colonial period.

The dissertation of Samuel DeJohn Anderson is approved.

Andrew Apter

Aomar Boum

Caroline Cole Ford

Ghislaine E. Lydon, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

To my parents

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Producing this dissertation has at times been a lonely process. Traveling to distant archives and muddling through the writing process necessitated time alone that often felt overwhelming. Looking back, I can see how enriching that time was, and how many people have helped me arrive at this stage. It is a pleasure to thank them, in this small way.

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Introduction

How does an institution mold those who pass through it, and how do they in turn shape the institution? This dissertation examines these questions through the example of the *médersa*, a “Franco-Muslim” school that operated in colonial northwest Africa from the 1850s to the 1950s. Over the century of its existence, the *médersa* trained thousands of *medérsiens*, as students were known, who played particularly important roles in the evolution of Muslim societies under French rule. The *médersa* was first created in the Maghribi settler colony of Algeria and spread in the early twentieth century to the West African colonies of Mauritania, Senegal, and Haut-Sénégal et Niger, what would become the French Soudan and is today Mali. It was an institution that crossed colonial, regional, and cultural boundaries. Its history also crosses historiographical borders: the *médersa* cannot be understood in the context of North African, West African, or French colonial history alone. Rather, the *médersa* evolved according to local Maghribi, Saharan, and Sahelian logics as well as colonial imperatives. These processes meant that the institution operated differently in each site, while retaining its core goal of training colonized Muslims in a dual Franco-Muslim curriculum. The continuity of this mission, despite the evolution of local forces and colonial governance over the course of a century, made the *médersa* a site of ongoing negotiation over the place of Muslim communities in northwest Africa and in the French empire. This process, which I term “domesticating the *médersa*,” affirms the centrality of this institution to French “Muslim policy” and to Muslim life under colonial rule across northwest Africa.

Individual *médersas* varied from place to place and over time, but certain core characteristics make it possible to discuss the institution in the singular. The most essential element of the *médersa* was its “Franco-Muslim” teaching, known as *enseignement franco-*

musulman in French. When the first three *médersas* were created in Algeria in 1850, their teaching was exclusively Islamic in nature; within a decade French instruction had begun as well. Over the years, the dual curriculum of French and Islamic materials became more important as a way to distinguish the *médersas* from other schools, both those that were part of the colonial administration and those run independently in Muslim communities across northwest Africa. While it drew from both Islamic and European educational traditions and practices, the *médersa* was firmly a colonial institution, one born of the contact between different forms of knowledge and means of knowledge transmission.

This mixture of influences is reflected in the institution's name. *Médersa* is a French word, but its origins are in Arabic. *Madrāsa* means “place of study,” and it can refer to a wide array of educational institutions.¹ Madrasas are widespread across the Islamic world and have played a range of social roles in the different societies in which they are present.² The French term *médersa* transliterates a Maghribi pronunciation that shortens or eliminates the vowel sounds of classical Arabic. In French, the word *médersa* is used to refer to any madrasa; for the sake of clarity, in French it is useful to refer to the institution that is the subject of this dissertation as the French *médersa*, or *la médersa française*.³ I rely on these linguistic subtleties to distinguish among different institutions: in this dissertation, *médersa* refers to the specific colonial institution at hand and other Islamic schools are described in their particular context.

¹ A madrasa is “a religious boarding school associated with a mosque.” A range of adjectives can specify schools

² Ebrahim Moosa, *What Is A Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

³ This is a lesson I learned in my field research, especially when speaking with those unfamiliar with the French *médersas*. Most memorably, during my first visit to Tlemcen, in 2013, I was taken on a fascinating but not especially productive tour of the old city, looking for the remnants of medieval madrasas instead of the site of the French *médersa*. Even among specialists, the French *médersa* is today not widely known. Louis Brenner, in his study of Islamic education in Mali, distinguishes between the “French *médersa*” and the “Islamic *médersa*”; these terms obscure the role of Muslims in the colonial *médersas*. See Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 39-41.

There were a total of ten *médersas* that operated in colonized northwest Africa. The first three were created in Algeria in 1850, in the cities of Tlemcen, Constantine, and Médéa. The latter *médersa* would move in 1855 to Blida and in 1859 to Algiers, where it would remain. These three *médersas* would operate continuously until 1951, when they were transformed into secular high schools, or *lycées*. In the early twentieth century, *médersas* were opened, in chronological order, in the cities of Djenné, French Soudan (1906); Saint-Louis, Senegal (1908); Timbuktu, French Soudan (1911); and Boutilimit, Mauritania (1914). For a brief period in the 1920s, the Boutilimit *médersa* was moved to the neighboring town of Mederdra. Two decades after this initial wave, another three *médersas* were opened in the Saharan towns of Timbedra, French Soudan (1933; following a border move in 1945 Timbedra became part of Mauritania); Atar, Mauritania (1936), and Kiffa, Mauritania (1940). During the interwar period and after the Second World War, in tandem with broader efforts to expand colonial education in the French empire, several schools that resembled *médersas* either opened or were proposed in communities across northwest Africa. The *médersa*'s institutional model, therefore, appeared across a wide range of space and time, and spread beyond institutions that were formally classified as *médersas* themselves (see Figure 1).

While the *médersa* was present across much of northwest Africa, it was absent from certain territories, most notably Morocco and Tunisia. Tunisia became a French protectorate in 1881; Morocco followed suit in 1912, and both regained full independence in 1956. This separate designation—protectorate, not colony—and resultant maintenance of local institutions such as the Moroccan sultanate meant that different imperatives guided French education policy in Morocco and Tunisia compared to Algeria and West Africa. Similar schools were opened for the training of Muslim subjects, but they lacked the explicit Franco-Muslim character of the

médersas. The *collèges musulmans* of Fes and Rabat, the Collège Sadiki of Tunis, and even Spanish-Arab schools in Spanish Morocco all replicated, to some extent, the médersas' institutional structure, but they served different purposes.⁴ Though Morocco and Tunisia shared both a northwest African Islamic culture and an experience of colonial rule with the rest of the region, the médersas never took root there.

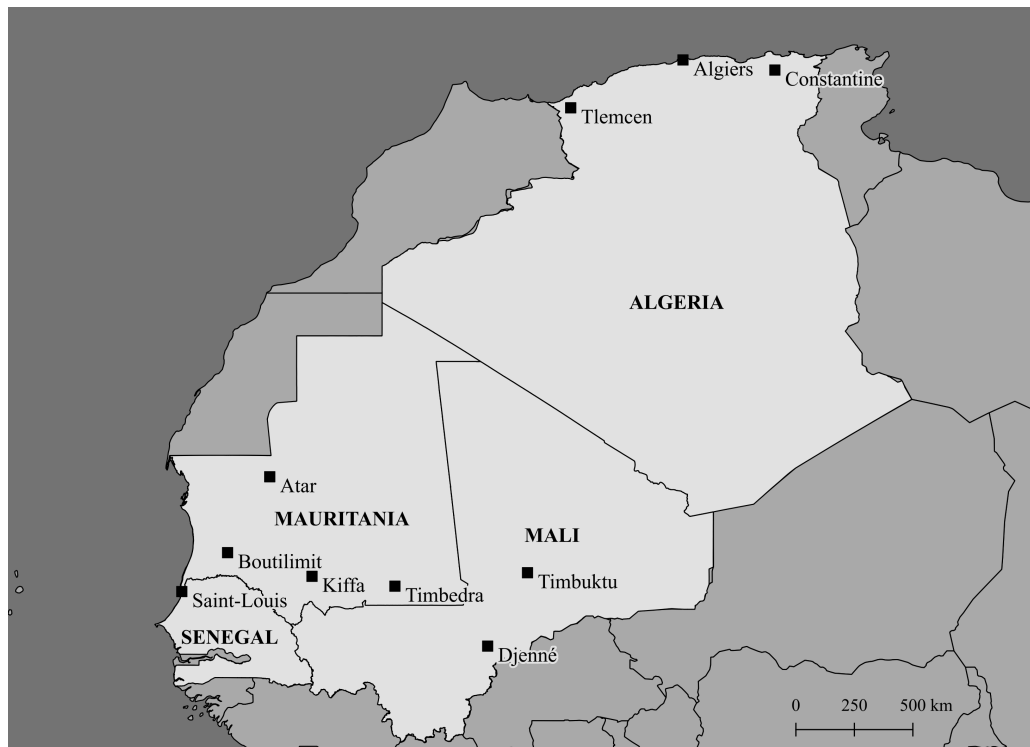


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of the ten médersas in northwest Africa.

⁴ On colonial education in the two protectorates, see R. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *L'œuvre française en matière d'enseignement au Maroc* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1928), 128–152, for an explicit comparison between médersas and the Moroccan collèges musulmans. See also Spencer Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul: French Education, Colonial Ethnology, and Muslim Resistance, 1912–1956* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Noureddine Sraïeb, “L’idéologie de l’école en Tunisie coloniale (1881–1945),” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 68–69 (1993), 239–254; Irene González González, *Spanish Education in Morocco, 1912–1956: Cultural Interactions in a Colonial Context* (Brighton, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), 47–79. For a comparative examination of the role of colonial education in North African nationalist movements, see John Damis, “The origins and significance of the free school movement in Morocco, 1919–1931,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 19 (1975), 75–99 and John Damis, “The Free-School Phenomenon: The Cases of Tunisia and Algeria,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5:4 (September 1974), 434–449.

Although the *médersa* adapted to a wide array of geographical, cultural, and historical elements, its goal remained essentially the same across all its iterations. The first of these was the aforementioned Franco-Muslim curriculum. No other educational institution, either colonial or African, anywhere in northwest Africa, included both European and Islamic instruction in so consistent a way from so early a date. The form and content of both the French curriculum and the Islamic curriculum changed over time and space, but the inclusion of both was unique.

The second defining feature of the *médersa* was the role imagined for its students, the *medérsiens*. Other colonial schools were, like the *médersa*, designed to train colonized subjects for a wide range of intermediary roles. Much of this education involved French language teaching. While this element was certainly present in the *médersas*, the Franco-Muslim curriculum made the *medérsiens* a singular group within colonized society. A minority within the small number who had access to colonial education, the *medérsiens* had an outsized impact on colonized societies across northwest Africa, though their roles differed from place to place. Over time, the range of jobs that required a *médersa* diploma narrowed. They were concentrated in the fields of Islamic law, education, and religion—especially in Algeria, where French efforts to control Islam as a social force led to a system known as the *culte officiel*, whereby religious authorities were chosen and paid by the colonial state. Many *medérsiens* also found work as interpreters, especially in French West Africa (*Afrique Occidentale française*, or AOF). In Algeria, the son of one *médersa* graduate recounted to me that the *medérsiens* were equally at home while praying in the mosque and out on the dance floor. In the late colonial period, this dual education evolved into the discourse of a “double culture” (in French, *double culture*). Pierre Bourdieu first theorized cultural capital with reference to the hierarchies of the French school system. The particular category of Franco-Muslim education in the *médersas* endowed the

medérsiens with “bi-cultural capital,” a form of distinction that was unavailable elsewhere in these colonized African societies.⁵

The médersas were spaces populated exclusively by men and boys. Students ranged in age from seven or eight to up to thirty years old, depending on the place and time. Recruiting students was a stubborn challenge, but by and large these efforts concentrated on elite families, especially in West Africa, where the “sons of chiefs” were a major target. The students were exclusively Muslim. Other aspects of their origin—especially, in West Africa, ethnicity and race—sparked controversy among colonial policymakers who debated who merited a Franco-Muslim education and would put it to good use in the service of the colonial administration. The professors were also all male—with the sole exception of Marguerite Sabot, who was named an interim professor at the Médersa of Tlemcen during the First World War.⁶ Especially in Algeria, but also in West Africa, the médersas’ faculty was drawn from the scholarly elite, both African and European. The renown of the faculty, which included some of the most important names in northwest African intellectual history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, made the médersas social worlds unto themselves. In other words, the médersas stood apart from other educational institutions in the region, and the medérsiens made up a particular cohort of colonial intermediaries.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Laretta C. Clough (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). The *métis*—those born to parents of different racial categories—possessed a different form of bi-cultural capital. Some, like the famous *signares* of Senegal, became important brokers and merchants; others, especially children, posed a “*métis* question” that prompted legal action from the French government. See Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013) and Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire’s Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁶ ANOM 14H/45/2, Arrêté du Gouverneur-Général, 5 November 1916. Sabot’s husband, Alfred Bel, was director of the Tlemcen médersa at that time. See also François Pouillon, ed., *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, 2nd edition (Paris: IISMM and Karthala, 2008), 71–72.

The *médersas* were not, however, the most prestigious of schools, nor were they embraced by all colonized Muslim populations. In Algeria, the *école normale*—the teacher training school in Bouzaréah, in the hills above Algiers—was a more popular choice, a surer path for those who sought an education in a French institution and a career with the colonial administration.⁷ In Senegal, Mauritania, and the French Soudan, a range of local factors meant that in each place the *médersa* played different and at times minor roles in colonial education and colonized society. As a result, the *médersas* have been effaced from much of the historiography of northwest Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Louis Brenner, focused on Mali, where the *médersa*'s impact was relatively light, concludes that the *médersa* had a “barely discernible” historical significance.⁸ This may or may not be the case for the French Soudan, but his argument has been reproduced and cited, without serious engagement, in most of the historiography of Islamic education in West Africa published in the last two decades.⁹ The Algerian *médersas* have also been by and large ignored by historians: the study of colonial education in Algeria has stagnated since the publication of Fanny Colonna's study of the *école normale* in 1975.¹⁰ Only one scholar has investigated, or even seriously acknowledged, the

⁷ Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens, 1883–1939* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques and Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1975), 94–97.

⁸ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 40.

⁹ See, for example, Ousmane Oumar Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 129–130; Rudolph T. Ware, III, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 196–200; Robert Launay, “Introduction: Writing Boards and Blackboards,” in Robert Launay, ed., *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 5–9.

¹⁰ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*. See also Alf Andrew Heggoy, “Education in Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” *Comparative Education Review* 17:2 (June 1973), 180–197. The vast majority of recent scholarship on Algeria, in English, French, and Arabic, focuses instead on the liberation war of 1954–1962. For example, a recent volume connected to an exhibition at the French National Museum of Education includes eight chapters devoted to the 1950s and 1960s, and three to the colonial period preceding it. See *L'École en Algérie, l'Algérie à l'école de 1830 à nos jours*, ed. Jean-Robert Henry and Florence Hudowicz (Rouen: Munaé and Canopé Éditions, 2017).

connection between the *médersas* of North and West Africa, in a master's thesis; even his emphasis is heavily weighted towards the Algerian case, and the French perspective.¹¹

In this dissertation, I argue that the *médersa's* significance is in fact discernible, and multifaceted. Furthermore, it is only through a trans-Saharan perspective, incorporating the histories of the *médersas* in both Algeria and French West Africa, that the *médersa's* impact can be fully appreciated. To gain this perspective, the dissertation adopts an institutional approach to the *médersa*, tracking its evolution from its creation in Algeria in 1850 to its transformation, in the era of decolonization, into a wide array of related institutions. This focus enables comparisons among the multiple places where *médersas* operated. Indeed, I call the *médersa* a “multi-local” institution, one which must be understood through both the local context of individual *médersas* and through the history of the institution writ large. Frederick Cooper has encouraged scholars of colonialism to “think like an empire.”¹² An institutional history of the *médersa* reveals both how French colonial administrators thought about Islam and Muslim communities in Africa and how that thinking influenced colonial “Muslim policy.” Crucially, the institutional focus also reveals how Muslim communities shaped the *médersas*, and thus colonial policy on a larger scale. In a 1919 report, a French education inspector described the *Médersa* of Timbuktu as “one of the principal instruments” in the “work of domestication” (*une œuvre d'apprivoisement*) of the Muslim population of that city.¹³ What follows is an investigation into that “domestication”: what made it possible, and what it made possible.

¹¹ Alexandre Gerin, “La survie des *médersas*: Enjeux politiques des *médersas* coloniales en Algérie et en AOF (1850–1959),” *Mémoire de recherche de Master 1*, Université de Provence, 2010.

¹² Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 200.

¹³ ANS J94, *Rapport sur la Médersa de Tombouctou*, undated (1919).

Defining the Terms of this Study

The médersa was closely tied to the colonial legal institutions of Algeria and French West Africa. This was especially true in Algeria, where from their inception the médersas were designed to train intermediaries explicitly for legal careers. By the late nineteenth century, a médersa diploma was required to work as a legal clerk (*adel*) or judge (*qadi*) in an Islamic court in Algeria. The connections between colonial education and legal history in colonial contexts remain under-explored: it is relatively uncommon for historians to track a group, such as the medérsiens, from their educations through their careers. Pending further research, the medérsiens would lend themselves to such a study.

Despite the disjuncture between the historiographies of law and education in colonial Africa, legal history has much to offer a study of the médersas. Similar processes occurred in legal and educational institutions during the colonial period, leading to revealing concurrences. Fanny Colonna discusses, for one example, the way that prospective students would choose among a range of schooling options, including the médersa and the *école normale*.¹⁴ This choice from an array of different institutions replicates the strategy of “forum shopping” whereby colonized litigants chose from a range of courts with different jurisdictions. Indeed, just as colonial rule gave rise to regimes of legal pluralism, so too did the educational system reflect a sort of “educational pluralism,” with different forms of knowledge roughly analogous to the different jurisdictions of the courts.¹⁵

¹⁴ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*, 77–97.

¹⁵ For representative works on legal pluralism, especially in the colonial context, see Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kristen Mann and Richard Roberts, eds., *Law in Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991); and Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014).

As legal pluralism developed in the colonies, new categories arose and became enshrined in law and practice. Across Africa (and elsewhere), “customary law” was a term ascribed to legal practices predating the arrival of European colonizers. These practices were codified into texts intended to help secure administrative control but which often enabled Africans to carve out spaces of authority and defend their own interests.¹⁶ In areas like northwest Africa where Islamic law was also practiced, separate Islamic court systems, which predated colonial rule, were preserved but incorporated into colonial bureaucracies, as were Jewish courts in the Maghrib.¹⁷ In French Algeria, this codification of Islamic law became known as “Algerian Islamic Law,” in an indication of how deeply the colonial state penetrated into Islamic legal practice.¹⁸ Franco-Muslim education in the *médersas* played a role in this codification of Islamic law by establishing a standard legal curriculum and diploma regime.

In his study of colonial courts in the French Soudan, Richard Roberts describes the “landscapes of power” that African litigants navigated in their daily lives.¹⁹ This metaphor for the navigation of social relations entails both intentionality (including the possibility of

¹⁶ Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Katherine E. Hoffman, “Berber Law by French Means: Customary Courts in the Moroccan Hinterlands, 1930–1956,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:4 (2010), 851–880. On a more general level, see Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 211–262. Mahmood Mamdani charts the consequences of this system in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895–1912* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Charles C. Stewart, “Colonial Justice and the Spread of Islam in the Early Twentieth Century,” in David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds., *Le temps des marabouts : itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française, v. 1880–1960* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 53–66; Jessica M. Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Elke Stockreiter, “‘British Kadhis’ and ‘Muslim Judges’: Modernisation, Inconsistencies and Accommodation in Zanzibar’s Colonial Judiciary,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 4 (2010), 560–576.

¹⁸ Claude Bontems, *Le droit musulman algérien à l’époque coloniale. De l’invention à la codification* (Geneva: Slatkine Érudition, 2014); Allan Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts and the French Colonial State in Algeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Roberts, *Litigants and Households*, 14–15.

movement across physical space, such as traveling to a court, and cognitive adaptability, as in anticipating new outcomes to a problem) and action. Traversing a landscape of power, to Roberts, is an assertion of agency within “sets of rules and resources.”²⁰ This dissertation’s institutional focus means that individual agency and action are less emphasized than they would be in a social history like Roberts’s. Others have used the same term to describe physical, urban landscapes.²¹ For my purposes, the idea of a “landscape of power” helpfully encapsulates the boundaries and possibilities of both physical and imagined power structures that the *médersas* represented in colonial northwest Africa.²² For a young man from the Algerian or Mauritanian hinterland, traveling to study in the *médersa* of Algiers or Boutilimit meant physically traversing new routes and inhabiting new spaces (especially in Algeria, where after 1910 the three *médersas* occupied new buildings and took on new symbolic power at the pinnacle of Franco-Muslim Algerian society). It also meant navigating new and intersecting structures of power between African Muslim societies and French colonial administrations. As the *médersa* was the sole Franco-Muslim school, it was a particularly prominent institution in the landscapes of power of colonial northwest Africa.

²⁰ Roberts, *Litigants and Households*, 15, citing Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²¹ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

²² Robert Launay describes “educational landscapes” in his study of Islamic schooling in West Africa, drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of fields but without reference to “landscapes of power” in particular. See Launay, Introduction, in Launay, ed., *Islamic Education*, 1–26.



Figure 2. The Médersa of Algiers, c. 1910. Postcard, author's collection.

As Roberts and other scholars of colonial courts have demonstrated, many sectors of colonized societies were able to navigate the landscape of power by exploiting institutional structures and carving out spaces of authority and freedom.²³ Among the most adept at this practice were those who found work as employees of the colonial administration. These intermediaries played roles ranging from office clerks to interpreters to teachers to police officers to soldiers.²⁴ These figures, endowed with the trust of colonial officials and officers, were able to

²³ See also Emily Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015) and Shamil Jeppie, Ebrahim Moosa, and Richard Roberts, eds., *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 4: Ghislaine Lydon, "Obtaining Freedom at the Muslims' Tribunal: Colonial Kadijustiz and Women's Divorce Litigation in Ndar (Senegal)," 135–164.

²⁴ The literature on African intermediary figures is vast. See, e.g., Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Joël Glasman, "Penser les intermédiaires coloniaux : Note sur les dossiers de carrière de la police au Togo," *History in Africa* 37 (2010), 51–81; Colonna, *Instituteurs*; Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (London: James Currey, 1991); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

work their connections to their own advantage.²⁵ They also shaped colonial knowledge, and thus colonial institutions, through their labor.²⁶ Codified customary law, scholarly institutes like the Institut Français de l’Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Dakar, and many other features on the colonial landscape of power came to be because of the work of such intermediaries.

Within this diverse group of colonized actors, the medérsiens stood out because of their training. Through the Franco-Muslim education of the médersas, graduates were intended to have both an elite status with their fellow Muslims and a respect for the French colonial mission. Their designated social roles, especially in the realms of law and religion, made them more powerful than many of their fellow intermediary figures. A qadi or a mufti (jurisconsult) was more overtly influential than a clerk. That the medérsiens frequently appeared as legal and religious authorities across northwest Africa is both notable and too infrequently acknowledged.²⁷ The médersas thus were endowed with a particularly important political purpose in their training of such figures.²⁸ Education, because of its central role in shaping cultural life, became a major site of attention and contestation in the colonial context. The médersa bridged the concerns of Muslim and European communities to a greater extent than other schools.

²⁵ Wangrin, a fictional interpreter, is perhaps the most well-known of these figures. See Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *L'étrange destin de Wangrin, ou les roueries d'un interprète africain* (Paris: Union général d'éditions, 1973).

²⁶ See, e.g., Jean-Hervé Jézéquel, “‘Collecting Customary Law’: Educated Africans, Ethnographical Writings, and Colonial Justice in French West Africa,” in Lawrance et. al., *Intermediaries*, 139–158; Tamba M’Bayo, *Muslim Interpreters in Colonial Senegal, 1850–1920: Mediations of Knowledge and Power in the Lower and Middle Senegal River Valley* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

²⁷ One exception is Allan Christelow, whose work in the 1980s addressed many of the fields in which medérsiens were involved. See, e.g., Allan Christelow, “The Muslim Judge and Municipal Politics in Colonial Algeria and Senegal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24:1 (January 1982), 3–24, and Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*.

²⁸ The medérsiens, like other elite intermediary figures, were often referred to as “our precious auxiliaries” (*nos auxiliaires précieux*) in colonial documents.

Histories of education in northwest Africa generally focus on one of two themes. The first, common to studies of colonial education, is the ideological meaning of education, such as its relationship to the civilizing mission. The famous *mission civilisatrice*, with its emphasis on spreading French culture to the colonized masses, has attracted the lion's share of attention in studies of colonial education and colonized society more generally.²⁹ The civilizing mission falsely reduced entire societies and cultures to oversimplified essences: the fanatic Muslim, the pliable Kabyle, the savage African.³⁰ In colonial theory, a French education would render these societies uniformly French and republican, assimilating them to European civilization or at least "associating" them with its rule.³¹ Studying the history of colonial education is an avenue for understanding how these ideas came about, the cracks in colonial logic that appeared in implementing them, and the ways in which colonized Africans engaged with and challenged them.³² Because the *médersas* were the sole French institutions where Islamic materials were taught, they offer new ways to understand how colonial ideas about Islam intersected with stereotyped images of different African communities, and how French administrators sought to transform African Muslim communities through a particular form of colonial education.

²⁹ Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Denise Bouche, *L'enseignement dans les territoires français de l'Afrique occidentale de 1817 à 1920 : Mission civilisatrice ou formation d'une élite ?* (Lille: Université Lille III and Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 1976); Kelly Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics: Colonial Schooling and Political Debate in Senegal, 1850s–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015). The "civilizing mission" in North Africa has gained less attention in scholarship but was still present. See, e.g., Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

³⁰ The roots of these ideas have been thoroughly analyzed and deconstructed. See, e.g., William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Anna Pondopoulo, "L'image des Peul dans l'oeuvre du Général Faidherbe," *History in Africa* 23 (1996), 279–299; Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995); Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

³¹ Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); W. Bryant Mumford, *Africans Learn to be French* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1937).

³² See, e.g., Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul*.

The second theme, more common in studies of Islamic education, is the transmission of learning. Prior to the colonial imposition of European forms of education, Islamic education in northwest Africa was primarily oral, emphasizing the memorization of the Qur'an and other key texts. Studies of a wide range of institutions, from a neighborhood *kuttab* (also known as a *maktab* or a *msid*), where children began memorizing the Qur'an at a young age, to the region's great mosque-universities of Qarawiyyin and Zaytuna, in Fes and Tunis, respectively, have focused on the methods of knowledge transmission and the genealogies of that knowledge. The *silsila*, or chain linking students to teachers for generations deep into the past, was a primary source of intellectual capital. Sufi orders and their spiritual centers, the *zawaya* (sing. *zawiya*), were crucial networks and nodes in these practices of Islamic learning. Another preoccupation in this literature is the question of the indigeneity of Islam in Africa, a question that dates back to the colonial period and the earliest European scholarship on African Muslim communities.³³ Because these processes took place outside the realm of the colonial state (despite a great deal of effort on the part of the French administration to extend its control over them), this literature tends to efface the colonial period as a time of Islamic knowledge production or transmission, or at least gloss over the intersections of Islamic learning with colonial bureaucracy and governance.³⁴ The *médersa*'s Islamic curricula, I suggest, demonstrate a degree of continuity in

³³ On this debate, see David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27–59.

³⁴ See, e.g., Scott S. Reese, ed., *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Dale F. Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Corinne Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’: Modes de transmission des savoirs islamiques (Mauritanie),” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 43:169/170 (2003), 235–260; Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*; El Ghassem Ould Ahmedou, *Enseignement traditionnel en Mauritanie : la Mahadra ou l’école “à dos de chameau”* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997); Chouki El Hamel, “The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in Moorish Society from the Rise of the Almoravids to the 19th Century,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29:1 (February 1999), 62–87.

the transmission of Islamic knowledge, although the format changed through its channeling into the colonial institution.

These two historiographies share an embrace of the terms “traditional” and “modern” to delimit pre-colonial and colonial (or African/Islamic and European) educations and educational institutions. Both consider the arrival of European colonization to be a rupture, or at least an inflection point, in the history of education. Adopting the terminology of Michel Foucault, Louis Brenner describes traditional Islamic education in Mali as occurring in an “esoteric episteme,” or a deep way of knowing restricted to a small number of savants. Colonial education introduced a “rationalist episteme” that transformed the meaning of knowledge and access to it through European institutional forms.³⁵ Robert Launay uses material terms to make the same distinction, classifying writing boards (on which young *tolba*, or students, gain Arabic literacy in traditional Islamic schooling) as traditional and blackboards (used in European schools) as modern.³⁶ Launay’s reference to the material tools of learning reveals the importance of methods to determining what is traditional and what is modern. This way of thinking is reminiscent of colonial thought, which decisively distinguished between the “modern methods” of the *médersas* and other European schools and the “medieval teaching” (*enseignement moyen-âgeux*) of Islamic institutions, in northwest Africa and elsewhere. I argue that this bifurcation—between European and Islamic or African, between traditional and modern—has served to obscure the *médersas* in

³⁵ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 6–9. Similar arguments are made in studies of other works on Islamic education in imperial contexts. See, e.g., Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde 1780–1910* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Mustafa Tuna, “Madrasa Reform as a Secularizing Process: A View from the Late Russian Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53:3 (2011), 540–570; David S. Lelyveld, *Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

³⁶ Launay, ed., *Islamic Education*, 3–5.

these historiographies, and allowed historians to dismiss them as irrelevant outliers. Rather, in combining elements of two disparate traditions, the *médersa* was an institution in-between, bridging these practices and structures, which in turn shaped other institutions—African, European, and Islamic—in the region.

In this dissertation I pay particular attention to the institutional practices of the *médersas*. I call these “practices of order.” This phrase is drawn from the large literature on the colonial state and the “governmentality” of Foucault.³⁷ In applying it to an educational institution, I emphasize the role of the colonial administration in the everyday operation of the *médersas*, but also draw attention to the role of African Muslims in contesting and shaping these practices. “Practices of order” is an idea often applied to the overtly coercive state practices of war, policing, or land appropriation.³⁸ Here, though, I focus on two practices that were more subtle: the recruitment of students, and the *médersa*’s Franco-Muslim instruction itself. (Other practices, including student discipline, the regime of examinations, and the channeling of graduates into certain careers would offer a fuller sense of the colonial order produced in the *médersas*.) Educational institutions are intended to train future generations. The *médersa* had a particularly important role in this regard in assuring the continuance of French rule. Debates over the

³⁷ My thinking on this subject and my use of this phrase were directly influenced by my participation in the “Practises of Order: Colonial and Imperial Projects” conference, held at the University of Copenhagen in January 2015. See, e.g., Søren Ivarsson and Søren Rud, “Rethinking the Colonial State: Configurations of Power, Violence, and Agency,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 33 (2017), 1–19; George Steinmetz, “The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914,” *American Sociological Review* 73:4 (August 2008), 589–612; George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). An extension of this literature, based in the Sahel, is Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

³⁸ See, e.g., Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Marie Muschalek, “Violence as Usual: Everyday Police Work and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 33 (2017), 129–150; Jonathan Wyrzten, “Colonial War and the Production of Territorialized State Space in North Africa,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 33 (2017), 151–173; Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

recruitment of students, therefore, involved determining who would best guarantee this future control. Similarly, given the persistent European fear of Islam as a threat to colonial hegemony, the Franco-Muslim curriculum was designed in such a way as to subtly but profoundly transform Islamic thought and practice in northwest Africa, to negate its potential as a mode of resistance.³⁹ Recruitment and teaching were, therefore, still practices of order—albeit with longer timeframes.

Tracking these practices of order over both time and space allows for a fuller understanding of the *médersa*'s development as a “multi-local” institution. Both recruitment and teaching practices changed from place to place, as the original Algerian institution adapted to social conditions in Senegal, French Soudan, and Mauritania. This focus reveals, for instance, the importance of race in the logic of Franco-Muslim schooling. Historians have long analyzed the roots of the false French colonial concept of *islam noir*, or “black Islam,” which held that black Africans practiced a bastardized form of Islam compared to the “pure” Islam of the “white” populations of North Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁰ The *médersa* shows how this idea was institutionalized: administrators used *islam noir* to justify the closure of the *médersas* in Saint-Louis and Djenné, which primarily enrolled black Muslim students. Moreover, a focus on student recruitment reveals that local racial discourses—for example, those of the *bidan* or “white” Moors in southern Mauritania who were reluctant to attend a *médersa* among the “blacks” of Saint-Louis—influenced the progress and development of colonial racism and

³⁹ See, e.g., Rüdiger Seesemann and Benjamin Soares, “‘Being as Good Muslims as Frenchmen’: On Islam and Colonial Modernity in West Africa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009), 91–120; Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Pascal Le Pautremat, *La politique musulmane de la France au XXe siècle : de l'Hexagone aux terres d'islam. Espoirs, réussites, échecs* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Jean-Louis Triaud, “Giving a Name to Islam South of the Sahara: An Adventure in Taxonomy,” *Journal of African History* 55:1 (March 2014), 3–15; Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, especially 163–202. This idea continued into the post-colonial period in French scholarship: see Vincent Monteil, *L'islam noir* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

colonial institutions.⁴¹ With this perspective, even the quickly-shuttered *médersas* had more than a “barely discernible” influence. Situated at the political and ideological crossroads of education, Islam, race, and colonial power, the *médersas* had an impact that radiated far beyond the schools themselves.

Resistance and accommodation are the two dominant responses that scholars attribute to colonized peoples facing imperial rule.⁴² Resistance can take multiple forms, from violent uprisings to more passive actions, such as a refusal to engage with colonial institutions.⁴³ Accommodation to a new colonial order also took many forms, from learning a European language to, in the French colonial case, acceding to French citizenship (becoming *évolué*, or “evolved,” in colonial parlance) by renouncing one’s formal personal status as a Muslim.⁴⁴ Through particular practices of accommodation, France positioned itself as a “Muslim power” in northwest Africa, a label intended to appeal to colonized Muslims, both allies and foes, and to

⁴¹ On indigenous racial discourses in northwest Africa, see Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); on French colonial racial politics in northwest Africa see Pessah Shinar, “A Major Link Between France’s Berber Policy in Morocco and its ‘Policy of Races’ in French West Africa: Commandant Paul Marty (1882–1938),” *Islamic Law and Society* 13:1 (2006), 33–62. For an analysis of “racecraft” in a different West African context, see Jemima Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), esp. 11–36.

⁴² See David Motadel, “Islam and the European Empires,” *The Historical Journal* 55:3 (September 2012), 831–856, for a global overview of resistance and accommodation focused on Muslim communities; see also Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *The American Historical Review* 99:5 (December 1994), 1516–1545.

⁴³ Some representative works on resistance in Africa include: Edmund Burke, III, *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860–1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Popular Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900–1945*, trans. Till Gottheiner (New York: Pica Press, 1971).

⁴⁴ One of the fullest explications of processes of accommodation in Muslim West Africa is David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000); see also the edited volume by David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française v. 1880–1960* (Paris: Karthala, 1997).

imperial rivals.⁴⁵ As David Robinson notes, much of the historiography of accommodation in West Africa is based on biographies of representative individuals, especially the *grands marabouts* (Muslim saints, scholars and leaders) like Sidiyya Baba, Malik Sy, and Amadu Bamba; the same could be said of studies of resistance.⁴⁶

An institutional study is one way to avoid such a focus—whether intended or unintended—on “great men.” To be sure, prominent figures, especially Sidiyya Baba in Boutilimit, played important roles in the histories of the *médersas*. But the *médersa*’s development was a process that involved a wider array of people. To be sure, it was not a fully representative slice of any colonized society, as the permanent exclusion of women and girls made clear. The *medérsiens*, by dint of the elementary education required to enter the *médersas*, were also already a relatively privileged group. However, through a diffuse and informal process of negotiation, the *médersa*’s evolution took both colonial and local imperatives into account. Who consented to enroll in the *médersas* and what subjects they embraced constitute just two issues that changed over time and space. Formalizing those changes entailed a process that I call “domestication.” Through these negotiations, the *médersas* were rendered legible to the institution’s multiple constituencies across northwest Africa. The purpose of the *médersa* was the “domestication” of Muslim populations, as the 1919 report on Timbuktu, cited above, makes explicit. Yet the roles Muslim Africans played in the institution’s development suggest a more complicated process at work. The *médersas* were first designed exclusively by French administrators to meet colonial needs. The ensuing institutional transformations suggest, I argue,

⁴⁵ David Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power in West Africa,” *Africa Today* 46:3/4 (Summer–Autumn 1999), 105–127.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 232; see also David Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics: Abdul Bokar Kan and Futa Toro, 1853–1891* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

that from Algeria to Mauritania and beyond, Muslim populations in fact “domesticated the médersa” through a range of locally-specific actions and negotiations.

Methods and Sources

The médersas were trans-Saharan institutions, and as such, this dissertation contributes to the field of trans-Saharan history. As a cursory examination of the historiography of Africa suggests, the study of northwest Africa remains bifurcated into two fields—North Africa, grouped with the Middle East in one frame, and “sub-Saharan” Africa in another. This pattern reproduces a division with deep epistemic roots, one that divides “black Africa” from “white Africa” and effaces the Sahara as a site of history and Saharans as historical actors.⁴⁷ These racialized geographies are common to French (*Afrique noire*, *Afrique blanche*) and to Arabic (*Bilād al-Sūdān*, or “land of the blacks”). As Ghislaine Lydon demonstrates, the names imposed on these places—Sahara, Bilad al-Sudan, even Africa—are external labels that only gradually came to be accepted by local populations.⁴⁸ Even the idea of Africa as a “black continent,” embraced by Afrocentric scholars like V. Y. Mudimbe as a way to escape Western epistemological constructions, oversimplifies complex histories and erases genealogies of knowledge.⁴⁹

French colonial scholar-administrators had a hand in the construction of this Saharan divide. A particularly important development was the grafting of race and religion—the ideas of *islam noir* and a “pure” and “white” *islam arabe*—and its application to “Muslim policy” across

⁴⁷ For an in-depth genealogy of these ways of thinking, see Ghislaine Lydon, “Saharan Oceans and Bridges, Barriers and Divides in Africa’s Historiographical Landscape,” *Journal of African History* 56:1 (March 2015), 3–22.

⁴⁸ Lydon, “Oceans and Bridges,” 7.

⁴⁹ Lydon, “Oceans and Bridges,” 5; V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

the French empire.⁵⁰ Yet curiously, as Lydon points out, despite the large body of work on the colonial period in both the Maghrib and West Africa, trans-Saharan studies of colonial rule are very rare.⁵¹ Indeed, this dissertation is one of the first to take up this line of investigation.

This dissertation brings a novel method to writing trans-Saharan history. Previous studies have focused on flows of people, goods, and ideas across the desert. This focus on movement is part of a larger historiographical trend examining trans-regional connections, dating back to Fernand Braudel's study of the Mediterranean and often focused on oceans.⁵² The *médersas* were not paths, per se, or nodes in a network: each operated more or less independently, and evolved according to local logics.⁵³ Although some individuals did move between different *médersas*, the institution's history is best understood as both trans-regional and locally specific.⁵⁴ What

⁵⁰ Lydon, "Oceans and Bridges," 8–11; Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam*; Jean-Louis Triaud, "L'islam au sud du Sahara: une saison orientaliste en Afrique occidentale," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 198–199–200 (2010), 907–950; Maati Monjib, "L'islam arabe en Afrique de l'Ouest: une construction altruisante au temps de la colonisation," in Fatima Harrak and Khalid Chegraoui, eds., *Les constructions de l'autre dans les relations interafricaines* (Rabat: Imprimerie El Maârif al-Jadida, 2008), 227–243.

⁵¹ Lydon, "Oceans and Bridges," 8. French- and English-language studies of trans-Saharan history with either pre-colonial or post-colonial focus include, among many others: Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon, eds., *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Arabic Literacy, Manuscript Culture, and Intellectual History in Islamic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); E. Ann McDougall, "Research in Saharan History," *The Journal of African History* 39:3 (1998), 467–480; Laurence Marfaing and Steffen Wippel, eds., *Les relations transsahariennes à l'époque contemporaine : un espace en constante mutation* (Paris: Karthala, 2003); Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Judith Scheele and James McDougall, eds., *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwestern Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, ed., *Bridges Across the Sahara: Social, Economic and Cultural Impact of the Trans-Sahara Trade during the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); and, last but not least, Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵² Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); see also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31:3 (1997), 735–762. In *On Trans-Saharan Trails*, Lydon makes the case for considering the Sahara like a sea.

⁵³ The network model of imperial connection is best articulated by Tony Ballantyne in *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). See also Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

distinguishes this study from other transnational studies is that it takes place solely on the African continent. Even though Paris was the center of French imperial power, metropolitan France had little role in the development of the *médersas*, which was instead guided from Algeria and French West Africa. This was a “multi-local” history, one that must be understood through attention to multiple local contexts. Linked together, they offer a model that can help historians understand other modes of connection within and across the Sahara, and elsewhere.

Just as David Robinson defines the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone as a particularly influential space for the “paths of accommodation” he traces, Franco-Muslim education defined a region.⁵⁵ Northwest Africa—a term that joins together North Africa and West Africa, while encompassing the Sahara often excluded from studies of both areas—was the zone where Franco-Muslim education made sense. Even if no *médersas* opened in Morocco or Tunisia, or if they closed quickly in Senegal and the French Soudan, the idea made sense in certain colonial and Muslim logics. The history of the *médersas*, which ranges from Mediterranean Algeria to the forest zones of Guinea and from the Atlantic coast of Senegal to the arid savannah of Chad, covers a geographic space familiar to scholars of trans-Saharan trade networks, Muslim intellectual history, and medieval African empires.⁵⁶ Yet this geographical scope is unusual in studies of colonial Africa. I argue that studying this space—covering the area of France’s “Muslim policy” and its racial-religious discourses—can help explicate how the Saharan divide arose in European scholarship, and help break that division down.

⁵⁴ Andrew Zimmerman, “Africa in Imperial and Transnational History: Multi-sited historiography and the necessity of theory,” *Journal of African History* 54:3 (2013), 331–340.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 11–13.

⁵⁶ See Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*; Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*; and Michael Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

The *médersas*' archives are, like the institutions themselves, multi-local in nature. For this dissertation I visited thirty-seven archives and libraries in Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, and France, ranging from national archives to private collections. The dispersion of these records reflects the chaotic processes of archiving colonial documentation in northwest Africa. The three Algerian *médersas* exemplify this disarray. The archives of the *Médersa* of Tlemcen are preserved, for the most part, in France. They are held in the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence, the main archive of the whole of the French empire. The *Médersa* of Algiers, on the other hand, has its records preserved *in situ*. They are held in the attic library of the Lycée Amara Rachid, what was once the Lycée Franco-Arabe de Ben Aknoun—the secular high school created at the closure of the Algerian *médersas* in 1951. It was only by chance that I stumbled upon these archives and was granted access to them—they have not been used in any other academic study. As for the *Médersa* of Constantine, I found only spotty, peripheral records in the Archives de la Wilaya de Constantine, the regional administrative archive. It is possible that the bulk of the institution's records are preserved elsewhere; perhaps they were destroyed like so much Algerian documentation, during the liberation war (1954–1962) or during the civil war (1991–2002). In West Africa, many sources from across French West Africa are preserved in Aix-en-Provence or at the Archives Nationales du Sénégal in Dakar. These repositories are not comprehensive, however. In the National Archives of Mauritania, for instance, I found sources unavailable in Senegal or in France. Smaller archives in Mauritania and elsewhere, especially national and regional archives in Mali, hold promise for future research.

Most of the sources produced in the *médersas* and preserved in archives are administrative in nature. Correspondence between colonial officials and reports written by inspectors were produced regularly, and allow for a close tracking of events and institutional

changes. These are dialogic documents, because the processes of their creation entailed conversations between the author and others; clerks were often responsible for the actual recording of these sources.⁵⁷ Through these institutional filters, individual voices and group actions are legible. Other sources including memoirs, oral interviews with *medérsiens* and their descendants, and scholarly publications from the period enable a fuller understanding of the *médersa*'s development, its role in colonized Muslim societies, and its impact on the lives of those studied there.

Chapters and Arguments

Chapter 1 traces the origins and development of the *médersa* in Algeria from its creation in 1850 to the early twentieth century. It contextualizes the *médersas* within a *longue durée* history of Islamic education and institutional change both within the Maghrib and the broader Islamic world. In particular, it links the *médersas* to institutional structures dating from the establishment of an Ottoman presence in Algeria in the early sixteenth century. The period covered in this chapter saw broad political upheaval in France, from the Second Republic to the Second Empire and the Third Republic, and concurrent ideological shifts in colonial rule, from the “Arabophilia” of Napoléon III to the Third Republic’s republican civilizing mission and official secularism. The *médersas* underwent their own transformations during this period and became closely integrated into other institutions on the colonial “landscape of power.” Formalizing Franco-Muslim education made the *médersas* linchpins to “Muslim policy” in Algeria.

⁵⁷ On “dialogic documents” see Ghislaine Lydon, “Writing Trans-Saharan History: Methods, Sources and Interpretations Across the African Divide,” *Journal of North African Studies* 10:3–4 (September–December 2005), 293–324. Other work on the colonial archive includes Alistair G. Tough, “Oral culture, written records and understanding the twentieth-century colonial archive. The significance of understanding from within,” *Archival Science* 12:3 (2012), 245–265.

Chapter 2 situates the Algerian *médersas* within the broader intellectual history of northwest Africa. I argue that the *médersas* occupied an intermediate step in the development of the dichotomies—“writing boards and blackboards,” or “traditional” and “modern”—that characterize the study of Islamic education in Africa. Moreover, the chapter makes the case for incorporating the Maghrib into the well-developed historiography of Islamic learning in West Africa. The chapter focuses on two aspects of the Algerian *médersas*: the curriculum and the teaching staff. An analysis of the Islamic curriculum suggests that Maghribi educational traditions were preserved in the Islamic curriculum through the study of core texts, although the methods of teaching changed. The *médersa* professors, however, also had access to new ways of thinking. They were responsible, for example, for the introduction of Islamic modernist thought from Egypt to Algeria. The example of the 1903 visit to Algeria by Mohammed Abduh, the great Egyptian reformist and mufti, demonstrates this new position occupied by the *médersa* professors. Neither entirely new nor entirely traditional, the *médersa*’s particular position on the “landscape of power” comes into focus through an institutional approach.

Chapter 3 charts the introduction of the *médersa* to West Africa in the early twentieth century. It is in this chapter that the *médersa*’s multi-local nature becomes most clearly visible. Tracing the opening of four *médersas*, in Djenné, Saint-Louis, Timbuktu, and Boutilimit, as well as the debate over a potential *médersa* in Guinea, the chapter demonstrates how French racism combined with the discourses of *islam noir* and *islam maure* to delimit the range of *médersas* in West Africa. The Algerian institutional model quickly faded in the different cultural context of West Africa. The *médersas* of Saint-Louis and Djenné closed, I argue, because the institutionalization of *islam noir* meant that Franco-Muslim education no longer made sense for the purposes of the colonial administration. In contrast, in Boutilimit (and to a lesser extent in

Timbuktu), the presence of “white” Muslims made the *médersa* an attractive option for colonial administrators. By considering these individual cases together, this chapter reveals how a multi-local approach and a focus on practices of order can enrich our understanding of connections and differences in colonial Muslim policy in different regions of French West Africa.

Chapter 4 examines what I call the “Saharan apogee” of the *médersas* in the 1930s and 1940s. Through the work of several Algerian *medérsiens* who served as professors in Mauritania, the *médersa* became the primary mode of colonial education in that Saharan colony. As a particular sort of “proxy,” these Algerian professors used their particular training in the Franco-Muslim “double culture” to render the *médersa* legible to Saharans who were otherwise reticent to engage with colonial institutions.⁵⁸ Again focusing on practices of order, especially student recruitment and curricular evolution, the chapter reveals a particularly Saharan process of domestication that resulted in *médersas* that operated differently from those to the north or the south. As elsewhere, race played an important role in this process. The chapter briefly describes other schools set up on the *médersa* model elsewhere in French West Africa during the interwar period, demonstrating the malleability and ongoing relevance of Franco-Muslim education across the region.

Chapter 5 describes the end of the *médersas* at the close of the colonial period. Amid the upheaval of decolonization, the *médersas* underwent a range of transformations. Four case studies capture the breadth of this range. First, in Algeria, the three original *médersas* were transformed into secular high schools in 1951, one hundred and one years after their creation. The *medérsiens* and their “double culture” took on a particular symbolic importance during the liberation war and after independence. In Mauritania, the *Médersa* of Boutilimit underwent a

⁵⁸ See Moses Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), for an example of military “proxies” in West Africa.

different transformation in the 1950s, into a nominally independent Islamic Institute meant to entice West African students to remain in the sphere of French influence rather than traveling to study in Egypt. This example shows how certain practices and policies remained in effect even as political conditions changed dramatically. The final two examples demonstrate the impact of the *médersa* model even in new places. In Chad, a Franco-Muslim school opened in the Wadai region in 1952—the year after the Algerian *médersas* had closed—and underwent a rapid sort of domestication according to local logics that led administrators to propose opening yet more *médersas* in nearby regions including northern Cameroon. Finally, at the remarkably late date of 1955, French colonial thinkers proposed opening a “Muslim university” on metropolitan French soil, to be affiliated with the Sorbonne and to rival al-Azhar, the eminent Islamic university, in Cairo, as a site of advanced Islamic learning. Conceived on the *médersa* model, this proposed institution never opened but nevertheless demonstrates a remarkable degree of continuity in French Muslim policy. As the colonial order crumbled, the *médersa* remained a seemingly viable option to many.

The dissertation concludes with a brief meditation on the *medérsiens* and on the *médersa* model in the era of African independence. Muslim societies across northwest Africa underwent dramatic changes in the 1960s and after, and it is difficult to generalize the roles of the *medérsiens* in these shifts. Nevertheless, many *medérsiens* became prominent in politics, culture, and public life. As a group, their legacy has been occluded by time and political upheaval. Nevertheless, the common thread of a *médersa* education unites them and complicates the institution’s legacy. Another important factor is the persistence of Franco-Muslim education across northwest Africa today. The *médersa* was originally intended as a tool in colonial

“Muslim policy.” The continuity of its institutional model in northwest African Muslim societies is evidence, I argue, of the ongoing process of domesticating the *médersa*.

Chapter 1: Institutional Origins and Evolution in Algeria, 1850s–1910s

On 30 September 1850, the President of France, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, created three new schools, called *médersas*, in the Algerian cities of Médéa, Tlemcen, and Constantine. Funded by the Ministry of War, these schools were intended for the training of Algerian Muslims as candidates for positions in the administrative divisions of Religious Affairs, Justice, and Public Instruction, as well as the surveillance offices called the Arab Bureaux.¹ Less than two years later, the French government would be overthrown—by Napoléon himself, who took the title of emperor, became Napoléon III, and transformed the Second Republic the Second Empire. Twenty years later, in 1870, he would be thrown out of office at the establishment of the Third Republic. Within Algeria, the ongoing French military conquest, dating from 1830, and ensuing Algerian resistance movements would result in enormous loss of life and social upheaval. Although they would be the subject of enduring and sometimes fierce controversy, the *médersas* remained in operation from 1850 until 1951. Over the course of that century, the *médersas* evolved into prominent features on the landscape of power in colonial Algeria and elsewhere. This chapter explores how this situation came to be.

Even at their creation, the *médersas* fit into a long history. Their name is a French transliteration of the Arabic term *madrāsa*, meaning “place of study.” Madrasas had a centuries-old history in North Africa and elsewhere in the Islamic world. By creating new *médersas* in three Algerian cities, the French colonial administration sought to harness the longstanding intellectual traditions of the Maghrib and use them to rule over colonized Muslim communities.

¹ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1, Presidential Decree of 30 September 1850. Translated in Osama W. Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 250–252.

This idea was contested both by Algerian Muslims and by European colonizers. Situated at the intersection of colonizing and colonized cultures, between French colonial ideologies and Algerian Islamic traditions, the *médersas* were controversial institutions. Yet they were also adaptable: over the course of the six decades covered in this chapter, the *médersas* underwent several reforms. This flexibility meant that the *médersas* remained acceptable to a range of figures, both French and Algerian, while maintaining its core purpose of training intermediary figures. Many of the complex forces at work in nineteenth and early twentieth century Algeria acted on the *médersas*. The institution's evolution during this period thus mirrors broader patterns in the development of colonial Algeria and the French empire. In particular, the *médersa*'s early history suggests how the colonial administration was able to insinuate itself into Islamic institutions and how, in response, Algerian Muslims acted to shape colonial rule.

The Lay of the Land: Institutional and Cultural Context

The *médersas* were not created out of thin air. The French administration had only a spotty understanding of Maghribi history, but nevertheless the *médersas* fit into histories of Islamic education and regional power structures with deep roots. Outside the new colonial context, before the French conquest of 1830, lines of authority intersected in educational institutions and in the cities that would host the *médersas*. While they were new institutions in their particular organizational details, the *médersas* had predecessors and precedents in the history of what had become French Algeria, in the broader Maghrib and in the Islamic world.

The modern-day borders of Algeria are colonial constructions. Before the French conquest, however, the same area along the Mediterranean coast had begun to emerge as a distinct region within northwest Africa. The coast is a fertile zone like the rest of the

Mediterranean region, and had been settled by indigenous Amazigh (or Berber) groups descended from Neolithic populations. Before the Common Era, kingdoms like Carthage emerged out of contact with Phoenician traders from the eastern Mediterranean; the kingdom of Numidia (c. 200 BCE–c. 50 BCE) ruled over much of what would become Mediterranean Algeria. The Roman Empire came to dominate much of the Mediterranean coast of North Africa in the early Common Era, and under Roman rule many Berber groups, especially in settled areas, converted to Christianity. This region was agriculturally productive and became known as the “breadbasket of Rome.” Roman ruins dot the Maghribi landscape, testifying to the geographical and political extent of Roman rule in this period. The importance of North Africa to the Roman Empire would later be used as evidence justifying French colonial rule as well.²

Several Amazigh dynasties emerged across North Africa in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire. From the late seventh century, many of these dynasties succumbed to waves of Arab invasions from the east. The Arabs—in particular, the Banu Hilal tribe—introduced both Sunni Islam and the Arabic language to the region. The Maghrib was thus incorporated into the Umayyad caliphate by the early eighth century. For the next several centuries, parcels of the region were under the control of either empires based in the Middle East (including the Abbasids and the Fatimids) or local Berber dynasties (such as the Zirids). For most of the region, the Maliki *madhhab* was the dominant Islamic legal code.³ In the Mزاب, a cluster of oases in the northern Sahara, Ibadi practice predominated; throughout Algeria, Jewish communities that predated the arrival of Islam continued to live alongside Muslim populations.

² Diana K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

³ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A history of the Maghrib in the Islamic period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 162–163.

In the early eleventh century, the Almoravid dynasty, a confederation of Amazigh groups, spread from their base in southern Morocco to govern a territory encompassing much of northwest Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, from the Senegal River in the south to Lisbon in the north. Algiers, at that point a small port town, marked the easternmost edge of their influence. In 1147, the Almoravid capital of Marrakesh was conquered by a new Amazigh coalition known as the Almohads. Their rule in North Africa stretched to Constantine and Tunis, but their influence in the Sahara was somewhat less than their predecessors. It was during the Almohad period that al-Andalus reached its pinnacle, the period remembered today as a halcyon time of coexistence for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. In the thirteenth century, the Almohad dynasty collapsed and a range of smaller Berber dynasties divided the region. Among these were the Zayyanid kingdom, based in Tlemcen, and the Hafsid dynasty, with Tunis as its capital.⁴ Madrasas grew in both cities under these rulers. Algiers sat roughly on the dividing line between these two states, but it was not a particularly important site at the time.

In the early sixteenth century, much of the Maghrib came under the control of the Ottoman Empire to at least some extent. Many areas, like the Kingdom of Tlemcen, pledged fealty to the Ottoman sultan in return for protection from other foreign forces, especially Spaniards engaged in the so-called Reconquista, or expulsion of Muslims from Iberia. The Regency of Algiers emerged in this period as a force in the western Mediterranean under the rule of Khayreddin, also known as Barbarossa, an Ottoman naval officer who successfully defended the city from Spanish forces. (The Spanish held several other coastal cities, such as Oran, into the early seventeenth century.) The intensity of Ottoman rule varied in North Africa, with certain areas operating more or less independently during extended periods. This was especially true

⁴ For Tlemcen in this period, see Djilali Sari, *Tlemcen la Zyanide* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2011); for a broad overview see Abun-Nasr, *History of the Maghrib*, 76–143.

around Algeria after a 1671 coup that ousted the Ottoman agha appointed from Constantinople. The Barbary States, which engaged the nascent United States in wars over Mediterranean piracy in the early nineteenth century, were one example of this loose Ottoman control.

Nonetheless, the Ottoman beys (governors) ruled over three beyliks in what is today Algeria. These three were the Bey of the East, who ruled over eastern Algeria from the capital in Constantine; the Bey of the West, who governed western Algeria from the successive capitals of Mazouza, Mascara, and Oran; and the Bey of Titteri, who oversaw central Algeria from Médéa. The Dey of Algiers, supervised the three beys, communicated with the Ottoman sultans, and ruled directly over the region surrounding the city. Through Ottoman rule, a community with origins in the eastern Mediterranean—Turks, Albanians, and others—settled in Algeria and became known as *kouloughlis*. Ottoman rule marked the emergence of a singular Algeria recognizable today.⁵ It was a diverse society, with flexible social, cultural, linguistic, racial, religious, political, and economic categories.

Three cities central to this study—Algiers, Constantine, and Tlemcen—were firmly established cultural centers by the Ottoman period.⁶ All had ancient roots, with settlements dating back to the Roman period if not before. All fit the model, created by European Orientalist scholars during the colonial period, of the “Islamic city” defined by a walled medina and

⁵ Several works discuss this period. See James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 9–48; Mahfoud Kaddache, *L’Algérie durant la période ottomane* (Algiers: Office des publications universitaires, 1991); Lucette Valensi, *On the Eve of Colonialism: North Africa Before the French Conquest*, trans. Kenneth J. Perkins (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977); Abun-Nasr, *A history of the Maghrib*; and Tal Shuval, *La ville d’Alger vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle: Population et cadre urbain* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2002).

⁶ Studies of Algiers include: Shuval, *La ville d’Alger* and Nacereddine Saidouni, *L’Algérois rural à la fin de l’époque ottomane (1791–1830)* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 2001). Studies of Constantine include: Eugène Vayssettes, *Histoire de Constantine sous la domination turque de 1517–1837, présentation de Ouarda Siari-Tengour* (Paris and Aubervilliers, Éditions Bouchène, 2002) and Muhammad al-Salih ‘ibn al-Antari, *Tarikh Qusantinah* (Algiers: Diwan al-Matbu’at al-Jami’iyah, 1991). Studies of Tlemcen are less common.

specialized markets.⁷ By the early nineteenth century, they were the three largest cities in Algeria: Algiers had fifty thousand inhabitants, Constantine twenty-five thousand, and Tlemcen twenty thousand.⁸ These were, thus, relatively small urban centers at that time, even compared to larger cities in North Africa like Fes, Tunis, and Cairo. The vast majority of the Algerian population was rural and lived off the land. This social environment played a major role in the development of educational institutions and the practice of Islam up to the early nineteenth century.

Education, and educational institutions, had been central components of Islamic life since the medieval period. As in other parts of the world, a wide range of institutions and traditions existed to transmit forms of Islamic knowledge in North Africa. In terms of higher education, Muslim societies were among the first to develop specialized institutions. Chief among these were the madrasas of Baghdad, which date back to the eleventh century and grew out of *nizamiyya* institutions from Iran. These institutions had important influences on the evolution of early European universities in the following centuries.⁹ Similar institutions in North Africa date back even further: the Qarawiyyin of Fes was created in the ninth century; al-Azhar in Cairo dates from the late tenth century; the Zaytuna of Tunis was founded in the seventh century but began to thrive as a center of learning under Hafsid rule in the thirteenth century. These three institutions became poles around which Maghribi intellectual life revolved from the medieval era

⁷ This model has been decisively critiqued: see Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987), 155–176, and Andre Raymond, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1994), 3–18. Some of this idea's architects, identified by Abu-Lughod and including Georges, William, and Phillippe Marçais, were professors in the Algerian *médersas*.

⁸ McDougall, *History of Algeria*, 25.

⁹ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

to the modern period. Their institutional practices spread and standardized across the region. The granting of a diploma (Ar. *ijaza*) is one example of a standardized practice across a range of educational institutions. The funding of such schools through private charitable foundations (Ar. *waqf*, or in North Africa, *habus*) is another.

Algiers, Constantine, and Tlemcen—among other towns in what became Algeria—developed similar educational institutions. Some of these, in Tlemcen in particular, achieved particular renown. Bejaia, a coastal city in Kabylia, also became known as a center of learning. For a variety of political, economic, and social reasons, however, none of the institutions of Algeria became as large or important as those in Morocco, Tunisia, or Egypt.¹⁰

In part this development was due to the presence of another educational institution across Algeria: the *zawiya*. Zawiyas (the Arabic plural is *zwaya*), sometimes described as Sufi shrines or lodges, were usually small-scale religious centers located in both rural and urban areas. These centers often offered elementary education, which included memorizing the Qur’ān and learning the Arabic script. Learning in a given *zawiya* was rooted in a particular Sufi tradition or would follow the teachings of a particular saint. Advanced studies in Islamic law or theology could lead a student to the title of *muqaddim*, one who could grant *ijazas* to others. Though *zawiyas* operated across the Islamic world, in northwest Africa there was a particular concentration in Kabylia.¹¹ The extent of this *zawiya*-based education led to widespread literacy across social classes; some have speculated that by the French conquest in 1830, the Algerian literacy rate in Arabic was higher than the French literacy rate in French.¹² In any case, *zawiya* schooling

¹⁰ Chems Eddine Chitour, *L’Education et la Culture de l’Algérie. Des origines à nos jours* (Algiers: ENAG Éditions, 1999). 51–80.

¹¹ Chitour, *L’Education*, 100–102.

occurred outside the realm of the state; so too, though to a lesser extent, did the education in the mosque-universities of the urban centers.

In the Ottoman period, state control began to encroach on certain higher educational and religious institutions. Ottoman sultans and other high-ranking officials created new schools (Tur. *medrese*) as the empire expanded; so too were existing institutions (such as Qarawiyyin, Zaytuna, and al-Azhar) incorporated into imperial bureaucracies. These institutions were less notable for their imperial origins than for the presence of a standardized curriculum: to accede to a civil service career, including posts of qadi, mufti, and teacher (Tur. *müderris*), students had to follow a course of study “rigorously defined and controlled by the State.”¹³ In the Maghrib, a conflict arose between the longstanding adherence to the Maliki *madhhab* or legal school and the Ottoman use of the Hanafi *madhhab*. A legal pluralist regime emerged, with two sets of muftis and courts to accommodate both practices.¹⁴ The Ottoman period saw the construction of many of Algeria’s largest religious edifices, such as the Ketchaoua mosque of Algiers and the Salah Bey mosque of Constantine, which in turn extended the reach of education and the Ottoman state, especially in the major urban areas.¹⁵ The institutional architecture linking Islamic education to the state and to civil service began during the Ottoman period. However, Ottoman educational reforms and modernization began only in the Tanzimat era (1839–1876), by which

¹² John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 103.

¹³ Gilles Veinstein, “Le modèle ottoman,” in Nicole Grandin and Marc Gaborieau, eds., *Madrasa : La Transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman* (Paris: Éditions Arguments, 1997), 75.

¹⁴ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 346 (note 59).

¹⁵ Chitour, *L’Education*, 113–119; Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

point Algeria had come under French control. As such, the direct Ottoman institutional footprint was lighter in Algeria in the early nineteenth century than in other parts of the Ottoman realm.¹⁶

The French conquest of Algeria began without a clear end goal in mind, but would have an immediate impact on Algerian politics and society. The famous “fly-whisk incident” of 1827 (in which the Ottoman ruler of the Regency of Algiers, Hussein Dey, swatted a French consul) prompted a long blockade of the city’s port and culminated in the 1830 conquest of Algiers. The 1830 conquest was more an effort by Charles X of France to shore up domestic support than part of any coherent foreign policy; only three weeks later he was overthrown in the July Revolution. French control of the territory progressed piecemeal: the bey of Constantine engaged in open resistance, while the beys of the west and of Titteri abdicated their posts quickly. Constantine would only be conquered in 1837, after two prolonged sieges. From 1834 to 1847, the emir Abd al-Qadir ruled a fledgling rival state, centered in inland western Algeria. Through both military action and diplomacy, with allies that at times included the Moroccan sultan and the influential Tijaniyya Sufi order, he sought to contain the French presence in Algeria. His defeat and exile, to Damascus, made him an international celebrity in the mid-nineteenth century; it also sparked a range of resistance efforts by other Algerians. Prominent French figures from an array of political positions, including the conservative General Bugeaud (who led the campaigns against Abd al-Qadir) and the more liberal Alexis de Tocqueville, agreed that France had an obligation to pursue the conquest of Algeria to the greatest possible extent. What precisely that meant, however, remained unclear.¹⁷

¹⁶ On education and modernization in the Ottoman Empire, see Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Joseph S. Szyliowicz, “The Ottoman Educational Legacy: Myth or Reality,” in L. Carl Brown, ed., *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 284–299.

¹⁷ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 49–80.

In 1848, another French revolution resulted in the creation of the Second Republic under Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. This change, and Louis-Napoléon's subsequent establishment of the Second Empire in December 1851, were major moments in the political history of modern France. In Algeria, however, these changes did not change the course of events to a significant degree. Military action continued apace until the 1857 conquest of Kabylia, which marked a denouement in the era of the "total conquest," although violent repression would continue in Mediterranean Algeria for decades to come, and the extension of French control in the Sahara continued into the 1860s.¹⁸ Much of this violence was subsumed into the idea of a "pacification" or "peaceful penetration" of the countryside, but there was nothing peaceful about it.

The 1850 Decree and the Early Years of the Médersas

Educational efforts by the French began early, well before the "pacification" progressed out of the immediate coastal zone. The first colonial educational institutions were created because of the urgent need for interpreters to accompany the military in the conquest. As early as 1835, a Franco-Arab school (*école franco-arabe*) was opened in Algiers, catered to the "young Moors" of the city, to teach the rudiments of spoken and written French. The two teachers, M. Jarre and Hadj Mohamed Kodja, were chosen by the Inspector of Public Instruction and by the mufti of Algiers, respectively.¹⁹ Even at this early date, hyphenated bi-cultural education was by necessity a cooperative effort involving a process of accommodation on the part of both French and Algerians. However, that the French military steward (*intendant militaire*) and Director of Fortifications jointly decided to situate the Franco-Arab school in "a small mosque...no longer

¹⁸ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 73–85 and 89–100; Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (1), Secrétaire du Gouvernement to Gouverneur-Général, 17 May 1835.

necessary to the military administration,” at number 7, rue de la Lyre, a prominent street in the lower casbah, suggests where decision-making power ultimately rested.²⁰

Other efforts followed in the next few years, in Algiers and beyond. A *collège arabe* opened in Paris in 1839. Also designed to train Arabic interpreters, this school only operated until 1847.²¹ It presaged a model of student recruitment that would reappear later in French West Africa and elsewhere: its targeted students were *otages*, “hostages,” the sons of prominent Algerian families who opposed the French and who would be kept under close surveillance while in Paris. In 1843, military and civilian administrators debated, without an ensuing change to policy, the prospect of introducing French instruction in the indigenous schools that operated in the three major mosques of Algiers.²² A few months later, the Director of the Interior (a civilian subordinate to the Maréchal who led the military in Algeria) noted that the mufti of Algiers, along with several of his colleagues, had fled to Alexandria and as a result the teaching of theology, literature, and jurisprudence had all declined significantly in the city. The *tolba*, or students, at the mosques sought to continue their studies. The Director saw an opportunity to extend French influence by hiring friendly professors, namely Mohammed Ould Ammi Amar, Ahmed ben Fazaz, and Hmidou ben Mohammed el-Ammali, to offer the desired instruction.²³ In 1849, French administrators wondered whether it was more desirable to teach French to Algerians or Arabic to Frenchmen, and whether it was more important to focus their efforts on

²⁰ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (1), Secrétaire du Gouvernement to Gouverneur-Général, 17 May 1835.

²¹ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (2), Ministre Secrétaire d'état de la guerre, Rapport au Roi, 11 May 1839; ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (11), Ministre Secrétaire d'état de la guerre to Maréchal, 22 May 1839. See also Yvonne Turin, *Affrontements culturels dans l'Algérie coloniale : écoles, médecines, religion, 1830–1880* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1971), 62–70.

²² ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (11), Secrétaire Général to Gouverneur-Général, 20 March 1843.

²³ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (11), Directeur de l'Intérieur to Maréchal, 7 September 1843.

the local Maghribi dialect or the more formal literary Arabic of the Qur'an.²⁴ These questions about the content of educational programs and the desirability of certain loyal instructors would persist throughout the French occupation and colonization of Algeria. They also addressed only a tiny proportion of the indigenous population: most Algerians vehemently resisted any foreign encroachment on educational practices and institutions, especially in this early period.²⁵

Despite resistance from the Algerian populace and the ongoing military conquest, the French administration pressed ahead with the organization of an educational system. In November 1847, an official system of public instruction was created, ranging from primary school to higher education.²⁶ This bureaucracy, from its very inception, delimited what was and was not accessible for Algerians and began a process of institutionalized division that would only grow more intricate and intractable over time. These developments came in tandem with decisions that made a wider impact on Algerian society and the course of colonization. In March 1848, just after the revolution that brought Louis-Napoléon to power and created the Second Republic, Algeria was declared an “integral part of France,” as much a part of the national territory as the metropolitan provinces. Later that year, the three *départements* of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine were formally organized on the model of metropolitan French regions. This civic organization extended to the municipal level, as *communes de plein exercice*, European-majority towns with mayors and councils, abutted *communes mixtes*, mixed communities with

²⁴ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (11), Ministre de l'Instruction publique et des cultes to Ministre, 11 June 1849.

²⁵ Turin, *Affrontements culturels*, 116–141.

²⁶ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1 (11), Maréchal, Note au sujet de l'organisation de l'instruction publique chez les indigènes, 24 November 1847.

more limited government, and *douars*, indigenous towns lacking any significant level of representation.²⁷

Constructing the institutional architecture in early French Algeria entailed connecting Algerian governance to metropolitan French institutions. This was the case for the Ministry of Public Instruction, introduced to Algeria in 1847 and, in different guises, dating back to the pre-Revolutionary period in France. And yet the landscape of power was designed to be uneven: in 1848, an official order (*arrêté*) placed Muslim education under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War, while education for Algerian Jews and Europeans remained under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Instruction.²⁸ This distinction mirrored the simultaneous, if slower-paced, development of separate legal regimes for French citizens and imperial subjects in Algeria (later imported to other colonized territories). Three legal codes in particular established this legal separation: the 1863 Sénatus-Consulte imposing French law on landholding and property ownership; the 1865 Sénatus-Consulte delineating different forms of personal status (making Muslim Algerians French nationals but not French citizens); and the vague but pervasive regime of the *indigénat*, which established different legal consequences for those classified as *indigènes*.²⁹ Algerian Jews were figures in between, whose experiences—classified differently in a range of regimes, made French citizens by the 1870 Crémieux Decree—illustrate the

²⁷ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 103–104.

²⁸ ANOM ALG GGA 1S/1, Arrêté portant sur l'organisation de l'instruction publique en Algérie, July 1848.

²⁹ McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 118–128; Louis-Augustin Barrière, *Le statut personnel des musulmans d'Algérie de 1834 à 1962* (Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon and Centre Georges Chevrier pour l'histoire du droit, 1993); Michael Brett, "Legislating for Inequality in Algeria: The Senatus-Consulte of 14 July 1865," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51:3 (1988), 440–461.

complexity and mutability of these categories, but also their real impact on the lives of Algerians—Jews, Muslims, and European settlers alike.³⁰

In the 1850s, several Franco-Arab primary schools for boys opened in the major cities of coastal Algeria, including Algiers, Constantine, Bône (Annaba), Blida, and Mostaganem. These were termed both *écoles franco-arabes* and *écoles arabes françaises*, without major distinctions in the curricula they offered.³¹ These schools were designed to initiate Muslim children into the French cultural and educational realm, building slowly and subtly to replacing the indigenous school system at some undetermined future date.³² These schools required students to attend classes in Arabic and French; only indigenous children were admitted as students. Similar schools for girls were opened in Algiers, Constantine, Oran, and Bône.³³ Boys could advance to secondary-level *collèges arabes français* in these towns, but girls were not allowed to progress to that level.³⁴ If girls sought further education, it was to be professional training as seamstresses or, more occasionally, as teachers.³⁵ These schools enrolled a minuscule percentage of Algerian children. Courses for adults were also set up in Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, with plans to expand the system as demand grew.³⁶ Supplementing these populations was a small number of children who were educated in missionary schools such as those run by the White Fathers, also

³⁰ Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010); on the Jews of southern Algeria, whose experience was yet more liminal, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

³¹ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/2, Rapport du Recteur au Gouverneur-Général, July 1861. See also ANOM F80/1572, Presidential Decree of 14 July 1850, in Abi Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 244–249.

³² Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 127–133.

³³ ANOM F80/1572, Presidential Decree of 14 July 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 244–249.

³⁴ ANOM ALG GGA 23S/1, Plan d'études au collège impérial arabe français d'Alger, 24 November 1855.

³⁵ Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman's Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Turin, *Affrontements*, 268–276.

³⁶ ANOM F80/1572, Presidential Decree of 14 July 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 244–249.

known as the Missionaries of Africa (*Pères blancs*, or the *Missionnaires d’Afrique*), an order founded in Algiers in 1868 to evangelize North Africans (and later West and Central Africans as well: their presence is still particularly well-established in the Great Lakes region).³⁷ These missionary schools were more widespread in that they reached into smaller towns, but they also failed to make much of an impact on the whole of the Algerian school-age population.

An even smaller number of students reached the level of higher education (*enseignement supérieur*). During the period of the Second Empire, only a single school was opened across the whole of the territory: the *école normale*, or teacher training school, opened in Bouzareah, on the outskirts of Algiers, in 1865.³⁸ It trained both European settlers and Algerian Muslims to teach in primary schools across Algeria. In 1879, several specialized institutes—of medicine, pharmacy, natural sciences, letters, and law—were created to cater to the growing settler population. In 1909, these would be combined into the University of Algiers.³⁹ The vast majority of students at the university were Europeans.

In 1850, then, the three *médersas* were the sole colonial institutions of higher education in French Algeria, located in Tlemcen, Constantine, and Médéa. Notably, they were designated exclusively for the education of young Muslim men. In their original organization, the *médersas* were not hyphenated Franco-Muslim or Franco-Arab institutions; rather, they offered purely Islamic instruction. Three courses were to be offered in each *médersa*, on the subjects of Arabic grammar (*nahw*) and literature, Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Islamic theology (*tawhid*). A director, two additional professors, and a manual laborer (*wakkaf*) were hired in each

³⁷ For a sympathetic insider’s history of the order, see Francis Nolan, *The White Fathers in Colonial Africa (1919–1939)* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa), 2012.

³⁸ Colonna, *Instituteurs*.

³⁹ Chitour, *L’Education*, 237–239.

médersa, each appointment subject to approval from the Governor-General of Algeria and the Minister of War. Their salaries were to be paid by the Ministry of War.⁴⁰

The médersas were also explicitly linked to other branches of the colonial administration. Their purpose, according to Article 3 of their foundational decree, was the formation of “candidates for positions in the administration of indigenous Religious Affairs, Justice, Public Instruction, and the Arab Bureaux.”⁴¹ These four offices were central to the budding colonial administration; their practices of order would define colonized Muslim life for the next century. It would be inaccurate to state that this arrangement was preordained or planned by Louis-Napoléon and his advisors in 1850. Rather, the médersas proved remarkably mutable institutions, adaptable to the range of political and social conditions in Algeria over the course of the colonial period. Simultaneously, however, the médersas maintained that original, central goal of training Muslims to work in the administration of Muslim Affairs. This mission persisted even during the transition from military to civilian rule, which occurred in 1870 when the Second Empire gave way to the Third Republic.

One of the earliest indications of the médersa’s flexibility was related to geographical location. The three cities initially chosen for the médersas—Tlemcen in the west, Constantine in the east, and Médéa in the center—were all deeply important to intellectual life and political power in the Maghrib prior to the French conquest. Tlemcen, with its great mosque dating to the Almoravid era and a tradition of Islamic learning stretching back at least that long, was the intellectual center of the region between Tunis and Fes, and one of the preeminent scholarly capitals of the Maghrib. Constantine, capital of the eastern beylik in the Ottoman period, was the

⁴⁰ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1, Presidential Decree of 30 September 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 250–252.

⁴¹ ANOM ALG GGA 22S/1, Presidential Decree of 30 September 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 250–252..

main scholarly and economic center between Algiers and Tunis. Médéa had been capital of the beylik of Titteri although its population was very modest in size.⁴² Whereas the médersas remained in Tlemcen and Constantine for the full period of their operation, until the 1950s, the médersa in Médéa moved twice in quick succession after its founding. In 1855 it moved to Blida, a town to the north, in tandem with a move by the French military division of the region, to assure continued oversight of the school.⁴³ In 1859 it moved again, once more following the military division, to Algiers—where it would remain until its closure ninety-two years later. This trajectory from Médéa to Algiers reflected the growing importance of Algiers as an administrative center for the French, the port city from which the Governor-General and military commanders oversaw the ongoing conquest and extension of French power.



Figure 1.1. The three Algerian médersas, 1859–1951.

⁴² Turin suggests that Médéa was initially chosen as a site for the médersa because it was a small town, free of the political challenges posed in larger cities. *Affrontements*, 252.

⁴³ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1 (V), Directeur des Affaires de l'Algérie, Proposition pour faire transférer à Blidah la Médressa de Médéah, 17 January 1855. This move is also recounted in Emile Combes, *Rapport sur l'enseignement supérieur musulman (Les Médersas)* (Paris: P. Mouillot, Imprimeur du Sénat, 1894), 9 and 19–23.

The decree creating the médersas stipulated that the schools would be attached to major mosques in each of the three cities. This move, according to colonial logic, would ensure some continuity, or even a revival, in Islamic teachings in these spaces. It also assured a creeping colonial influence into sacred spaces, one that met with at times stiff resistance from Muslim leaders. The Médersa of Constantine, for example, was installed in the Salah Bey mosque, an important site in the city dating from 1791. In February 1851—five months after the médersa’s creation and fourteen years after the city’s fall to the French army—the French began works to “ameliorate” the mosque which had, in the minds of the officers in charge of the city, fallen into disrepair.⁴⁴ This process would continue for at least twenty-three more years, until the summer of 1874.⁴⁵ In Tlemcen, the médersa was first installed in the region’s most famous mosque, dedicated to the Sufi saint Sidi Boumediene, in the hills overlooking Tlemcen. Following the 1853 murder of one student by another (attributed to an inter-tribal conflict), the médersa was moved to the mosque of Sidi Brahem in the city center to allow for greater security and oversight.⁴⁶ This building was one of the lucky ones to escape the large-scale destruction of Tlemcen’s historic buildings by the French. The city’s oldest *madrasa* was one such loss.⁴⁷ After its transfer to Algiers in 1859, the médersa was installed in a mosque on the place Duquesne, in the city’s Marine Quarter—a neighborhood that the French would bulldoze in a modernizing

⁴⁴ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1 (VI), État estimatif des dépenses à faire pour ameliorer la Medersa de la Mosquée Salah Bey, 1 February 1851. See also Combes, *Rapport*, 23–27.

⁴⁵ ANOM ALG GGA 2N/72, Préfet de Constantine to Gouverneur-Général, 30 July 1874.

⁴⁶ Combes recounts these events briefly in his *Rapport*, 18–19, note 2. See also Turin, *Affrontements*, 247. I found no reference to the Sidi Brahem site outside of Turin and Turin provides no citations for this information. Abi-Mershed (*Apostles of Modernity*, 144) places the Constantine médersa in the Sidi el-Kittani mosque and the Tlemcen médersa in the city’s Great Mosque.

⁴⁷ André Lecocq, *Histoire de Tlemcen, ville française: L’administration militaire 1842–1852* (Algiers: ENAG Éditions, 2011); Djilali Sari, *Tlemcen face à l’occupation coloniale* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2011), 47–61.

fervor of the 1930s.⁴⁸ (I have found no record of the sites of the médersas in Médéa and Blida.) The médersas insinuated French presence into social realms—education and religion in particular—that had particular importance to the local population. In a very physical way, they also entered and transformed sacred spaces through their presence.⁴⁹

At their creation, the médersas juxtaposed, or conjoined, two competing strands in French imperial strategy. The first was a utopian socialism and “Arabophilia,” most frequently attributed to the Saint-Simonian movement. The second and more enduring strand was the imperative to control, or “domesticate,” Islamic practice. The two worked in tandem in this early period of the médersa’s history and shaped the institution’s initial development.

Historians characterize the rule of Louis-Napoléon (known as Napoléon III after his coup and coronation at the dawn of the Second Empire in 1852) as a period of “Arabophilia” with regards to French policy in Algeria.⁵⁰ More specifically, Napoléon and his advisors—primarily those who adhered to the Saint-Simonian doctrine—envisioned Algeria as an “Arab Kingdom” (Fr. *royaume arabe*), where French and Algerians alike would work to improve the territory. Saint-Simonianism was a complex philosophical movement, founded by a count, Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), linking industrial economics, social theory, and Christian mysticism. A

⁴⁸ Henri Klein, “Etablissements Universitaires,” in *Feuillets d’El-Djezaïr* (Algiers: L. Chaix, 1937), 144. On the Marine Quarter’s history, see Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 49–57.

⁴⁹ This argument has been made more frequently for later periods in colonial history. See James McDougall, “The Secular State’s Islamic Empire: Muslim Spaces and Subjects of Jurisdiction in Paris and Algiers, 1905–1957,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:3 (July 2010), 553–580; on the relationship between colonial rule and urban spaces see Çelik, *Urban Forms*; Zeynep Çelik, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Terpak, eds., *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); and for other French colonial contexts, Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁵⁰ The main studies of this period in Algeria are Annie Rey-Goldziguier, *Le Royaume Arabe : la politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1861–1870* (Algiers: Société Nationale d’Édition et de Diffusion, 1977) and Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*.

central goal of this movement was the replacement of the medieval Catholic European social order with a new society transformed through science and technology. Saint-Simonianism attracted a wide range of prominent French thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century, including Auguste Comte, who first articulated the ideas of positivism and the philosophy of science, and many students of the *École Polytechnique*, one of France's elite schools. Prosper Enfantin, one of Saint-Simon's closest followers, linked the core idea of fostering a new industrial society to colonialism, first as a prominent proponent of the Suez Canal and later as an advocate for the new Algerian colony.⁵¹

The most important Saint-Simonian influence on Algeria was the curious figure of Ismael (sometimes spelled Ismaïl) Urbain (1812–1884), one of Napoléon III's most trusted advisors. Urbain was born in Cayenne, in the South American territory of French Guiana, to a French merchant from Marseille and a local free woman of West African descent. Following his father to France, in his twenties Urbain became interested in Saint-Simonianism. He traveled to Egypt, where he learned Arabic and eventually converted to Islam (abandoning his birth name, Thomas). By the mid-1830s, he was working in Algeria as a military translator. There he became a trusted advisor to the generals leading the conquest and personal translator to the Duke of Aumale, who received Abd al-Qadir's surrender in 1847. In 1840, Urbain married an Algerian Muslim woman from Constantine. His outsider status—as a mixed-race Frenchman born in a colony, a convert to Islam, married to an Algerian—made him an important figure in the nascent colonial administration, and he grew close to Napoléon III. He served in high positions as an advisor at the Ministry of War in Paris and a member of the Council of Government (*Conseil du gouvernement*) in Algiers between the 1840s and 1860s. He also published widely on questions

⁵¹ See Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain : une autre conquête de l'Algérie* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001); Michel Levallois, *Ismaïl Urbain : Royaume arabe ou Algérie franco-musulmane ? 1848–1870* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2012).

of colonial policy. He died in 1884, after the course of Algerian history had turned away from Saint-Simonian ideas of progress and his benefactor Napoléon III had been overthrown, but he remained committed to the ideals of a mutually supportive relationship joining France and Algeria.⁵²

Urbain was but one of the proponents for *Algérie française*, a term that came to refer to the colony in general and, in the 1950s, to the staunch belief that France must remain in control. In Urbain's time, the phrase meant, rather, that France and Algeria would grow together as a model of cooperation between the "East" and the "West." In the more conservative, militaristic milieu of French politicians and generals, it was more common in the mid-nineteenth century to speak of a *France algérienne* or *France africaine*—the discourse of a French territory stretching "from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset" had emerged since the 1848 declaration that Algeria was an integral part of France. Urbain called for an "Algeria for the Algerians" instead. In Saint-Simonian terms, this meant investments in modernization and industry to be mutually beneficial to European settlers and Algerian natives both. Though it is unclear if Urbain specifically included the *médersas* in his vision of French Algeria, the idea made sense in his view of the colonial situation.⁵³ A French-sponsored Islamic education would help build the "Arab Kingdom," modernize the educational system, and cement the fates of the two peoples together.

The idea of an "Arab Kingdom" was rooted in the philosophy of an association between Algeria and France—an idea opposed in colonial philosophy by assimilation, whereby colonized

⁵² Edmund Burke III, "Thomas Ismail Urbain (1812–1884): *Indigénophile* and Precursor of *Négritude*," in G. Wesley Johnson, ed., *Double Impact: France and Africa in the Age of Imperialism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 319–330; Levallois, *Royaume arabe*.

⁵³ Levallois, Abi-Mershed, Burke, and Rey-Goldziguer all do not make an explicit connection between Urbain and the *médersas*.

peoples became French in culture and in civil status.⁵⁴ Generally associated by historians with the rise of the Third Republic, the tensions between these two stances became apparent in earlier periods.⁵⁵ The core questions of what it meant to be French and what it entailed to become French first arose in this period; debates over the meaning of French nationality, with specific reference to an Algerian “other,” continue to shape French political discourse.⁵⁶

While Urbain and “Arabophilia” certainly influenced the evolution of colonial theory and political debate, the practices of order in colonial institutions belie the central French goal of establishing enduring control over the indigenous population. One of Urbain’s goals in advocating for an “Algeria for the Algerians” was maintaining Ottoman-era landholding practices that enabled Algerians to continue working the land. While the 1863 Sénatus-Consulte law ostensibly preserved Algerians’ landholding rights, it opened the door to massive property seizures by the European settler population in the years to come, leading to the disastrous *cantonement*, or containing, of Algerian populations on ever-smaller pieces of land. Similarly, the *bureaux arabes*, or Arab Bureaus, created in 1844, were initially small offices intended to gather intelligence and concentrate governing authority outside major cities. Over the next decades, the officers of the *bureaux* concentrated their authority to the extent that they became primary enforcers of the diffuse rule of the *indigénat*—the separate category of law for indigenous Algerians with harsh and arbitrary punishments meted out on a whim.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This topic has been relatively under-studied in North Africa but extensively examined in West Africa. See Betts, *Assimilation and Association*; Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*; Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*.

⁵⁵ Jean-Loup Amselle, *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 54–76.

⁵⁶ Gavin Murray-Miller, “A Conflicted Sense of Nationality: Napoleon III’s Arab Kingdom and the Paradoxes of French Multiculturalism,” *French Colonial History* 15 (2014), 1–38.

⁵⁷ See Jacques Frémeaux, *Les bureaux arabes dans l’Algérie de la conquête* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1993); McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 119–125; Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l’indigénat. Anatomie d’un*

The médersas became enmeshed in similar practices of control. Under the auspices of the same office that organized land reforms—the Central Directorate (*Direction centrale*)—the médersas and other colonial educational institutions contributed to the concentration of administrative power.⁵⁸ The teaching staff was explicitly drawn from the *‘ulama*, or scholarly class, of each city. Their presence on the administration’s payroll may have helped legitimize the médersas, or delegitimize the professors, in the eyes of the wider population. Designed in part to furnish the Arab Bureaus with competent Algerian assistants, the médersas were intended to contribute to the ongoing process of surveilling and building knowledge of indigenous Algerian life.⁵⁹ Other fields for which the médersas trained their students—education, law, and religious affairs—also underwent similar processes of “containment” as the instruments of colonial rule developed. These would coalesce at a later point—one remarkably still understudied in the historiography of colonial Algeria—into the regime known as the *culte officiel*, through which médersa-educated intermediaries were meant to guide Algeria’s Muslim populations to a form of Islamic practice that could not be used to contest French hegemony.⁶⁰

The 1858 creation of a Ministry of Algerian Affairs regrouped colonial affairs from separate ministries (Public Instruction, Justice, War, etc.) into a distinct new organization. This move also put the médersas and other Franco-Arab schools under the jurisdiction of the

«monstre» juridique: *le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l’Empire français* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte and Zones, 2010) 67–78.

⁵⁸ Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 157.

⁵⁹ For a treatment of this phenomenon in the Third Republic period, see George R. Trumbull IV, *An Empire of Facts: Colonial Power, Cultural Knowledge, and Islam in Algeria, 1870–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ Raberh Achi, “La séparation des Eglises et de l’Etat à l’épreuve de la situation coloniale. Les usages de la dérogation dans l’administration du culte musulman en Algérie (1905–1959),” *Politix* 17:66 (2e trimestre 2004), 81–106. McDougall is another to address this theme, in “The Secular State’s Islamic Empire,” although in a later period.

Academy of Algiers (created in 1848) rather than the Ministry of War.⁶¹ (Regional or departmental Academies were the main organizations of educational administration in France dating back to the era of Napoleon I, in 1808). Napoleon III visited Algeria twice in the early 1860s. He came away convinced of the Saint-Simonian Arab Kingdom, and began an effort to turn it into a reality through geographic separation between traditional Algerian pastoralism in the interior and modern European industry along the coast. As part of this project, Franco-Arab instruction was expanded in the coastal cities and in the smaller cities of the interior.⁶² This move included renewed investment in a *collège impérial arabe-français* in Algiers, founded in 1858 and designed to educate the sons of military officers and elite families. Its joint curriculum, which included both French and Arabic instruction, was the first of its kind: at this point, the three *médersas* still offered only an Islamic curriculum. Dozens of Franco-Arab schools opened across the three provinces of Oran, Algiers, and Constantine in the 1850s and early 1860s, part of the same wave of “Arabophile” colonial policy.⁶³

In September 1870, Napoléon III was captured at the Battle of Sedan, ending the Franco-Prussian War and precipitating the collapse of the Second Empire. In the nascent Third Republic, Ismael Urbain and Napoléon’s other advisers were shunted aside and the project of building an Arab Kingdom in Algeria abandoned. The European settler constituency gained strength with increasing numbers and greater political influence.⁶⁴ The dominance of any given colonial ideology—assimilation or association—ebbed and flowed as time went on, their essential

⁶¹ Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 164.

⁶² Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 188–200.

⁶³ Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 196.

⁶⁴ David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jennifer Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

contradictions unaddressed.⁶⁵ The institutional architecture of French rule—the Government-General, the Ministry of Algerian Affairs, the *bureaux arabes*—remained in place as well in the new regime.

By the late 1860s, even before Napoléon III's surrender, many of the Franco-Arab schools had closed.⁶⁶ The remainder would not last long under the Third Republic: the *collège impériale franco-arabe* was shuttered in 1871. This was less due to any immediate shift in colonial policy than because of a longstanding lack of interest on the part of Algerians in attending colonial schools. Indeed, to speak of a lack of interest is to put it mildly: the 1850s and 1860s saw some of the bloodiest resistance by Algerians to the nascent French project. These included uprisings in the Aurès region of eastern Algeria, among the Awlad Sidi Shaykh confederacy in southwestern Algeria, and the conquest of Laghouat on the edge of the Sahara.⁶⁷ A devastating famine in 1867–1868 further weakened the indigenous Algerian population. A *refus de l'école*, or rejection of colonial schooling, was a common response from Algerian Muslims across a wide spectrum of society. All colonial schools suffered low enrollments.⁶⁸ The *médersas* were not spared, despite their explicit goal of appealing to Muslims keen to restore Islamic education in Algeria.⁶⁹ Reports on the *médersas* in these early years often called for their closure, especially at the *médersa* of Tlemcen where enrollments were lowest, perhaps due to the persistence of educational traditions outside the colonial realm of influence.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 209.

⁶⁶ Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 196.

⁶⁷ Brower, *A Desert Named Peace* 91–137; McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 73–80; Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint* 168–213.

⁶⁸ Turin, *Affrontements*, 302–303.

⁶⁹ Turin, *Affrontements*, 246–250.

Despite increased surveillance from the *bureaux arabes*, older, indigenous schooling traditions gained strength as spaces of resistance to French rule during this period. Predominantly rural, and often on the fringes of French-controlled territory, the *zawiya* was for some, like the Rahmaniyya order, a refuge from direct colonial rule. Other Sufi orders, such as the Tijaniyya, pioneered a more accommodationist approach, engaging with colonial officials in an effort—sometimes successful—to preserve spaces of authority.⁷¹ For all the efforts of colonial figures like Urbain, the notion of a hyphenated, bicultural, Franco-Arab education seemed, at the dawn of the Third Republic, to be an outdated notion. The fact that the *médersas* survived this period, despite low enrollments, official pronouncements of their failure, and major political upheavals in Algeria and in France, suggests both their degree of adaptability and the enduring attraction of Franco-Muslim education to a range of colonial authorities.

The Médersas in the Third Republic: A Period of Reform

In 1871, the mountainous region of Kabylia erupted in one of the last major insurrections against French rule before the start of the liberation war. Led by Mohammed al-Mokrani, the revolt differed from others because of its leader: from a prominent Kabyle family, Mokrani had seen his family's prestige diminish precipitously after the arrival of the French, and he sought to force the colonists to recognize an older social order and force them into negotiation. By 1872, his forces were defeated, Mokrani himself was killed, and his family exiled to the Pacific colony of New Caledonia. The revolt in many ways exemplified the reality of Algerian life in the

⁷⁰ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (III), Directeur de l'Intérieur to Conseiller d'État, 7 February 1859. See also Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1871–1919* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), vol. 1, 324–325.

⁷¹ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 142–156; Jillali El Adnani, *La Tijaniyya, 1781–1881 : Les origines d'une confrérie religieuse au Maghreb* (Rabat: Éditions Marsam, 2007), 167–221 .

transition from the Second Empire to the Third Republic. Under the thumb of European settlers and French military forces, Algerian Muslims had to adapt to survive the ongoing “cataclysm” and the collapse of old ways of life.⁷² Accommodating and adapting to colonial power structures was one such strategy.

The regime of violence continued unabated despite the shift, likewise in 1871, from military to civilian rule in Algeria. Indeed, civilian rule brought about even more stringent restrictions on Algerian Muslims. The increased value of the franchise under republican rule led the vociferous settler population to urge ever-stricter restrictions on Muslim access to civic institutions and governmental power. Muslims were targeted by the extension of the *indigénat* legal code. Indeed, in this period, the category of *indigène* took on new legal and discursive meanings. In the period of the military conquest, a “Kabyle Myth” arose among army commanders and other colonial officials, erecting an exaggerated barrier between Arabs and Berbers and devoting differing strategies to each population. In the Third Republic era, that division faded in the colonizers’ minds as “European” and *indigène* became the operative dichotomy structuring access to power.⁷³

Two new concepts further hardened this oppositional division between colonizer and colonized in the first decades of the Third Republic. The first of these was the so-called “civilizing mission,” or *mission civilisatrice*. Though this idea recalled the Saint-Simonian ideal of improving Algerian lives through industry, it took on new and more formal meaning between the 1870s and 1890s. It became especially important to French policy after the 1884–1885 Berlin Conference when the European “Scramble for Africa” divided the African continent among the

⁷² McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 78–80.

⁷³ Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*; Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 1, 267–292.

European powers. France, Great Britain, Portugal, Italy, and Spain all laid claim to vast swaths of Africa, drawing borders with little regard to political, cultural, or geographical realities. The civilizing mission justified European and especially French colonialism by arguing that uncivilized Africans would be brought into the modern world by adopting European customs, including Christianity. French politics and culture—French republicanism and the French language in particular—were understood to be the crucial conduits for this civilizing process to occur.⁷⁴ To become “civilized,” Africans and other colonized subjects had to assimilate to French standards of culture and civilization—a process that entailed losing or rejecting older cultural, linguistic, and religious affiliations.⁷⁵ In doing so, they could accede to French citizenship and the rights that status entailed. For Muslims, the cost was, essentially, apostasy: one had to renounce personal status and the jurisdiction of Islamic law. The civilizing mission developed in tandem with colonial knowledge production about the cultures and groups that were its target, reinforcing the gulf between European and Algerian societies—and African societies as a whole.⁷⁶

The second defining concept of this period was official secularism, or *laïcité*. Growing out of anticlerical movements with roots in the French Revolution, *laïcité* supported French republicanism by effacing official differences among believers of different faiths. In the 1880s, French public education was made secular by a series of laws sponsored by Jules Ferry (a chief proponent of the civilizing mission in the colonies and author of a major 1892 report justifying settler colonialism in Algeria). In 1905, a law separating churches and the state made the French

⁷⁴ Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize* (Stanford, 1997); J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ Betts, *Assimilation and Association*, 18–21.

⁷⁶ On colonial knowledge production and its relationship to the civilizing mission in Algeria, see Trumbull, *An Empire of Facts*.

state fully secular by enshrining official neutrality with regards to religious practice, guaranteeing the freedom of religion, and restricting the influence of religious institutions in the state.⁷⁷ One of the main proponents of the 1905 law was Emile Combes, author of a major reform to the *médersas* passed in 1894. State secularism continues to be a defining feature of the French government, and especially of public education, to this day, despite the upheavals and changes of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ At its inception, as in the present, *laïcité* had a particularly vexed relationship with Islam.⁷⁹

Amid these ideological shifts, the *médersas* both exhibited important continuities and underwent profound changes. The first of these came in February 1876, as part of a project that began the previous year that brought “Islamic schools of all kinds” into the purview of the Governor-General.⁸⁰ This *arrêté* was the first formal revision of the *médersa*’s structure since the foundational decree of 30 September 1850. In this 1876 act, several new stipulations were added to the *médersas*’ institutional framework in ways that reflect the importance of republicanism—at least as a reference point—in French Algerian policy. For example, the third article of the *arrêté* instituted a new entrance examination for students wishing to enroll at any of the three *médersas*, during which prospective *medérsiens* were required to prove their age (between 18

⁷⁷ On *laïcité* in France, see, among others, Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945: Politics & Anger* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Paola Mattei and Andrew S. Aguilar, *Secular Institutions, Islam and Education Policy: France and the U.S. in Comparative Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Véronique Dimier, “French Secularism in Debate: Old Wine in New Bottles,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 26:1 (Spring 2008), 92–110.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Randi Deguilhem, “Exporter la *laïcité* républicaine : la Mission laïque française en Syrie mandataire, pays multiconfessionnel,” in Pierre-Jean Luizard, *Le choc colonial et l’islam : Les politiques religieuses des puissances coloniales en terre d’islam* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 383–400; Raberh Achi, “La séparation des Eglises et de l’Etat.”

⁸⁰ Décret portant nouvelle organisation de l’instruction publique en Algérie, 15 August 1875. Reproduced in Robert Estoublon and Adolphe Lefébure, *Code de l’Algérie* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1896), 466–467.

and 25 years old), their good morals, and, crucially, their indigenous status (“*il aura à justifier de son indigénat*”). The second article redefined the purpose of the *médersas* as training candidates for posts in the offices of Islamic Affairs, Justice, and Public Instruction, “as well as those positions that can...be occupied by non-naturalized Muslims.”⁸¹ This revision removed the Arab Bureaus from the list of approved careers for *médersa* graduates, and explicitly referenced personal status laws based on the 1865 *Sénatus-Consulte* defining French nationality. Both of these new regulations formalized patterns of inclusion and exclusion that were coming to define Algerian political and social life.

The 1876 reforms brought about a change to the very core of the *médersas* by adding a French curriculum. According to the *arrêté*'s fourth article, the Islamic curriculum (which maintained the three courses in Arabic language and literature, theology, and Islamic law) was to be supplemented with instruction in French language, history, geography, arithmetic, and “the principles of French law” including civil law, penal law, and administrative law.⁸² (There is no indication in the decree of who would teach these French courses, or how those instructors would be chosen.) The reasoning behind this move is left unsaid in the decree itself, although it fits within the logic of the civilizing mission to spread knowledge of French culture and language even among non-naturalized Muslims. The French curriculum remained part of the *médersa*'s teaching in Algeria, without major changes, until their closure in 1951.

Finally, these 1876 measures further entangled the *médersas* in the colonial bureaucracy. Whereas prior to 1876, the *médersas*' directors wrote periodical reports to their superiors in the administration, after this decree their oversight was more strictly controlled. Military

⁸¹ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1 (I), *Arrêté portant réorganisation de l'enseignement supérieur musulman*, 16 February 1876.

⁸² ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1 (I), *Arrêté portant réorganisation de l'enseignement supérieur musulman*, 16 February 1876.

commanders in each region were charged with the “political and administrative surveillance” of each *médersa*. The newly-created post of *Médersa Inspector*, under the auspices of the Academy of Algiers, was designed to oversee the academic content and “interior discipline” of each *médersa*. This inspector’s salary was fixed at eight thousand francs per year, more than double that of even a *médersa* director, let alone a professor. The seventh article of the decree also reorganized the sources of funding for the *médersas*’ students. Previously, their room and board had been covered by the administration, part of the budget from the Ministry of War designated to cover the whole of the *médersas*’ costs. After 1876, however, students were funded by “Arab taxes” (*impôts arabes*) levied on *indigènes* in each of the three departments. Additional money could be raised from communes to support local students.⁸³ Each of these measures brought the *médersas* further into the control of the colonial regime, and further restricted the realms under the authority of the Muslim instructors and directors.

These reforms of February 1876 made lasting changes to the *médersa* system. The most drastic of these was the introduction of a French curriculum, which transformed the *médersas* into “Franco-Muslim” schools. This term—*enseignement franco-musulman* in French—came into usage gradually, becoming widespread only in the early twentieth century. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, it was more common to refer to the *médersas* simply as “Muslim schools of higher education” (*écoles musulmanes d’enseignement supérieure*). Nevertheless, the French nature of the *médersas* became more and more apparent as time went on, not least because of the increased regime of inspections and oversight formalized by the 1876 reforms. In addition to the annual visits by the *Médersa Inspector*, the *médersas* were subject to three major reports during and after this period. Two came in 1876, by the French Arabist

⁸³ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1 (I), Arrêté portant réorganisation de l’enseignement supérieur musulman, 16 February 1876.

Jacques-Auguste Cherbonneau (1813–1882) and the Algerian translator Belkassem Ben Sedira (1845–1901), and a third in 1892, by the intermediary elite figure Mohammed ben Rahal (1858–1928). Ben Sedira was one of the earliest Algerians to advance through the French schooling system, eventually becoming a professor in the *École des Lettres* in Algiers and publishing several important French-Arabic and French-Kabyle dictionaries. Ben Rahal was the first Algerian to receive the French *baccalauréat* degree. From an elite family in Nédroma, a scholarly city near Tlemcen, he went on to a career in colonial politics, frequently focusing on educational issues.⁸⁴ These three figures, one Orientalist scholar-administrator and two accommodationist Muslim elites, are representative of the actors engaged in the process of adapting the *médersas* in the early Third Republic period.

The *médersas* saw firm opposition from many parts of the colonial establishment during this time. These opponents argued that the *médersas* were hotbeds of “fanaticism,” where Islamic instruction transformed young Arabs into vehement anti-French insurrectionists. Their supporters countered that France needed intermediaries, especially in the designated fields of Public Instruction, Justice, and Religious Affairs, and that it was more practical, and safer, to train these figures rather than chose them from among those trained outside of French influence. The tenuous compromise was an increasingly harsh surveillance regime and an increased reliance on French professors. An 1882 reform even put the French directors in charge of religious education. Urbain, outside the centers of power but still commenting publicly on Algerian

⁸⁴ Gilbert Grandguillaume, *Nédroma : L'évolution d'une médina* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 177–186. See also Abdelkader Djeghloul, ed. *Si M'hamed ben Rahal et la question de l'instruction des Algériens* (Oran: Centre de Documentation des Sciences Humaines, 1982).

affairs, noted that this measure forced the French instructors to teach in Arabic, a language they spoke poorly.⁸⁵

The *médersas* were thus subject to a dual *refus*. Many Muslim families were reluctant to send their sons to a French school, let alone a *médersa* where discipline was strict and the professional results uncertain. For a proper Islamic education, many Algerians saw the *Zaytuna*, in Tunis, as their best option. At the same time, many settler-dominated communes refused to fund scholarships (*bourses*) for students. As a result of these twin forces, the number of enrolled students fell dramatically—from an average total of 70 students in the 1870s to 44 in the 1880s.⁸⁶

By the mid-1890s, this situation had become so serious that the French national government intervened. Typically, correspondence on the *médersas* involved a set number of offices: the Governor-General, the Office of Native Affairs (*bureau des affaires indigènes*), the Academy of Algiers, the administrative offices of each *département* (based in Algiers, Constantine, and Oran), and the directors of the *médersas*. Unlike other branches of the colonial administration, the *médersas* rarely garnered attention from metropolitan French officials. This irregular attention serves as evidence of a certain degree of independence on the part of the Government General in Algeria to pursue policies without regard to metropolitan politics; it also belies a certain degree of ignorance on the part of metropolitan French lawmakers regarding colonial institutions and realities.

In 1894, however, the senator Emile Combes published an extensive report on the *médersas*, based on research conducted in the years prior. Commissioned by the French Senate, Combes made his audience's unfamiliarity with the subject clear: "the word '*médersas*' is not new in parliamentary language," he wrote early in the report, "but the object itself is very little

⁸⁵ Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 1, 328–332.

⁸⁶ Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 1, 331.

known.”⁸⁷ The *médersas*’ results had been neither spectacular nor disastrous enough to attract large-scale attention, but their ideological and theoretical importance, especially in the era of the civilizing mission, made them focal points for colonial debates.

Emile Combes was a fitting author for the report, given his later importance in French history. In the mid-1890s he was a leftist junior senator from the provinces, without major experience in the colonies. In 1892 he authored another report on primary education for *indigènes* in Algeria; in 1895 he would briefly serve as Minister of Public Instruction. From 1902 to 1905 he was Prime Minister of France, during which time he would introduce several lasting social reforms. The most important of these was the 1905 passage of the law separating church and state, which enshrined *laïcité* as an official policy.

In his report, Combes offered an extensive history of the *médersas* in the four decades since their foundation. In doing so, he deftly melded the *médersas*’ original practical purpose with the republican civilizing impetus fully theorized in the intervening years. He wrote, referring to his Second Empire predecessors, “we were engaged...in respecting [Algerians’] social regime and beliefs. This was not only just or generous on our part, but above all a necessity” given the unlikelihood of full “extermination or suppression” of the indigenous population.⁸⁸ He went on: “since the *médersas* put at our disposition...a nursery [*pépinière*] full of subjects more or less imbued with our civilizing spirit...our moral authority grew.”⁸⁹ Without reference to the large-scale political upheavals in France (and in Algeria, for that matter) between 1850 and 1894, Combes portrayed the *médersas* as a constant presence in French Algeria, one that fit comfortably with the current political climate.

⁸⁷ Combes, *Rapport*, 2.

⁸⁸ Combes, *Rapport*, 3.

⁸⁹ Combes, *Rapport*, 4.

Combes did not, however, gloss over the *médersas*' organizational problems. He charted problems ranging from disorganization in scheduling entrance examinations, to the uneven level of learning among students, to the familiar and constant issue of funding.⁹⁰ The teaching staff and curriculum earned particular attention for the ways in which they developed differently at each *médersa*. For example, in Tlemcen, the director was always a Frenchman, whereas in Constantine and Algiers Algerian Muslims held that position. The curriculum had the potential to be dangerous, even, for the French. Over time and to varying degrees in the three sites, the theology course had been drastically reduced because French administrators feared it would foster "fanaticism" in the *médersas*' students.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the theology course was officially included in the *médersas*' program at the moments of reform in 1876 and at the time of Combes's investigation in the 1890s.⁹²

Combes's report made a clear case to his fellow senators that the *médersas*' instruction in Islamic subjects served a dual purpose. First, there was the practical result of training young intermediaries to work specifically for the administration, rather than recruiting from those trained elsewhere (in the *zawiyas* or in the mosque-universities of Morocco and Tunisia, for instance). Second, in introducing a French curriculum of history, geography, arithmetic, and French language in 1876, the colonial administration initiated a policy of subtly trying to influence the development of Islam in Algeria. This was not quite the civilizing mission, but the two ideas shared a common faith in the power of French ideas to change colonized cultures. Combes wrote that introducing the French curriculum was "the beginning of an infusion, slowly

⁹⁰ Combes, *Rapport*, 30–68.

⁹¹ Combes, *Rapport*, 46, 49.

⁹² Combes writes much later in the report that theology was never formally eliminated, but rather had fallen into "desuetude." *Rapport*, 252.

at first, of the French spirit into Muslim teaching. It was a barrier to the expansion of religious fanaticism more than a deviation towards French instruction.”⁹³ To that end, Combes argued that the theology course was a necessary component of the *médersas*’ mission. In teaching Islamic theology, the *médersas* stayed loyal to their originally stated mission—the restoration of higher education in Algeria—and remained singularly attractive to the communities of Algerian Muslims who the French were trying to attract.⁹⁴

In essence, Combes portrayed the *médersas* as a cornerstone in France’s Muslim policy in Algeria. (He did not use the term *politique musulmane*, which had become more explicit and more central to French colonial efforts in West Africa beginning in the 1850s, with Faidherbe’s tenure in Senegal.⁹⁵) In this view, the *médersas* supplemented their practical purpose of training a corps of Francophile Muslim Algerians with a more covert and longer-term goal of shaping the study of Islam. The *médersas* also had the symbolic power of demonstrating—to both imperial rivals and to Algerian Muslims—French commitment to Islamic learning and the restoration of Islamic heritage after a period of decadence under Ottoman rule. These mutually constituted purposes were complex, and merited close attention on the part of the administration. If carefully guided, the *médersas* could be “hyphens” [*traits d’union*] between the “two races”: French and *indigène*.

Combes presented three options to his fellow senators in the report. First, the *médersas* could be shuttered if they were deemed too ineffective or dangerous. Second, they could be transformed on the model of the Maghrib’s old and prestigious mosque-universities. Third, they

⁹³ Combes, *Rapport*, 46.

⁹⁴ Combes, *Rapport*, 52.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Harrison, *France and Islam*; Donal Cruise O’Brien, “Towards an ‘Islamic Policy’ in French West Africa, 1854–1914,” *Journal of African History* 8:2 (1967), 303–316; David Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power.”

could be restructured and reformed again in ways meant to increase their utility. The third option was best, he concluded, but the others deserve attention in themselves as roads not taken.

The first option was “suppressing” the *médersas* and replacing them with the European higher educational institutions of Algiers. (These included the School of Law and School of Letters, among others, all founded in 1879 and combined, in 1909, into the University of Algiers.) The European settler population favored this option in its generally antagonistic stance vis-à-vis Algerian Muslim communities. Combes wrote that it was unlikely to achieve the necessary results and that it was “an act of justice and humanity to respect the values and societal institutions” of the *indigènes*.⁹⁶ History had shown the Muslims’ reluctance to convert to Christianity; given the likelihood that Islam would continue to be a powerful force in Algerian society, it was unwise to proceed without attempting to contain or mold its influence. And, according to Omar ben Brihmat, a professor at the *Médersa* of Algiers and a trusted interlocutor on Muslim affairs, it would be impossible to attract students to French schools without an Islamic component to the educational program. Because Islamic law was part and parcel of Islamic faith, it would also be impossible to separate these subjects for training intermediaries. Combes rebutted these objections to the *médersa*’s project as the conclusions of ignorant “detractors” and the idea of closing the *médersas* as a “detestable maneuver.”⁹⁷ The *médersas*, he concluded, “were and still are testaments to our respect for the religion and social regime of the conquered people. They are a necessity of moral life and civic life” in French Algeria.⁹⁸ In other words, as Islamic institutions, the *médersas*’ symbolic and administrative value meant they were worth preserving, at least in some fashion.

⁹⁶ Combes, *Rapport*, 193.

⁹⁷ Combes, *Rapport*, 202–203.

⁹⁸ Combes, *Rapport*, 203.

The second option Combes presented was the organization of the *médersas* into advanced schools of Islamic studies, along the lines of al-Azhar in Cairo, the Qarawiyyin in Fes, and the Zaytuna in Tunis.⁹⁹ This proposal was first made by M’hamed Ben Rahal, author of the earlier 1892 report on the *médersas*.¹⁰⁰ It had incurred the wrath of a wide array of colonial officials, including the Rector of the Academy of Algiers, who feared the results of increased support for advanced Islamic study in Algeria. Combes responded with a defense of Islamic education, explaining in some detail how religious content was inseparable from literary, philosophical, and even legal study in an Islamic context. Echoing his arguments from the first section of the report, Combes wrote that France had a responsibility to its Muslim subjects, which included offering instruction in theology and other subjects at the heart of Islamic learning traditions. And yet, he continued, the *médersas* could not be modeled so closely on the older institutions of Fes, Tunis, or Cairo.¹⁰¹ Their purposes were too different: in Fes, a student could continue his studies for a decade or longer, prompted by nothing more than a devotion to learning, but at the *médersas* students had more material motivations, pursuing studies to ensure a position in the administration.¹⁰² By embracing the traditions of the older mosque-universities, the *médersas* could build the “amour-propre” of Muslim students. This approach to the *médersas* would also imbue “modern methods” into Islamic studies and help the French guide the intellectual developments of Algeria and Tunisia. (Tunisia had become a French protectorate in 1881, but the French deployed a different approach to Franco-Muslim education there.) Combes embraced one

⁹⁹ Combes, *Rapport*, 204–248.

¹⁰⁰ A portion of ben Rahal’s report is excerpted in Combes, *Rapport*, 329–332.

¹⁰¹ Combes cited, among others, Gaëtan Delphin, *Fes, son université et l’enseignement supérieur musulman* (Paris: Ernest Leroux and Oran: Paul Perrier, 1889), one of the first European studies of the Qarawiyyin. Delphin was also the director of the *Médersa* of Algiers during this period.

¹⁰² Combes, *Rapport*, 217–22.

of Ben Rahal's ideas, namely the creation of a superior *médersa* for advanced study. Ben Rahal wanted it in Tlemcen, Algeria's intellectual capital and near to ben Rahal's hometown of Nedroma; Combes argued for the political and social importance of Algiers.¹⁰³ As in the first section, Combes argued for the necessity of French support for Islamic education, but advocated for conserving the institutional structure of the *médersas*.

This was the third option Combes included in his study: the *perfectionnement*, within existing institutional structures, of the *médersas*. To do so, Combes identified several "lacunae" in the *médersas*' status quo.¹⁰⁴ These included the restoration of the theology course, a regularized approach to the granting of scholarships, a prolongation of the course of study from three to four years, the creation of a superior division in Algiers, and a clarified relationship between a *médersa* diploma and the career options open to the *medérsiens*. Ben Rahal had suggested making a *médersa* diploma equivalent to a French *baccalauréat*; Combes rejected this idea, preferring to keep the *médersas* a separate but clearly defined and fully developed system.

In his conclusion, Combes wrote: "Muslim Algeria is definitively conquered; it is without hope of escaping our domination."¹⁰⁵ The peace that reigned there was, however, not a true peace. The *médersas* were instruments for building an "interior peace," one that would be both deep and long-lasting. Ben Rahal's desire for schools resembling Qarawiyyin or Zaytuna were unacceptable because they lacked the French imprimatur. Rather, properly "perfected" *médersas* could be effective tools for building French Algeria. "The renown of our *médersas* in North Africa," he wrote, "will serve the cause of civilization."¹⁰⁶ With a defined curriculum combining

¹⁰³ Combes, *Rapport*, 246–247.

¹⁰⁴ Combes, *Rapport*, 249–273.

¹⁰⁵ Combes, *Rapport*, 275.

Islamic traditions and French subjects, Combes went on, the *médersas* would be “a hyphen between the traditions of an outdated Islamism and the persuasive theories of modern science.”¹⁰⁷ Finally, he concluded, “the *médersas* appear to be an excellent means, a ready instrument for our peaceful and subtle [*insinuante*] propaganda” in North Africa.¹⁰⁸ The *médersas* could potentially play a deeply important role in France’s colonial mission as symbols of engagement with Islamic traditions and Muslim communities. Doing so would require careful attention to those traditions and communities, but Combes (like many of his contemporaries) was confident in French mastery over Islam.¹⁰⁹

Combes made ten concrete suggestions for carrying out this project.¹¹⁰ (The full list is reproduced in Appendix A). Of these, only six were directly related to the *médersas* themselves. These included fixing a standard scholarship for students, expanding and codifying the Franco-Muslim curriculum, and creating a superior division in Algiers. The other proposals he made had to do with streamlining the procedure for hiring *medérsiens* in the legal and religious fields. Indeed, Combes’s report lays out an extended vision for the bureaucratization of *culte musulman*, fixing examinations for students to qualify for positions of influence in mosques.¹¹¹ This was one of the first articulations of the regime that would become the *culte officiel*, through which the colonial administration exerted control over muftis, imams, and other religious authorities. It also marked the beginning of an effort, completed a decade later, to codify Islamic law and

¹⁰⁶ Combes, *Rapport*, 279.

¹⁰⁷ Combes, *Rapport*, 282.

¹⁰⁸ Combes, *Rapport*, 315.

¹⁰⁹ For a connected case, see Burke, *The Ethnographic State*.

¹¹⁰ Combes, *Rapport*, 323–325.

¹¹¹ Combes, *Rapport*, 304–314.

bureaucratize the Islamic court system.¹¹² With reference to the ongoing French debate over *laïcité*, Combes wrote in this report that “should [the separation of Church and State] be possible in France, it is impossible in Muslim Algeria.”¹¹³ He made this case clearly in this report. That the author of those words and the statesman who oversaw the implementation of official secularism in France were in fact the same man is a testament to the intense differentiation between France and Algeria. Though technically part of France, Algeria was without a doubt a land apart. The debate over the *médersas*, summarized and transformed in Combes’s report, neatly illustrates this “rule of difference” as it developed in French Algeria.¹¹⁴

A New Feature on the Landscape of Power

The French Senate endorsed Combes’s third option, “perfecting” the *médersa* within its current boundaries. Before long, his ten proposals were enacted. The term of study expanded to four years at the three *médersas* of Tlemcen, Constantine, and Algiers. The Franco-Muslim curriculum was standardized, with four Arabic courses (theology, Islamic law, Arabic grammar and literature, and rhetoric) and six French courses (French language, history and geography, arithmetic, physical and natural sciences, French law with an emphasis on law in Algeria, and hygiene and medicine), as well as diction and calligraphy. The teaching staff was consequently expanded with a larger number of French professors. The *médersas*’ budget also grew, and efforts were made to recruit more students. A Superior Division (*division supérieure*) was indeed

¹¹² Combes, *Rapport*, 297–303. See also Oussama Arabi, “Orienting the Gaze: Marcel Morand and the Codification of le droit musulman algérien,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11:1 (2000), 43–72; Bontems, *Le droit musulman algérien*.

¹¹³ Combes, *Rapport*, 251.

¹¹⁴ The idea of “rule of difference” is better developed in the historiography of the British Empire. See, e.g., Guido Abbatiata, “Empire, Liberty and the Rule of Difference: European Debates on British Colonialism in Asia at the End of the Eighteenth Century,” *European Review of History—Revue européenne d’Histoire*, 13:3 (2006), 473–498.

created, in Algiers, with two years of additional study focused on the Islamic curriculum for the most talented students, chosen from across the three *médersas* by the results on their final exam. Approximately twenty students were enrolled in each of the two years of that program.

Per Combes's suggestion, career paths were much more clearly defined for the *medérsiens* at the end of their studies. Those who satisfactorily completed two years in the Superior Division were qualified for posts such as imam, mufti, and qadi. Those who graduated from the lower divisions of any of the three *médersas* were funneled into lower-ranking positions in the same fields of law and religious administration. Adels, or aides to qadis, were newly required to possess a *médersa* diploma; so too were the *hazzabs* who publicly recited the Qur'an in official mosques.¹¹⁵ The reforms also specified the qualifications for those who worked as a *mouderrès*, a teaching position, adapted from an Ottoman-era title, in official mosques and intended, in part, to identify and nurture talented boys for the entrance exams to the *médersas*. Thus, the *médersas* became linchpins in a system whereby the colonial administration insinuated itself into three essential realms of Algerian Muslim life. Islamic education, Islamic law, and Islamic religious practice were all directly connected to the *médersas* through past and future cadres of *medérsiens*.

In practice, this system did not work seamlessly. Neither did the *médersas* convince Algerian Muslims of France's beneficence and civilization. It would be more accurate to say that the Combes reforms convinced many French administrators of France's beneficence. For decades to come, the *médersas* would stand in for larger colonial civilizational projects, physical evidence of the "hyphen" connecting Algerian Muslims to French ideals.

¹¹⁵ Combes, *Rapport*, 84–85 and Edmond Doutté, *L'islâm algérien en l'an 1900* (Algiers: Giralt, 1900), 127–130.

At no point was this clearer than the period between 1905 and 1909, when the colonial administration built three new buildings to house the *médersas* in Algiers, Tlemcen, and Constantine. Prior to this point, the *médersas* had occupied older, pre-colonial spaces in the renowned mosques of each city (the Salah Bey mosque in Constantine; the Sidi Brahem mosque or the Great Mosque in Tlemcen; a mosque in the central Marine Quarter of Algiers). These new *médersas* physically embodied the idea of France as a “Muslim power” that took hold in this period, in the Maghrib and across northwest Africa.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the expansion of French colonial activities in West Africa made the *médersas*, and Algerian “Muslim policy” more generally, all the more important both symbolically and strategically.

Two notable French architects were chosen to design these new cornerstones of French Muslim power. Henri Petit (1856–1926) designed the new *médersas* of Algiers and Tlemcen, both completed in 1905, and Albert Ballu (1849–1939) designed the *médersa* of Constantine, completed in 1909. Both were specialists of the Neo-Moorish [*néo-mauresque*] style and had long careers in Algeria. Petit was named the official architect of the Government General around 1900. He designed many prominent buildings in Algiers, including the city hall of the suburb of El Biar and the headquarters of the newspaper *La Dépêche Algérienne*, both of which resemble North African mosques, complete with false minarets. The Tlemcen *médersa* was his only building outside of Algiers. Ballu published studies of Roman antiquities across Algeria in addition to designing important sites including the cathedral and main train station of Oran (which also resembles a mosque, with its mock minaret and clocktower). Ballu also designed the Algerian pavilions at the famed Universal Expositions of 1889 and 1900, both in Paris. These works came to typify the so-called *style Jonnart*, named after the Governor-General Charles

¹¹⁶ David Robinson, “France as a ‘Muslim Power.’”

Jonnart, who encouraged these construction projects. Chief practitioners of Neo-Moorish architecture, Petit and Ballu were leading figures in the reshaping of Algeria's urban spaces in the early twentieth century, before modernists like Le Corbusier emerged and further transformed cities such as Casablanca and Rabat.¹¹⁷



Figure 1.2. The new Médersa of Algiers. Postcard image from author's collection.

The new Algiers médersa was the most striking of the three. The site on which it was built was adjacent to the mausoleum and zawiya of Sidi Abderrahmane al-Thaalibi (d. 1471), a scholar and mystic revered as the city's patron saint. That complex itself attracted a good deal of attention from colonial architects including Ballu as a masterpiece of traditional architecture.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ On Algerian colonial architecture, see Nabila Oulebsir, *Les usages de la patrimoine : monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie (1830–1930)* (Paris: Éditions du MSH, 2004); on the later modernists, see Wright, *The Politics of Design*, and Çelik, *Urban Forms*.

At the center of the Casbah, overlooking the bay of Algiers, the site was removed from the French quarters of the city. Petit's new médersa imitated the features of the zawiya and other Arab and Ottoman architectural forms in both the exterior and interior of the building (see Figure 1.2). Though it resembled older architectural models from North Africa, the médersa was designed to operate like a modern school—distinct classrooms were included where older buildings had courts and halls. Across the central cupola, the names, in Arabic, of twelve major Maghribi scholars were inscribed in cartouches.¹¹⁹ By the main entrance, a short poem by Belkassem al-Hafnaoui (1850–1942; translator and editor of *Mobacher*, the Arabic version of the *Journal officiel*, and a graduate of the médersa) was carved into a marble plaque. The poem praised the French, especially the Governor-General Jonnart, for their civilization, and offered the médersa as proof of their good works.¹²⁰ Intended as a demonstration of the French respect for and mastery over North African culture, the médersa became an important feature on the city's landscape. When King Edward VII of England visited Algiers in 1905, the newly

¹¹⁸ Ahmed Koumas and Chéhrazade Nafa, *L'Algérie et son patrimoine. Dessins français du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Monum, Éditions du Patrimoine, 2003), 134–141.

¹¹⁹ As transliterated into French, the twelve were: Sidi Abd-er Rahman et-Tçaalibi; Mohammed Ben El-Moucebih; Mohammed Ben Marzouk; Ahmed Ben Abdallah, dit l'Algérien; Mohammed Ben Youcef Es-Senoussi; Ahmed Ben Zekir; Ali Ben Othman El-Menghellati; Abd-er-Rahman el-Ouaglissi; Abd-er-Rahman El-Akhdheri; Ahmed Ben Yaya el-Ouanechrissi; Ahmed El-Makerri; and Saïd Quaddoura, dit l'Algérien. These transliterations are from Henri Klein, "L'Épigraphie Arabe sur quelques Nouveaux Édifices," *Feuillets d'El-Djezair* IV (1912), 100–102.

¹²⁰ Henri Klein translated the poem into French as follows:

Chez chaque peuple existe une élite. Mais plus grand
 Est celui qui laisse des monuments dans le domaine des connaissances humaines.
 C'est grâce à leur savoir, que les Grecs ont eu une ère illustre.
 Après eux, les Arabes ont pareillement manifesté leur génie.
 Les civilisations de ces peuples ont disparu. Il n'en reste que des vestiges.
 Mais aussi éclatants que la flamme projetée par un feu allumé au sommet d'un mont.
 La République a mis à profit ce noble héritage.
 Il n'est, en effet, aucune des sciences modernes où ne se soit exprimé le génie français.
 Comme preuve de cette assertion, je ne veux citer que la Médersa El-Tçaalibia,
 Dont le nom nous est cher autant que le personnage qu'il rappelle est près des cendres duquel elle est érigée.
 Cet établissement a été créé à notre intention.
 M. Jonnart - l'étoile brillante de l'époque - étant Gouverneur Général.

In Klein, "L'Épigraphie Arabe," 100–101.

inaugurated médersa was a featured stop on his itinerary.¹²¹ For years to come, the médersa would host dignitaries and events, such as a 1924 exposition of Algerian arts, at times when it was politic to emphasize a “hyphen” between colonizer and colonized.¹²² Across Algiers—indeed, across Algeria—the médersa came to be known in both French and Arabic as the *médersa thaâlibiyya*, after the saint whose tomb lay nearby.



Figure 1.3. The new Médersa of Tlemcen. Postcard image from author’s collection.

Although they lacked the importance of the capital, in Tlemcen and Constantine the new médersas garnered similar attention. Tlemcen’s médersa sat in a new European quarter of the city, somewhat removed from the historic center (see Figure 1.3). At its opening in 1905, the

¹²¹ “Les souverains anglais à Alger,” *Le Mobacher*, 22 April 1905.

¹²² A. Berque, *Les Arts Indigènes Algériens en 1924 (L’Exposition de la Médersa d’Alger)* (Algiers: Imprimerie Administrative Emile Pfister, 1924).

Governor-General Charles Jonnart offered words of praise for the médersa and the residents of Tlemcen (though it is perhaps indicative of the divisions within the city that the main settler newspaper, *Le Petit Tlemcenien*, did not consider the médersa's opening to be front-page news for that week).¹²³ In Constantine, the new médersa was located not far from its former site, perched on the edge of the imposing cliffs carved by the Rhumel river that separated the old and new city (see Figure 1.4). Images of the three new médersas circulated across Algeria and the French empire on postcards, and all three buildings became important landmarks in the three cities. Today, the médersas of Constantine and Tlemcen are preserved as museums of each city's history; in Algiers, the médersa is used as the office of a government bureau serving Algerians studying abroad.



Figure 1.4. The new Médersa of Constantine. Postcard image from author's collection.

¹²³ "M. Jonnart à Tlemcen," *Le Petit Tlemcenien*, 4 May 1905.

The construction of such monumental new buildings suggests that the place of the médersas on the landscape of power in colonial Algeria was secure by the first decade of the twentieth century. Such a conclusion is only partially accurate. Certainly, the debate over whether or not to close the médersas as dangerous incubators of “fanatic Islamism” died down; the médersas continued to operate more or less unchallenged for the remainder of the colonial era. Their results, however, were not uncontested.¹²⁴ From 1904 until 1910, representatives of the *Délégations financières* (a council charged with organizing the Algerian budget, comprised of both European settlers and representatives of Algeria’s indigenous communities, created in 1898) debated whether or not to fund the creation of a fourth médersa, in Bejaia (then known as Bougie), a Kabyle city between Algiers and Constantine with a prestigious reputation for Islamic learning.¹²⁵ The proposal was eventually rejected because of concern over the cost. In an effort to attract more students, a “commercial section” was added to the Médersa of Algiers in 1908, but it was quickly closed.¹²⁶ In the same period, concern grew among colonial officials about the growing numbers of Algerians who departed for studies in Fes, Tunis, and Cairo. A 1910 report noted with concern that more Algerians were studying at al-Azhar alone than at the Médersa of Algiers.¹²⁷ In 1912, declining enrollments led some commentators to question if the médersas

¹²⁴ Several studies of colonial society featured the médersas as important representations of broader trends in Algerian Muslim life. See, e.g., Doutté, *L’islâm algérien*; Ismaël Hamet, *Les musulmans français du Nord de l’Afrique* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1906); Maurice Poulard, *L’Enseignement pour les Indigènes en Algérie* (Algiers: Imprimerie administrative Gojosso, 1910); Chérif Benhabilès, *L’Algérie française vu par un indigène* (Algiers: Imprimerie Orientale Fontana Frères, 1914).

¹²⁵ Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 2, 941–942; on the Délégations, see Jacques Bouveresse, *Un parlement colonial?: Les délégations financières algériennes, 1898–1945*, 2 vol. (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2010).

¹²⁶ Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 2, 942. The *arrêté* creating this section was promulgated on 3 April 1908 and printed in *Le Mobacher* on 11 April 1908.

¹²⁷ Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 2, 942–943.

would soon be deserted.¹²⁸ Concerns both old and new continued to prompt debate over the *médersas* and their utility to the colonial project in Algeria.

And yet, after the Combes reforms of 1894, the *médersas* were firmly fixed on the Algerian institutional landscape. The *médersas* were central to the maintenance of a colonial system that, through the establishment of the *culte officiel* to control Islamic religious practice and the codification of *droit musulman algérien*, sought to control the crucial institutions of Algerian Muslim life. Streamlined and institutionalized in their organization, the *médersas* began to make more of an impact on colonial society in Algeria and elsewhere. It was also in the early years of the twentieth century that the *médersa* spread to several parts of French West Africa, part of a similar strategy of *politique musulmane*. The *médersas* also began to produce a quantifiable, though small, elite within Algeria. Eagerly praised by administrators as “free from all aristocratic spirit and foolish pseudo-religious prejudice,” these figures—major scholars and less important functionaries both—began to make their mark on Algerian society.¹²⁹ There would not be another major reform to the *médersas* until the 1940s, as the colonial system began to crumble.

From their creation in 1850 to the inauguration of the last of the neo-Moorish buildings in 1909, the *médersas* underwent a range of transformations. Many of these changes mirrored broader developments in colonized Algeria and across the French empire in what Claude Collot has called the “period of organization” from 1830 to 1900.¹³⁰ Created out of an “Arabophile” spirit on the part of Louis-Napoléon, and built on an array of Arab, Berber, and Ottoman

¹²⁸ “La Médersa désertée ? Est-ce la faillite ?” *L’Islam*, 3 September 1912.

¹²⁹ Alfred Bel, director of the *Médersa* of Tlemcen, cited in Ageron, *Les Algériens*, vol. 2, 942.

¹³⁰ Claude Collot, *Les institutions de l’Algérie durant la période coloniale (1830–1962)* (Paris/Algiers: Éditions du CNRS/Office des publications universitaires, 1987), 7–10.

precedents with deep histories in the Maghrib, the médersas evolved into something new. As Franco-Muslim institutions, they adapted to fit the new realities of colonized Algerian life. Designed to function as part of a system to guide and control the lives of Muslim Algerians through the realms of education, law, and religious practice, the médersas maintained this core focus throughout the upheavals of the Second Republic, Second Empire, and Third Republic, from the period of the military conquest to civilian rule. Perhaps paradoxically, the ever-stricter institutionalization of the médersas during this period allowed for a new range of actions on the part of the medérsiens.

Chapter 2: The Algerian Médersas in African Islamic Intellectual History

For all their symbolic importance and all the political debate they engendered, the médersas were first and foremost sites of learning. In the study of colonial-era schooling, this fact is sometimes overlooked. Fanny Colonna's study of the *École normale* in Algiers, for example, emphasizes how the teachers trained there formed a social cohort after their graduation; Kelly Duke Bryant's study of schools in colonial Senegal interprets them as foyers for nascent political activities, culminating in the election of Blaise Diagne to the Chamber of Deputies in Paris in 1914.¹ The "writing boards and blackboards" model adopted by Robert Launay uses the material technologies of instruction to compare, and separate, "traditional" and "modern" forms of Islamic education in Africa.² According to Launay and other contributors to his edited volume, the colonial period was one of competition between two modes of education; Louis Brenner described it in Foucaultian terms as an evolution from an esoteric episteme to a rationalist one.³

Brenner's work on médersas—both the French médersa discussed in this dissertation and the Malian reformist médersa network that arose in the late colonial period—has been highly influential and has served as a standard reference work in the scholarship of Islamic education in West Africa in the years since its publication. Yet Brenner's focus on the médersa in Mali (where the French médersa was shortest-lived) leads him to underestimate the institution's impact elsewhere. Most other scholars have followed this conclusion that the médersas were largely irrelevant, at least in West Africa.⁴ The well-developed literature on West African

¹ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*; Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*.

² Launay, ed., *Islamic Education*.

³ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 7–9.

intellectual history and Islamic education in the colonial period has no parallel in the Maghrib, where certain classic works on Islamic education remain canonical, and more recent works build off the West African literature.⁵ Education in Algeria has been a more or less stagnant field since the studies of Colonna and Turin, as research in Algeria became more difficult and scholarly attention turned elsewhere.⁶

This chapter examines the intellectual character of the Algerian *médersas*—their curricula, their modes of knowledge transmission, the scholars employed to teach in them—to argue, against Brenner, that the *médersas* constituted an important intermediary step in the development of educational institutions in northwest Africa. Furthermore, the “Franco-Muslim” nature of the *médersas* complicate Launay’s bifurcated “writing boards and blackboards” characterization by demonstrating that the two modes of learning did coexist in a single institution during the colonial period. Understanding the development of the *médersa* in Algeria, where the institution originated, sheds light on its impact elsewhere.

The two criteria of curriculum and teaching staff are considered here as evidence of the *médersas*’ importance. In Algeria, the Islamic curriculum drew on local teaching traditions, which were connected to educational practices that spanned the Maghrib and other parts of the Arab Muslim world. By incorporating these sources of knowledge into a European-style curricular structure, the educators in the *médersas*—both Algerian and French—contributed to

⁴ See, for example, Anna Pondopoulo, “La medersa de Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal (1908–1914) : un lieu de transfert culturel entre l’école française et l’école coranique ?” *Outre-mers* 94:356–357 (2007), 63–75; Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, 129; Cheikh Anta Babou, “The al-Azhar Schol Network: A Murid Experiment in Islamic Modernism,” in Launay, ed., *Islamic Education*, 173–194; Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*, 198–200.

⁵ See, for example, Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*; more recent work includes Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul*; and Aomar Boum, “The Political Coherence of Educational Incoherence: The Consequences of Educational Specialization in a Southern Moroccan Community,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 39:2 (June 2008), 205–223.

⁶ Allan Christelow is one of the last to address the *médersas* in Algeria, in *Muslim Law Courts*; more recent scholarship produced in Algeria on Algerian education ignores the *médersas*. See, for example, Chitour, *L’Éducation et la culture*.

the codification of an Islamic education akin to the slightly later codification of Islamic law. The curricula of the Algerian *médersas* demonstrate that the *medérsiens* were schooled in a familiar Islamic curriculum, one that made sense to Algerians. The addition of the French curriculum after the 1894 Combes reforms initiated the idea of the *médersa* as a fertile training ground for the “double culture of Orient and Occident,” a crucial idea for the *medérsiens* in the twentieth century.

The second focal point of this analysis is the teaching staff. In Algeria, the original professors were simply local ‘*ulama* who continued teaching as they had before the French conquest, but with a salary from the colonial administration. As time went on, these scholars gained prominence within French scholarly fields because of their association with the administration: some among them became notable translators of classical texts and prominent intellectuals in their own right. Their association with the administration enabled contacts that might not otherwise have been possible. In particular, *médersa* professors were actively engaged in the *nahda*, the “renaissance” of Arab-Islamic thought around the turn of the twentieth century, which connected them to fellow intellectuals in Egypt and elsewhere. Just as the *médersas* codified a certain curriculum, their institutional structure, especially the new position of *médersa* professor, gave a new home to northwest African scholars, who trained generations of students in scholarly traditions dating back centuries and in new “modern” forms of pedagogy.

The *médersas*, especially after the introduction of the “Franco-Muslim” curriculum, represent an intermediate stage between the rationalist and esoteric epistemes described by Brenner. As major centers for scholarship in northwest Africa—sites of an educational accommodation—they succeeded in both preserving some forms of knowledge and traditions of knowledge transmission, while also pioneering a shift to a European, modern institutional model.

As inventions of a colonial power, the *médersas* represent a particular branch in the global evolution of Islamic learning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Practices of Educational Order

Just as the *médersas* grew out of institutional precedents in the Maghrib, so too did the curricular content and instructional methods meld Maghribi Muslim traditions and French practices. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, modernization was a key idea for many in North Africa, Europe, and elsewhere. In Algeria, the curricular development of the *médersas* came about through the adaptation of North African practices of learning to French institutional practices. The example of Egypt, where a modernization of the educational system took place under British rule, was a major reference point for both French colonizers and Algerian Muslim elites. Over the course of the *médersas*' first decades—from their creation in 1850 to the reforms of the 1890s—the development of curricular practices represents a form of “domestication.” Through this process, Islamic learning became more legible to the colonial administration, and at the same time, Algerian Muslims learned how to adapt to the bureaucratic system imposed by French rule.

Across the Muslim world, educational institutions split into two broad categories: elementary and advanced. The most elementary institution was the small Qur’anic school, often called a *msid* or *kuttab* in Maghribi Arabic. These schools operated on a very local scale, in urban neighborhoods or in villages, and their purpose was to train young children to memorize the Qur’an.⁷ Carrying the Qur’an within oneself, physically embodying the sacred text, was a core value of Muslim communities in the Maghreb, across northwest Africa, and indeed across

⁷ Kamel Kateb, *École, population et société en Algérie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), 37–49.

the Islamic world.⁸ Memorizing the Qur'an was the first step to literacy in Arabic and further learning. Not all young people were able to do so, but the practice was widespread and highly esteemed.⁹ Fewer went on to more advanced study, which they would pursue either in an urban mosque or a rural Sufi *zawiya*. Attracting students with their reputation and renown, expert scholars would teach students through lesson circles (Ar. *halqa*). Generally, these studies entailed memorizing certain texts; *tafsir*, or exegesis, was a separate practice reserved for the most advanced scholars.¹⁰ In formal education in particular, oral knowledge and transmission was prized above written documentation, though over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a written diploma (Ar. *ijaza*) became a standard attestation of scholarship, superseding less formal means of building reputation. Within northwest Africa, Morocco and Mauritania—especially the Saharan region known as *Bilad Shinqit*—enjoyed the greatest reputation for Islamic scholarship, from Qur'anic memorization to advanced scholarship.¹¹ Though cities like Tlemcen and Constantine were renowned for their scholarly communities, many of the most dedicated and talented students decamped for rural *zawiyas* or traveled to Morocco or Tunisia for more advanced studies.¹²

⁸ See Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 1–9; Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’”; Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 63–65.

⁹ Dale F. Eickelman, “The art of memory: Islamic education and its social reproduction,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20:4 (October 1978), 485–516.

¹⁰ Dale Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*. The practices Eickelman describes for a student in early 20th-century Morocco can be generalized to the Maghrib prior to French colonization.

¹¹ Ghislaine Lydon, “Inkwells of the Sahara: Reflections on the Production of Islamic Knowledge in Bilād Shinqīt,” in Scott Reese, ed., *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 39–71.

¹² Kamel Chachoua, *L'islam kabyle. Religion, État et société en Algérie* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001), 47–98; David Gutelius, “Sufi Networks and the Social Contexts for Scholarship in Morocco and the Northern Sahara, 1660–1830,” in Reese, ed., *Transmission of Learning*, 15–38.

The French education system underwent major changes in the nineteenth century. Schools were sites of political debates over the place of religion, especially the Catholic Church, in French society. The extension of standardized and free schooling was one branch of the project of creating a uniform population, all of whom spoke French.¹³ It was common for some administrators in Algeria to refer to Arabic as another language, like Breton or Basque, to be stamped out.¹⁴ French primary schools in Algeria taught young boys and girls—both European settlers and a tiny proportion of Algerian Muslims and Jews—rudimentary French and an elementary curriculum. A smaller number of secondary schools continued that work, and focused almost exclusively on educating boys. These schools were founded, like the three *médersas*, in 1850.¹⁵ The ideological impulse to spread French civilization began early, before the Third Republic-era articulation of a civilizing mission. The passage of the 1881–1882 Jules Ferry laws mandating free, secular mass education made explicit the goal of transforming French and Algerian society through the extension of an education system with few concessions to local traditions.¹⁶ Strong settler opposition to any sort of education for indigenous populations limited the administration's investment in schooling; the rejection, on the part of many Muslim Algerians, of colonial schools also limited the impact of French education.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the decrees of July and September 1850 formally arranged French education in Algeria to correspond with the metropolitan French system of primary, secondary, and higher education.

¹³ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 310–314.

¹⁴ McDougall, *History of Algeria*, 86–89.

¹⁵ ANOM F80/1572, Presidential Decree of 14 July 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 244–249.

¹⁶ Gustave Benoist, *De l'instruction et de l'éducation des indigènes dans la province de Constantine* (Paris: Hachette, 1886).

¹⁷ Abdelkader Djeghloul, *Eléments d'histoire culturelle algérienne* (Algiers: ENAL, 1984), 13–29; Chitour, *L'Éducation et la culture*, 163–196.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Egypt was the primary reference point for modernizing Islamic education. Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman ruler of Egypt and Sudan from 1805 to 1848, and his successors set about creating European-style schools to train new elites and civil servants. Islamic modernists like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Muhammed Rashid Rida, and the French-educated Rifa'a al-Tahtawi advocated implanting the idea of individual reasoning (Ar. *ijtihad*) into modern education, rather than adhering to traditions (Ar. *taqlid*). Under these conditions, even al-Azhar, the pinnacle of Sunni Islamic education from the medieval period, began a slow transformation into a modern, degree-granting university.¹⁸ These changes led to the rise of the *effendiyya*, a new educated middle class roughly comparable to the medérsiens, with new notions of masculinity, religion, and society.¹⁹ Egypt, and Egyptian schooling in particular, was an important example that both French colonizers and their Algerian interlocutors looked to in discussions of educational reform.

Incorporating Islamic education into a French institutional framework entailed adaptations to both educational traditions. Several ancillary practices in the médersas were replicated wholesale from French schools. These included the practices of recruitment, provision of room and board, and discipline. In Algeria, as elsewhere in northwest Africa, students pursuing studies prior to the European occupation were able to choose when to begin and end

¹⁸ For background on Egyptian education, see James Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac & Co., 1939); Indira Falk Gesink, "Islamic Reformation: A History of Madrasa Reform and Legal Change in Egypt," *Comparative Education Review* 50:3 (August 2006), 325–345; Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), especially 23–86; on modernization projects more broadly see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁹ See Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

their studies especially after having completed the memorization of the Qur'an.²⁰ Emile Combes, in his 1894 report on the *médersas*, wrote disparagingly that at the time of the French invasion in 1830, advanced education was the result of “adventurous peregrinations” between “faraway *zawiyas* independent of all control.”²¹ In the French system, the process of becoming a student entailed much less independence.

The 30 September 1850 decree creating the three *médersas* gave no indication of how students were to be chosen or recruited. Rather, it specified that “the ten most deserving students of each school” would be granted a subsidy of 100 francs per year.²² Far from being a reward, this money became a means of control, a way for administrators to exert power over students and their families. Recruiting students was a major challenge for the colonial administration from the beginning, and enrollments remained small, at approximately thirty to forty students each in Tlemcen, Algiers, and Constantine for the first decades of the *médersas*' operation.²³ By the 1870s—perhaps as part of the 1876 reforms—the recruitment and care of students became more formalized. The granting of scholarships (Fr. *bourses*) to all replaced the hundred franc subsidy for the best students.²⁴ Prospective students—chosen by local administrators across Algeria—who passed the entrance examination would be paid a small amount to cover their costs, including room and board and travel to Tlemcen, Algiers, or Constantine. This marked an inversion of previous institutional practice in the Maghrib and elsewhere in the Islamic world,

²⁰ Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*; Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’”; Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*.

²¹ Combes, *Rapport*, 8.

²² ANOM 22S/1, Presidential Decree of 30 September 1850, in Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 252.

²³ For a representative sample, see *Statistique Générale de l'Algérie, années 1867 à 1872* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1874), 41–42.

²⁴ The 1876 reforms institute an entrance examination and age limits for students, but make no mention of *bourses*. The origins of this scholarship regime remain obscure.

whereby students provided their masters with food, other goods, and services in return for their teaching.²⁵

This arrangement benefitted the colonial administration, in that it extended its control over students in a more direct and longer-lasting way. Funding for these scholarships came from a wide array of government bodies, from the Ministries of War and Colonies in Paris to the Government-General in Algiers and departmental subdivisions in Oran, Algiers, and Constantine, down to individual communes. By tying enrollment at the *médersa* to funding from these colonial offices, the administration guaranteed French oversight over the student body from the entrance examinations to the final granting of diplomas. Expulsion and the revocation of scholarships became important tools for managing student behavior and performance. At the *Médersa* of Constantine, for example, several students had been expelled by the mid-1880s for “having taken a bit too much advantage of the liberty given them.”²⁶ There, and in Algiers and Tlemcen, several students had their scholarships revoked for disciplinary reasons or low marks on their exams. Because students were lodged with families or rented rooms in the three cities (a regime called the *externat*, versus an *internat* system with dormitories on school property), the administration’s control over students’ money loomed large in the imposition of colonial discipline.²⁷ This scholarship system became an essential practice of order and a fundamental difference between the *médersas* and older forms of Islamic education in North Africa.

A concurrent development in the institutional practices of order was the creation of a system of examinations. In the *zawiyas* and *madrasas* of the Maghrib prior to colonization,

²⁵ See Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’”; Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 69.

²⁶ Benoist, *De l’instruction*, 29.

²⁷ The *externat* system was formalized in 1886. See Combes, *Rapport*, 82.

successfully memorizing a text was the primary marker of scholarly achievement for a student.²⁸ Only advanced scholars would offer analysis or explanation (*tafsir*) of texts. From their first years of operation, however, the *médersas* instituted examinations for students. These took the form of essays (*rédactions*) and calculations—usually in response to questions about the division of inheritances. Written in Arabic (and, after the 1876 curricular reforms, in French), these essays would be marked, presumably by the professors and perhaps also by French inspectors, with numeric grades and comments. These examinations were a new genre of text and a new method of scholarly assessment. To progress from one year to the next in the *médersa* required passing a comprehensive examination, one that many students failed to pass. Those who failed were either expelled from the *médersa* or required to repeat the year’s program.²⁹

The *médersas* were far not the only institutions that adapted older Islamic traditions to new modes of examination in the early decades of French rule in Algeria. In 1866, following a negotiation of French and Algerian Muslim leaders on what was known as the Gastambide Commission, the Islamic judiciary underwent a standardization that integrated it into the French legal bureaucracy. Among the consequences of this move was that *qadis* received a state salary, becoming part of the system of the *culte officiel*. Another—following objections from al-Makki Ben Badis, a prominent notable from Constantine, to the French favoritism shown towards the *medérsiens*—was to allow students trained in *zawiyas* to compete for positions in the judiciary. (This loophole would be closed by the 1894 Combes reforms, which once again limited the candidate pool for legal positions to *medérsiens* alone.) All candidates were to be subjected to an

²⁸ Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 57–69.

²⁹ Typical examples of these examinations are preserved in ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (I), *Epreuves écrites*, 1858–1859.

examination, a compromise that Allan Christelow attributes to Ben Badis.³⁰ This standardization of Islamic legal knowledge, undertaken under the aegis of the colonial administration, was a remarkable example of negotiation on the part of both colonial authorities and Muslim leaders. Though explicit documentation of these processes of negotiation and examination do not survive for the *médersas*, the process was no less remarkable in those institutions.

These practices—examinations, awarding scholarships and diplomas, and so on—represented the imposition of European practices on Islamic education through the *médersas*. The form of the institutions changed dramatically, but the content remained to a considerable degree consistent with what was taught before the conquest of Algiers. In the decree of 30 September 1850, instruction was limited to three subjects: *tawhid* or theology; *fiqh* or jurisprudence; and *nahw* or Arabic grammar. The order designated that instructors were to be chosen from among the learned people of the cities of Tlemcen, Constantine, and Médéa. It gave no direction as to the content of these courses. It seems likely that, at least initially, the French administrators who oversaw the *médersas* did not intervene to a great extent in their curricular content. The bureaucratic structure was the new element: the *‘ulama* of the great mosques of Médéa, Constantine, and Tlemcen had until 1850 operated independently of one another; after the creation of the *médersas* they were united under a single bureaucratic structure and by the title of *médersa*. The *médersas* thus constituted an institutional innovation by joining the three subjects under a single institutional umbrella, and by creating a new diploma with different qualifications than the earlier tradition of the *ijaza*. But there was no specified curriculum, or reading list, or other mandated oversight of instructional material. The inspections of the *médersas*, carried out by agents of the colonial state—initially by officers of Arab affairs, and

³⁰ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 184–187.

from the 1880s onward by inspectors from the Academy of Algiers—began to change the unencumbered free rein initially given to the nine professors in the three *médersas*.³¹

Reports from the first decades of the *Médersa* of Tlemcen, which unlike the *médersas* of Constantine and Algiers are preserved in consultable archives, indicate the uneven ways in which this model began, and how it developed in the early years after the creation of the *médersas*. In the 1850s, the faculty at Tlemcen included the first director, Si Hamed ben Hamza, and two other professors from the city, Si Miloud ben Nemich and Si Mohammed ben Abdallah. A French interpreter, M. Pilard, rounded out the faculty. The four professors offered several hours of courses per week. Most were oriented towards *fiqh*, following the works of Sidi Khalil (a fourteenth-century Egyptian scholar whose *Mukhtasar*, or handbook of shari'a law, is considered authoritative by Maliki scholars across northwest Africa). In 1858, one inspector from the Bureau arabe noted that there was little interest in the grammar course. For the lack of a qualified professor, no course in theology was offered. To the inspector, this was a positive situation, because Islamic theology would contain anti-Christian elements that could spark the fanaticism of the Algerian youth to act against France's "civilizing activity."³²

Other reports from Tlemcen indicate the development, in fits and starts, of a standardized curricular program. In the final trimester of 1861, a French course was instituted, which students followed "with zeal."³³ The basic content of instruction centered on the legal treatise of Sidi Khalil and some standard works of grammar (see Figure 2.1). No works were listed for the theology course—theoretically on the books but not actually taught—or for the French

³¹ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/1, dossiers I, II, IV, V, VI, and ALG GGA 24S/2, especially dossier IV (Rapports périodiques, Tlemcen, 1857–1882).

³² ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (IV), Rapport trimestriel, médersa de Tlemcen, 30 September 1858. Combes also discusses the question of the theology course in the 1894 report, 46.

³³ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (IV), Rapport trimestriel, médersa de Tlemcen, 24 December 1861. "Zeal," or *zèle* in French, was a term usually reserved for perceived Islamic fanaticism.

instruction. These works—the *Mukhtasar* of Sidi Khalil, the *Ajurrumiyya* of Sanhaji, and the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik in particular—were standard texts studied widely across the Maghrib and elsewhere in the Islamic world.³⁴ Most dated from the medieval period. Their presence suggests the continuity of textual instruction from before the creation of the *médersas*.

Works taught at the Médersa of Tlemcen	Subject
Sidi Khalil, <i>Mukhtasar</i>	fiqh
Commentary by El Kharchi	fiqh
Commentary by Dardiri	fiqh
Sanhaji, <i>al-Ajurrumiyya</i>	nahuw
Ibn Malik, <i>Alfiyya</i>	nahuw
Commentary by Al-Azhari	nahuw
Commentary by Ibn Akil	nahuw

Figure 2.1. Works in the Islamic curriculum, Médersa of Tlemcen, 1864.

When Dr. Perron, the Inspector-General of Public Instruction in Algeria, visited the Tlemcen *médersa* in November 1864, he was pleased with the operation of the school. The results he saw were satisfying, though he recommended one change to the instruction. Specifically, he requested that students in the *nahou* course become more familiar with dictation, *la dictée*, a standard French school exercise. This practice would, he believed, better prepare students for their future positions as scribes or otherwise.³⁵ The next report from the local inspector noted that this recommendation had been implemented.³⁶

³⁴ Many of these works were studied at the Yusufiyya in Marrakesh. See Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 91–95.

³⁵ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (IV), Inspection de 1864 de la Médreça de Tlemcen, 11 December 1864.

³⁶ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (IV), Rapport trimestriel, médersa de Tlemcen, 24 December 1864

The reorientation towards dictation is indicative of a broader characteristic of the *médersa*, especially in its early years. Though the “Franco-Muslim” hybrid character would only be fully developed with the formal addition of a French curriculum, even while the *médersa* retained its original, fully Islamic curriculum, the methods of knowledge transmission changed to fit a European conception of what a school should look like and how a school should operate.

Similarly, the early reports from Tlemcen describe a daily schedule that looked different from a *zawiya* education or other school system in North Africa at the time. Instruction was provided on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday, with the two holy days of Friday and Sunday off. Classes began at six-thirty in the morning and concluded at five o’clock in the afternoon, with half an hour off between noon and twelve-thirty and another afternoon break between two o’clock and four o’clock. The courses altered between Islamic subjects and European ones. The arithmetic course was taught in Arabic by M. Pilard, the military interpreter and part-time (*adjoint*) professor who also taught the rudiments of French reading and writing in the late afternoons.³⁷ (Pilard, in his guise as a military interpreter, made major contributions to the French understanding of the Sanusiyya Sufi order in the southern part of the Oran province. He was the first in a long line of French Orientalists who would teach at the *Médersa* of Tlemcen.³⁸) This daily and weekly schedule would have been alien to the Algerian instructors, and to students who had pursued studies in local schooling traditions.

³⁷ ANOM ALG GGA 24S/2 (IV), Inspection de 1864, 11 December 1864.

³⁸ Jean-Louis Triaud, *La Légende noire de la Sanûsiyya: Une confrérie musulmane saharienne sous le regard français (1840–1930)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1995), 171–193.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:30–8:00 fiqh	6:30–8:00 fiqh	6:30–8:00 fiqh	6:30–8:00 fiqh	–	6:30–8:00 fiqh	–
8:30–10:00 arithmetic	8:30–10:00 arithmetic	8:30–10:00 arithmetic	8:30–10:00 arithmetic	–	8:30–10:00 arithmetic	–
12:30–2:00 nahou	12:30–2:00 nahou	12:30–2:00 nahou	12:30–2:00 nahou	–	12:30–2:00 nahou	–
4:00–5:00 French	4:00–5:00 French	4:00–5:00 French	4:00–5:00 French	–	4:00–5:00 French	–

Figure 2.2 Weekly schedule in Tlemcen, 1864.

By the turn of the twentieth century, after the Combes reforms, the *médersas* had a relatively fixed curriculum. Edmond Doutté (1867–1926), the French sociologist and Orientalist, elaborated on the curriculum in a study of “Algerian Islam” published in 1900. He had been named director of the *Médersa* of Tlemcen in 1898, but in 1900 left to lead a mission to Morocco.³⁹ In the Islamic curriculum, the three original courses—theology, jurisprudence, and Arabic grammar and literature—remained. Of these, theology, restored to its place in the curriculum, took the smallest amount of time: three hours per week for all four years of the *médersa* program. Arabic constituted seven hours per week; the law course varied year by year. Of note is that the French language course took nine hours per week, but French history and geography, French common law, and science courses all amounted to only one or two hours per week.⁴⁰ These breakdowns suggest how educators, administrators, and students prioritized certain subjects.

The theology course was divided in two sections, dogma and ritual. Doutté listed the content of the dogmatic section in the following components: the existence of God; the prophetic mission of Mohammed; and Providence (faith and its works). The ritual section included time

³⁹ Pouillon, ed., *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 310–312.

⁴⁰ Edmond Doutté, *L’islâm algérien en l’an 1900* (Algiers-Mustapha: Giralt, 1900), 151–156.

spent on purifications, including prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and halal alimentary regulations, including the correct way to slaughter animals; moral virtues including charity, chastity, sobriety, and modesty; and social relations between parents and children, and servants and masters.⁴¹ This division of the curriculum was not deeply emphasized, and did not contain deep studies of Islamic thought on these subjects. Indeed, it was unusual for covering material so basic that it would be familiar to anyone raised in a Muslim society. Nevertheless, it stood out against the French secularist tradition and against the assimilationism of the Third Republic in providing such purely religious training to students.

The four-year Arabic language and literature course included studies of both subjects each year. In this field, Doutté provided more specific information, including the main reading sources. These demonstrate a close adherence on the part of the *médersas* to a classical Arabic Islamic curriculum. The grammar course, for example, began with the *Ajurumiyya* of Sanhadji (d. 1324), a classic work of grammar by a Moroccan scholar, and continued with another, the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Malik (d. 1274). Both of these works had been taught since the earliest days of the *médersas*. The literature course covered the major genres of Arabic writing: poetry, both *jahili* (pre-Islamic) and Islamic; history; proverbs; and scientific and literary works from the likes of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, and other major writers.⁴² As with the theology course, the Arabic course reflected existing curricular traditions and did not exhibit a major influence from the French themselves.

⁴¹ Doutté, *L'islâm algérien*, 151–152.

⁴² Doutté, *L'islâm algérien*, 153–155.

The course of *droit musulman*, Islamic law, was most thoroughly delineated because of the médersas' mission of training Muslim magistrates.⁴³ The first year, according to Doutté, covered the sources of Islamic law (the Qur'an, the sunna, and the four legal schools, with special emphasis on the Maliki madhhab and the Hanafi madhhab), and the institution of marriage in Islamic law.⁴⁴ The second year continued the study of marriage, covering the process of divorce and issues related to children (adoption, paternity, guardianship, etc.). The third year focused on commercial law; the fourth year on inheritance.⁴⁵ In each year, students were trained in the differences between Hanafi and Maliki practice; their assignments involved practicing the composition of various documents necessary for these transactions and activities. This syllabus thus reflected the responsibilities attributed to Muslim legal experts in the colonial system, in the official courts, where medérsiens were solely qualified for the posts of *bach-adel*, and *adel* (both positions comprising legal assistant to the qadi and notary).⁴⁶ It is worth noting that this progression matches quite precisely with the generalized *fiqh* curriculum, divided into four quarters and subdivided into 57 "books" or chapters, put together by the Egyptian jurist 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (d. 1565) in his *Mizan al-Kubra*, which combined works from the four main *madhahib*.⁴⁷

⁴³ Aïssa Kadri, "Le droit de l'enseignement et l'enseignement du droit: Contribution à une analyse des fonctions du système de l'enseignement supérieur algérien," thèse de doctorat, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992.

⁴⁴ The Maliki School is the most widespread in northwest Africa; the Hanafi School was the one adopted in the Ottoman Empire. Algiers had both a Maliki and a Hanafi mufti; elsewhere in Algeria Maliki law predominated. See McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 346 (note 59).

⁴⁵ Doutté, *L'islâm algérien*, 152–153.

⁴⁶ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 144–148; Bontems, *Le droit musulman algérien*, 157.

⁴⁷ See Wael Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Appendix A, 551–555.

Allan Christelow, Wael Hallaq, and David Powers, among others, have shown how the extension of colonial control over Islamic legal systems in Algeria and elsewhere—especially India and Egypt, both under British rule—diminished the institutions of Islamic courts and the power of Muslim jurists.⁴⁸ The confiscation of the *habus* (religious endowments, also known as *waqf* outside the Maghrib) in Algeria by the French state exemplifies the ways in which European colonial states extended their powers into realms theretofore under local jurisdiction. Christelow and Hallaq both conclude that the *médersas* served as instruments to delegitimize Islamic legal expertise and power, limiting the knowledge of qadis and other jurists to further weaken indigenous ways of rule. Nevertheless, in terms of educational content, the *médersas* did not change the older curricular content of Maghribi schools.

One innovation the *médersas* brought to Algerian Islamic education was, it seems, the comparative study of Maliki and Hanafi legal traditions. Algerian Muslims, like most of those elsewhere in Northwest Africa, followed the Maliki school. The Ottoman Empire had, however, followed the Hanafi school and had introduced it to Algeria in the sixteenth century. Algiers maintained two muftis, or chief Islamic scholars, one Maliki and one Hanafi, into the French period. By including the legal traditions of both schools in its curriculum, the *médersa* continued this system. There was also some instruction, though not much, in the Ibadi traditions of the Mزاب.⁴⁹

Likewise, the French curriculum added to the *médersas* in the 1890s seems to replicate to a great extent the ways in which French students were taught. The French language program, for

⁴⁸ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 144–148; Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharīʿa*, 432–438; David S. Powers, “Orientalism, Colonialism, and Legal History: The Attack on Muslim Family Endowments in Algeria and India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:3 (July 1989), 535–571.

⁴⁹ Augustin Jomier, “Islām ibādite et integration nationale : vers une communauté mozabite ? (1925–1964),” *Revue des mondes musulmanes et de la Méditerranée* 132 (December 2012), 175–195.

example, progressed from defining words and practicing pronunciation in the first year to studying various genres of French prose and poetry from its origins through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the third and fourth year. The French civilization course began with the Gauls, echoing the stereotypical recitation of “*nos ancêtres les gaulois*” in schools across French-colonized Africa. A course in hygiene, taught by local European doctors in each of the three cities, introduced medérsiens to the basic tenets of the nascent field of public health.⁵⁰

In the Algerian médersas, the content of the Islamic curriculum did not differ significantly from earlier, established traditions of Islamic learning. Nor was the European curriculum adapted to a Muslim audience. The innovation came in the institutional structure: nowhere else were these two curricula combined. At the same time, the médersas changed the methods of Islamic education. In the médersas, subjects were combined and regulated in new ways. Students now studied theology, Arabic, and jurisprudence at the same time, in a set number of hours per week. The médersas also adopted a more strictly delimited curriculum, eliminating some works and introducing others, though this activity was less firmly regulated by the colonial administration. In this sense, the médersas represented a modernization, a Europeanization, of Islamic education. In so doing the colonial administration exerted new powers of surveillance and control over the field and the educators practicing in it. Such a bureaucratization or standardization represented a certain practice of order. Drawing, like Brenner, on Foucault’s notion of an episteme, the Algerian médersas represented an intermediate step in a transition from esoteric to rational; old ways were not suppressed or replaced, but rather introduced into a new system of regulations and oversight.

⁵⁰ ANS J91, Programmes d’études des médersas algériennes, undated (c. 1905). On colonial health and medicine, see Turin, *Affrontements* and, for Senegal, Kalala Ngalamulume, *Colonial Pathologies, Environment, and Western Medicine in Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal, 1867–1920* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

A grainy postcard image (Figure 2.3) suggests what daily life looked like in the médersas. An illustration, it may represent an imagined rather than an accurate vision of the daily goings-on in the médersa. It is also difficult to date the image: it does not closely resemble the interior of the new médersa built in 1905, so it may predate it. The image portrays two groups of students, each sitting on rugs around a turbaned professor in an alcove in an intricately decorated hall. It could be any Islamic school, but for the maps or images affixed to the wall. These are indications of the mixed education in the médersas: French schoolteachers often referred to maps and other teaching aids in their classrooms, but Islamic learning took place without any such tools. This image from Tlemcen shows how forms of European modernity, with surveillance as described by Foucault at its core, and existing North African traditions coincided in the daily life and the learning practices of the medérsiens.



Figure 2.3. Postcard image of the Médersa of Tlemcen (author's collection).

Accommodating the ‘ulama

In addition to molding traditions of Maghribi Islamic learning into European institutional structures, the *médersas* created a new category of intellectual in Algeria. The position of *médersa* professor, depicted by the two turbaned figures in Figure 2.3, became one that enabled certain learned men to act in new ways and engage with new ideas. Many of those employed as *médersa* professors in Tlemcen, Constantine, and Algiers made major contributions to the development of intellectual history in Algeria and in northwest Africa more broadly. This section presents two figures, both professors at the *Médersa* of Algiers, as representative individuals among the larger group. These two are Abdelkader Medjaoui (Abd al-Qadir al-Majjawi) and Mohammed Bencheneb (Muhammed ibn Abi Shanab), each of whom stands out for different reasons but who together exemplify the roles and social stature of the *médersa* professors.

The field of intellectual history in the modern Middle East and Arab world has long focused on elite intellectual figures as individuals and as groups.⁵¹ A good deal of this research concerns Egypt (especially the *ulama*’ of al-Azhar) and the other Arab territories under Ottoman control; as such, these studies conflate the categories of “Arab” and “Muslim,” and focus on elite debates, to the detriment of understanding full intellectual and social dynamics in these multiethnic societies.⁵² In the case of North Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scholars have generally identified three categories of Muslim intellectuals: traditional clerics trained in old ways, modernizers open to new ideas from the West or from other parts of

⁵¹ Some signal contributions to this large field are: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?* trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

⁵² A critique of this pattern rooted in East Africa and drawing on Gramsci’s notion of “organic intellectuals” is Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

the Islamic world, and technocrats who wholeheartedly adopt Western education and ideas.⁵³ In Algeria, most of the third category were educated in French schools such as the *École normale* in Bouzareah or the faculties of law, medicine, or letters that would be combined into the University of Algiers in 1909. In the *médersas*, the first two categories of intellectuals taught alongside one another.

Abdelkader Medjaoui (1848–1914) was one a member of the first category, an “old turban” who nevertheless made significant waves in Algerian intellectual circles. Born in Tlemcen to a prominent scholarly family, the young Medjaoui and his family fled to Tangier to escape colonial rule. (This flight to Morocco presaged the more famous, and larger-scale, exodus of Tlemcen’s leading families in 1911.⁵⁴) In Morocco, he received the standard Islamic education of an *‘alim* (scholar), first in Tetouan and then in Fes, at the Qarawiyyin. In 1870, he moved to Constantine to open a small, independent school, perhaps at the urging of al-Makki Ben Badis.⁵⁵ The Ben Badis family, a prominent lineage in the Constantine region, had resisted the *médersas* and other forms of colonial encroachment on Islamic institutions and traditions; Makki’s son Abdelhamid would go on to found the Association of Algerian Muslim ‘Ulama in 1931. If indeed Medjaoui moved to Constantine because of Ben Badis’s influence, he soon became embroiled in their local struggles against the French for control. He joined the ranks of “official” scholars on the French payroll: in 1873 he was named a *mouderrès*, or religious instructor, in Constantine’s famous Kettani mosque. Five years later, in 1878, he was hired as a professor of

⁵³ See, e.g., Abdallah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain (1830–1912)* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1977); Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*; Rachid Bencheneb, “Le mouvement intellectuel et littéraire algérien à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 70: 258–259 (1983), 11–24.

⁵⁴ Charles-Robert Ageron, “L’émigration des Musulmans algériens et l’exode de Tlemcen (1830–1911),” *Annales* 22:5 (Sept.–Oct. 1967), 1047–1066.

⁵⁵ Allan Christelow speculates as such in *Muslim Law Courts*, 230–233.

Arabic language and literature at the Médersa of Constantine. He would remain in that position for two decades. His trajectory from an independent school to the médersa was in all likelihood part of an effort by the colonial administration to keep a close eye on him. That his erudition could bring prestige and legitimacy to the médersa in the eyes of the local population was a valuable ancillary benefit.

In 1877, just before he was hired at the médersa, Medjaoui published a remarkable pamphlet, in Cairo. The pamphlet was “the first significant expression of Islamic modernism in Algeria [and] a poignant expression of the dilemmas of Algerian cultural and intellectual life under colonial rule.”⁵⁶ In it, Medjaoui called for adopting modern educational practices along the lines of those in Egypt. Doing so, he argued, would strengthen the study of both religion and science, and improve the material condition of impoverished Algerians. Opening Islamic learning up to reason and science was a major tenet of Islamic modernism, a school of thought also known as *islah* or *salafiyya*, which developed in the late nineteenth century among thinkers like Muhammed Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Medjaoui clearly drew upon the Egyptian precedent, but was the first to apply those ideas to the Algerian context. The pamphlet sparked a lively debate in Constantine. A French military interpreter named Arnaud praised it in the administration’s official newspaper as “a useful book.”⁵⁷ This somewhat surprising assessment by a member of the colonial administration prompted, in turn, a curious condemnation by a group of Algerian Muslims who were affiliated with a settler newspaper, *Le Progrès de l’Est*. These anonymous writers objected to Medjaoui’s contention that Algerians spoke a less

⁵⁶ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 231.

⁵⁷ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 231, citing *Le Mobacher*, 12 December 1877.

sophisticated Arabic than their Arab counterparts in the Mashriq, not to any ideological differences about science or modernity.⁵⁸

The pamphlet marked the beginning of what has been called the “little *nahda*,” or renaissance, in the Constantinois region of eastern Algeria.⁵⁹ It was the first articulation of this major strand of Arab-Islamic thought by a Maghribi writer, and it cemented Medjaoui’s place at the center of the intellectual community in Constantine. Scholars have speculated that the furor surrounding the pamphlet prompted the administration to pressure Medjaoui into taking a position at the *médersa*, which he did the year after its publication.⁶⁰ This was likely to be the case: the *médersa* was, after all, an instrument for controlling Islamic learning and Muslim scholars in Algeria. Since the *médersas* had added a French curriculum soon before, in the 1876 reforms, Medjaoui’s openness to modernizing Islamic learning would have made him an attractive hire from the perspective of the colonial administration. Given his interest in the Egyptian model, Medjaoui himself may have been intrigued by the prospect of teaching in the *médersa*.

He taught at the *Médersa* of Constantine for twenty years, primarily Arabic language and literature courses, and gained the respect of both his students and his European colleagues as a great scholar. Though the kerfuffle over the pamphlet did not last long, Medjaoui’s relationship to the population of Constantine remained complicated. According to some, he was respected as a man of the people.⁶¹ In April 1898, however, he was named professor of Qur’anic exegesis and

⁵⁸ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 232.

⁵⁹ Muhammad Ali Dabbuz, *Nahda al-Jaza’ir al-haditha wa thawratuha al-mubarika* (Cairo: al-Matba’a al-Ta’awuniya, 1965).

⁶⁰ Christelow, *Muslim Law Courts*, 232; Dabbuz, *Nahda al-Jaza’ir*.

theology at the newly created Superior Division at the Médersa of Algiers.⁶² Justifying the move to the Governor General, the Rector of the Academy of Algiers, Charles Jeanmaire, explained that Medjaoui had been implicated in intrigues pitting him against an imam in Constantine the year before. “In changing his milieu,” Jeanmaire wrote, Medjaoui could continue to work unimpeded by “cabals” of “intransigent Muslims” such as those who had accused him in this latest affair.⁶³

The machinations and motivations behind Medjaoui’s move to Algiers are unclear. It is possible that he was in real danger from his opponents in Constantine: he is said to have also contemplated going into exile in Morocco or in Libya, where he had family connections to the powerful Sanusiyya Sufi order.⁶⁴ Jeanmaire explained in his letter to the Governor General that he had faced great difficulty in finding a suitable candidate in Algiers for the post at the Superior Division, so the danger of the “cabal” may have been exaggerated to convince his superiors to approve Medjaoui’s transfer. It seems clear that Medjaoui did not request this transfer himself, but the move from Constantine to Algiers proved mutually beneficial—he remained free to teach and publish, while lending prestige to the newly organized Superior Division and to the whole of the médersa project, in the eyes of both French administrators and friendly Algerian Muslims. Medjaoui and the administration were able to negotiate a solution that served both of their purposes.

Medjaoui taught to great acclaim in Algiers until his death in 1914. He continued to publish pamphlets and books that challenged, often in subtle ways, the colonial status quo. One

⁶¹ Somia Oulmane, *Dūr al-shaykh al-Majjawi ‘Abd al-Qadir wa kitābuhu “Irshād al-Mut’alimin” fī al-sumūd al-fikrī bi al-Jaza’ir* (Algiers: ONDA, 2013); interview with Somia Oulmane and Habiba El Kamel, 24 January 2016.

⁶² ANOM ALG GGA 14H/43, Arrêté du Gouverneur-Général, 26 April 1898.

⁶³ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/43, Recteur de l’Académie to Gouverneur-Général, 16 April 1898.

⁶⁴ Interview with Somia Oulmane and Habiba El Kamel, 24 January 2016.

such work was a 1904 pamphlet on Islamic political economy, one of the first works of its kind to be published in Arabic and certainly the first by an Algerian scholar.⁶⁵ And yet he maintained a close relationship with the colonial administration, even going beyond his post at the *médersa*. In 1902, for example, he was praised in the colonial press for hosting a sewing workshop for young Muslim women in his home in the *casbah*.⁶⁶ In 1904, he was named a Knight of the Legion of Honor (*chevalier de la légion d'honneur*), a rare honor for a Muslim Algerian.⁶⁷ At his death, Medjaoui was a major figure in Algeria and among a broader Maghribi Muslim scholarly community. He was prominent enough that his sudden death sparked rumors of a political conspiracy, and even poisoning.⁶⁸

Medjaoui's intellectual production would have been, if not impossible, very difficult without the protection afforded him by his post as a *médersa* professor. This protection worked in multiple directions. If indeed his works and activities prompted threatening reactions from fellow Algerian Muslims, then his affiliation with the administration insulated him from some of those attacks. And in an era when colonial authorities worked to squash any sort of Islamic intellectual innovation deemed dangerous, Medjaoui managed to earn the trust of European administrators.⁶⁹ Unlike some of his colleagues on the *médersa* faculties, however, he chose to retain the personal status of an *algérien musulman* rather than accede to French citizenship. His

⁶⁵ Interview with Somia Oulmane and Habiba El Kamel, 24 January 2016. This work, in Arabic, co-authored by a member of the Ben Brihmat family, and entitled, in French translation, *Economie politique*, was published in Algiers by Fontana in 1904.

⁶⁶ "L'Œuvre de Mme la Comtesse d'Attanoux en Kabylie," *La Dépêche coloniale illustrée*, 31 December 1902.

⁶⁷ This was announced in *Le Petit journal* (Paris), 21 November 1904.

⁶⁸ Interview with Somia Oulmane and Habiba El Kamel, 24 January 2016.

⁶⁹ Allan Christelow, "Intellectual history in a culture under siege: Algerian thought in the last half of the nineteenth century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18:4 (1982), 387–399.

career was one characterized by accommodation and compromise, if not outright collaboration, with the colonial authority.

The life and career of Mohammed Bencheneb (1869–1929), a younger colleague of Medjaoui's, illustrates just how far a médersa professor could advance in the colonial system. Bencheneb was born near Médéa to a rural family with Turkish roots.⁷⁰ He studied first at the French school in Médéa, then at the École Normale in Bouzareah. This nominally would have placed him in the third category of Algerian intellectuals, the *francisants* who were more closely allied with the French than any other group.⁷¹ He taught first at a rural school near Médéa before being named to a French school in Algiers, in the casbah. While teaching there, he pursued further studies at the École des Lettres with such prominent scholars as René Basset and Abdelhalim Bensmaïa. There his erudition became clear: he mastered eight languages (including classical Arabic, French, Hebrew, Latin, Turkish, Farsi, German, and Spanish) and earned several diplomas.⁷²

In 1898, at the remarkably young age of thirty-one, Bencheneb was named professor of Arabic language and literature at the Médersa of Constantine. He replaced Abdelkader Medjaoui, who had just been named to the Médersa of Algiers.⁷³ In 1901, he returned to Algiers himself, replacing Abderrezak Lacheraf (father of the famous medérsien, FLN militant, and historian Mostefa Lacheraf) as professor of Arabic language and literature.⁷⁴ Unlike Medjaoui, whose

⁷⁰ Achour Cheurfi, *La classe politique algérienne (de 1900 à nos jours)*. *Dictionnaire biographique* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2001), 73–74.

⁷¹ Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*.

⁷² Hédi Bencheneb, *Mohamed Ben Cheneb (1869–1929) : un trait d'union entre deux cultures : dossier documentaire et bibliographie* (Paris: Institut du monde arabe, 2004).

⁷³ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/43 (Bencheneb), Recteur de l'Académie to Gouverneur-Général, 24 April 1898.

⁷⁴ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/43 [Bencheneb], Recteur de l'Académie to Gouverneur-Général, 10 October 1900.

transfer was in part a way to protect him from political intrigues, Bencheneb was chosen for the post at the Algiers médersa because he was so respected by the European scholars and administrators who made such decisions. The Rector, Charles Jeanmaire, and the directors of the Constantine and Algiers médersas, Adolphe de Calassanti Motylinski and Gaëtan Delphin, respectively, all ranked Bencheneb as the most qualified candidate for the post. “He is superior to his colleagues in his knowledge and his use of the most rational teaching methods,” Jeanmaire reported to the Governor-General, “and he possesses the culture befitting a médersa professor.”⁷⁵ Bencheneb’s studies in French institutions such as the École des Lettres had earned him the esteem of his European colleagues and superiors. Once returned to Algiers, he began teaching outside the médersa as well. He taught Arabic at the École des Lettres and *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) at the Safir Mosque, one of the casbah’s oldest and most important. His training allowed him to summit to the pinnacle of Algerian academia, appealing to both colonial officials and to his fellow Muslims.

From this vantage point in Algiers, Bencheneb launched into an international career unlike any other Algerian scholar of his day. He published regularly in the preeminent scholarly journals of his day, such as the *Revue Africaine*. Many of his works were translations and commentaries, in French, on Arabic texts by a wide range of Maghribi authors. He also undertook bibliographic projects including an annotated catalogue of manuscripts and books held in important Algerian libraries, including that of the Great Mosque of Algiers.⁷⁶ Other médersa professors undertook similar tasks, but Bencheneb’s scholarly production was more intense than most.

⁷⁵ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/43 (Bencheneb), Recteur de l’Académie to Gouverneur-Général, 22 November 1900.

⁷⁶ Mohammed Ben Cheneb, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes conservés dans les principales bibliothèques algériennes. Grande Mosquée d’Alger (Rue de la Marine)* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1909).

This work brought Bencheneb into contact with the community of European Orientalist scholars, many of whom pursued similar historical and philological studies of Arabic texts and inscriptions. This community spanned the Mediterranean, working both in North Africa and from perches at various European universities. This community of scholars gathered in Algiers in 1905, for the fourteenth Congress of Orientalists. This major conference—the first of its kind held outside the halls of a European university—introduced Bencheneb to the major scholars in this field. At the congress, he examined “the transmission of the collections of Bukhari to the inhabitants of Algiers” in a paper focused on the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a collection of the sayings of the Prophet from the tenth century C.E. (the third century in the Islamic calendar), one of the most important hadith collections in Sunni Islam.⁷⁷ His presentation encapsulates the multiple modes in which Bencheneb operated: a learned scholar of Sunni Islam, schooled in Algerian traditions and French methods, he was comfortable with both European and Maghribi practices of knowledge transmission and scholarship.

After the conference, Ben Cheneb’s career and reputation spread wide. He was sent to Morocco and Tunisia on scholarly missions; he corresponded with Orientalists from Europe and with scholars from the Maghrib, Egypt, Turkey, and beyond. In 1920, he was elected to the Arab Academy in Damascus, the organization founded two years prior and modeled on the Académie Française to regulate Standard Arabic. In 1922, he received the title of *Docteur ès-Lettres* from the University of Algiers (which he helped found), for a thesis analyzing Turkish and Persian

⁷⁷ Mohammed Ben Cheneb, “De la transmission du recueil des traditions de Bokhary aux habitants d’Alger,” in *Recueil de mémoires et de textes publié en honneur du XIVe Congrès des Orientalistes par les Professeurs de l’Ecole Supérieure des Lettres et des Médersas* (Algiers: Imprimerie Orientale Pierre Fontana, 1905), 99–116. Bencheneb was one of two Algerian Muslims published in this book, compared to fourteen Europeans; Saïd Boulifa, the other Algerian Muslim, was a professor at the Ecole Normale of Bouzareah. See also: I. Goldziher, “L’école supérieure des lettres et les médersas d’Alger au XIVe Congrès des Orientalistes,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 52 (1905), 219–236, a review of the compilation cited above by one of the most preeminent Orientalists of the time.

words in the spoken dialect of Algiers.⁷⁸ In 1928, he represented France (and Algeria) at the Seventeenth Congress of Orientalists, held at Oxford; the experience there solidified his reputation as one of the foremost scholars in his field in the world. Upon his death, in February 1929, his colleagues and students remembered him as a scholar who had “remained loyal to his origins.”⁷⁹ He never sought French citizenship or engaged directly in politics, but achieved renown in both the European scholarly community and among Algerian Muslims by pursuing an immensely rich scholarly career, focusing on Maghribi and Islamic subjects within French institutions. The *médersas* where he began his teaching career served as a springboard to that success.

Several other men fit the profiles of Bencheneb and Medjaoui, learned men (whether traditionalists or modernists) who navigated the complex politics of French Algeria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by embracing, to varying extents, the new position of *médersa* professor. This status, which came with a salary from the colonial government and without much refuge from the administration’s watchful eyes, nevertheless allowed some of the professors to grow into major figures in colonial Algeria, and to extend their networks further afield. To name but a few: Abdelhalim Bensmaïa (1866–1933) was one of Ben Cheneb’s professors at the *Médersa* of Algiers and, like Medjaoui, an acquaintance of Mohammed Abduh, the Egyptian reformist. Mohammed ben Mostafa ben al-Khoja, also known as Shaykh al-Kamal, was a contemporary of Medjaoui’s who likewise participated in the Algerian *nahda*, penning a

⁷⁸ Mohammed Ben Cheneb, *Mots turks et persans conservés dans la parler algérien* (Algiers: Flites Éditions, 2009). His other publications include a manual of Arabic grammar, *Az-zaggāgi al-gumal, Précis de grammaire arabe* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1957) and a collection of local proverbs, *Proverbes de l’Algérie et du Maghreb* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003).

⁷⁹ Hédi Bencheneb, *Mohammed Ben Cheneb*, xx.

series of articles for the administration's official newspaper about the rights of women in Islam.⁸⁰ Other professors were part of regional scholarly lineages: Mohammed Saïd Ibnou Zekri (1952–1914) was a Kabyle scholar who became a prominent professor; his son, Ahmed, was the final director of the Algiers médersa when it was transformed into a secular *lycée* in 1951.⁸¹ The Ben Brihmat family—Hassan ben Brihmat and his son Omar ben Brihmat—constituted a dynasty of sorts, both working at the médersas as professors and publishing works for students, such as Omar Ben Brihmat's textbook for the law course at the médersas.⁸² Finally, Mohammed Benmouhoub went from professor at the Médersa of Constantine to Mufti of Paris at the opening of the Paris Mosque in 1924. He too was part of a family dynasty, as other Benmouhoubs passed through Constantine and the Superior Division in Algiers over the course of several decades. In each case, the man's status as a médersa professor solidified his reputation, increased his access to the resources controlled by the colonial administration, and enabled his engagement with intellectual or scholarly pursuits that would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, but for his affiliation with the official school system.

A parallel arrangement employed French Orientalist scholars as médersa professors. At the outset, médersa professors for the French curriculum were selected from the whole cadre of teachers. No explicit policy explains the subsequent shift, which saw those positions go to prominent Orientalists. They, like Bencheneb, often pursued dual careers teaching in the médersas and researching Maghribi history and culture. These scholars took posts at all three of

⁸⁰ This work was printed in *Le Mobacher* from 6 July to 14 December 1895, and reprinted as a book: M. Kamal, Mohammed ben Mostafa ben El Khodja, *Respect aux droits de la femme dans l'islamisme*, trans. M. Arnaud (Algiers: Imprimerie Orientale Pierre Fontana, 1895).

⁸¹ Kamel Chachoua, *L'islam kabyle*; Kamel Chachoua and Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité, *Clercs obscurs. Deux ulémas kabyles dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Algiers: Office des Publications Universitaires, 2015).

⁸² Omar Ben Brihmat, *Manuel de droit usuel et d'instruction civique à l'usage des étudiants des médersas* (Algiers: Imprimerie Orientale Pierre Fontana, 1908).

the Algerian *médersas*, but Tlemcen in particular hosted a large number of French Orientalists. Indeed, like the Ben Brihmat and Ibnou Zekri families, a sort of dynasty arose in Tlemcen: Georges, William, and Philippe Marçais all taught there and, at intervals, served as the *médersa*'s director between 1898 and 1945 (with others interspersed). William (1872–1956) and Georges (1876–1962) were brothers; Philippe (1910–1983) was William's son.⁸³ Other important figures were there as well, including Edmond Destaing (1872–1940), a scholar of Berber linguistics who in 1908 served as the founding director of the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis in Senegal and who became in 1910 the director of the *Médersa* of Algiers. Edmond Doutté (1867–1926), another prominent *islamologue*, also taught at Tlemcen and contributed to the organization of the French protectorate in Morocco.

Alfred Bel (1873–1945), directed the Tlemcen *médersa* longer than any other, from 1905 to 1914, 1916 to 1935, and 1939 to 1940, a total of twenty-nine years. He was also responsible for organizing French education in the region of Fes after the proclamation of the French protectorate in 1912. Remarkably—indeed, uniquely—his wife, Marguerite Sabot, was named interim professor at the *médersa* while one of the other professors was mobilized during the First World War.⁸⁴ At his retirement in 1935, he was praised as the “soul of the *médersas*,” and his departure mourned as a “grave loss for the institution.”⁸⁵ Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes (1862–1957) served as director from 1895 to 1898, before going on to an illustrious career teaching in Paris (at the *École des langues orientales vivantes*), Cairo, and Damascus. Octave Houdas (1840–1916), Gaudefroy-Demombynes's colleague in Paris, was simultaneously the

⁸³ See Eveline Cortet, Michèle Junqua, and Odile Kerouani, eds., *Deux savants passionnés du Maghreb. William et Georges Marçais* (Paris: Institut du monde arabe, 1999).

⁸⁴ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/45/2, Arrêté du Gouverneur-Général, 5 November 1916.

⁸⁵ ANOM ALG GGA 14H/45/2, Recteur de l'Académie d'Alger to Gouverneur-Général, , 5 January 1935.

Inspector of Médersas at the turn of the twentieth century, departing from his post in Paris to survey the three Algerian médersas for periodic reports. Houdas also translated important Sahelian Arabic manuscripts including the *Tarikh al-Fattash* and the *Tarikh as-Sudan*, with the help of his son-in-law, the Africanist-administrator Maurice Delafosse.⁸⁶ Taken together, the European Orientalists on the médersa faculty, at Tlemcen as at Algiers and Constantine, constituted a major intellectual force. Their scholarly output—to which only a few of the Muslim professors, like Bencheneb, contributed—formed the foundation of a whole school of thought, an “Algiers School” of academic Orientalism.⁸⁷

There is an episode that encapsulates the position of the faculty at the three Algerian médersas vis-à-vis broader colonial society and the international scholarly community. In 1903, from late August to early September, the great shaykh Mohammed Abduh, Grand Mufti of Egypt, visited Algiers and Constantine as part of a longer tour of western Europe (his itinerary also included Paris, London, and Oxford). Abduh was at that point at the height of his international fame, and his arrival caused a stir among the Algerian intelligentsia. The visit was made with the support, or at least the passive approval, of the colonial administration, which issued Abduh’s permission to travel and which meant he was forbidden from speaking openly about politics.⁸⁸ In Algiers, he lodged in the casbah home of one of his minders, a nephew of the shaykh and médersa professor Abdelhalim Bensmaia. Many of the details of his visit are

⁸⁶ Abderrahman es-Sa’di, *Tarikh es-Soudan*, trans. Octave Houdas (Paris: E. Leroux, 1898); Mahmoud Kati, *Tarikh el-Fettach*, trans. Octave Houdas (Paris: E. Leroux, 1913); Jean-Loup Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud, eds., *Maurice Delafosse : Entre orientalisme et ethnographie. L’itinéraire d’un africaniste (1870–1926)* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1998).

⁸⁷ See Alain Messaoudi, *Les arabisants et la France coloniale. Savants, conseillers, médiateurs (1780–1930)* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2015), 433–510; Paul M. Love Jr., “The Colonial Pasts of Medieval Texts in Northern Africa: Useful Knowledge, Publication History, and Political Violence in Colonial and Post-Independence Algeria,” *Journal of African History* 58:3 (2017), 448–458.

⁸⁸ Rachid Bencheneb, “Le séjour du šayh ‘Abduh en Algérie,” *Studia Islamica* 53 (1981), 121–135.

sketchy: it is somewhat unclear, for instance, at what point he went to Constantine, and his interactions with the community of Algerian scholars are not definitively described.⁸⁹

Two incidents are recorded. In one conversation, he rebuked Ahmed Ben Brihmat and other members of his family for taking French citizenship. This was, Abduh said, an impossible effort to renounce an identity, part of an impossible assimilation. Islam was an open religion, and being Muslim could mean wearing European dress, living among Europeans, and accepting science. But it could not be renounced as the French required for gaining citizenship under the personal status laws.⁹⁰ The second incident was a two-hour exegesis in an Algiers mosque on 5 September in front of an audience of approximately two hundred students and scholars from across Algeria and Morocco. Based on the *sūrat al-‘asr*, one of the shortest verses in the Qur’an, Abduh connected faith and good works, rooted in the truth of God and patience, to the well-being of the Muslim community. In the contemporary Algerian context, he went on, this meant connecting religious practice to the social and cultural changes inherent in *islah*, his vision of Islamic reform. Through modern education and science, the Algerian Muslim community and the broader Muslim community (Ar. *umma*) could reconcile Islamic tradition with progress without losing the core of a Muslim identity.⁹¹

For those in the audience—who certainly included *médersa* professors such as Medjaoui and Bencheneb—this was a welcome message, one that encouraged resilience in the face of colonial obstacles. Certainly, the *médersas* fit within Abduh’s view of modernizing education, though no exact analogue appeared in Egypt. In the immediate aftermath of Abduh’s visit, his ideas were taken up by Arabic periodicals in the newly expansive journalistic public sphere, and

⁸⁹ Bencheneb, “Le séjour,” 130–132.

⁹⁰ Bencheneb, “Le séjour,” 129–130.

⁹¹ Bencheneb, “Le séjour,” 132–134.

médersa professors and others in the scholarly community continued to advocate for similar approaches. Until the advent of the *medersas libres* of Abdelhamid Ben Badis in the 1930s, however, there was no individual leader or explicit agenda linked to such Islamic reformism.⁹² Abduh's Algerian visit thus sheds light on the particular position of médersa professors: as leading scholars, they were able to engage with the most current and significant intellectual debates of their time. As employees of the colonial administration, though, their ability to speak out was compromised. Traditionalists and modernists alike were secure in their status as Muslims (especially compared to the *francisants* who more fully cast their lot with the colonial administration), but as médersa professors their close affiliation with the colonizers meant that they could not emerge as major political figures. This dilemma was a consequence of the particular path of accommodation that they followed.

Conclusion

The two aspects of the médersas analyzed in this chapter—the development of an Islamic curriculum and the creation of the new position of médersa professor—illuminate the ways in which the three Algerian médersas inserted themselves into the existing social fabric of the Muslim communities where they operated. In other words, they demonstrate two ways in which the médersa was domesticated. In the first case, the Islamic curriculum of the médersas was first lifted wholesale from existing Maghribi educational traditions, and the teaching staff brought in from prominent mosques in the three cities. Gradually, the médersas were molded to a more European model. The curriculum was transformed by the addition of French subjects, though the Islamic curriculum remained much the same. The introduction of modern European

⁹² Bencheneb, “Le séjour,” 135; Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940. Essai d'histoire religieuse et sociale* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967).

educational practices had a greater impact. The trimester system and the school year, the daily schedule incorporating different subjects, and the examination regime all fundamentally changed the structure of a higher Islamic education and its methods of knowledge transmission.

The second aspect, the creation of the post of *médersa* professor, worked in a different direction. By hiring respected scholars, the French administration ensured a certain level of surveillance over a group that could have been subversive. The professors themselves, by accepting that level of surveillance, ensured a certain freedom from persecution and access to new, international networks that linked them to debates in Europe and in the Middle East. This likewise changed the processes of knowledge production and transmission for Algerian intellectuals.

Like the process of accommodation David Robinson describes in Senegal and Mauritania during the colonial period, during which Muslim leaders worked out alongside the colonial administration mutually beneficial ways of sharing power and authority, the changes undergone by the *médersa* underline a process and a pattern of domestication.⁹³ As laid out in the introduction, domestication was a term used by French administrators and scholars, especially in West Africa, to discuss the *médersa*'s role in "taming" Islam, or in reducing its capacity to serve as a realm of resistance to colonial rule. In Algeria, domestication was a process by which the *médersa*, and the Islamic education it provided, became mutually intelligible to Muslim communities and European authorities in the colonial context. By combining "writing boards and blackboards," or modes of teaching from two different epistemological traditions, the *médersas* represented an early effort in the evolution of modern Islamic education in Northwest Africa. As

⁹³ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 1–7.

this chapter demonstrates, it was a collaborative effort, a mutual process of domestication in which both Europeans and Algerians participated.

Chapter 3: From Tlemcen to Timbuktu: The Médersa's Evolution in West Africa, 1900–1922

With his “heart nourished by a steady hope,” Ibrahima Sow wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal with an unusual request in February 1912. The young man from Dakar, then twenty-two years old, asked for a grant to pursue advanced Islamic studies at the Médersa of Algiers.¹ He had earned a diploma the year before from the Médersa of Saint-Louis, one of the first to do so after that médersa's founding in 1908. His former professor Edmond Destaing, by 1912 serving as director of the Algiers médersa, had encouraged him in this endeavor. Despite his powerful benefactor and emotional appeals, Sow's proposal was not approved. In October 1912 he was named a monitor at the French primary school in Louga, on the road between Saint-Louis and Dakar; his name never appeared in the attendance rolls of the Médersa of Algiers.²

This outcome must have been disappointing for Sow, especially because his education at the Médersa of Saint-Louis coincided with the colonial administration's embrace of a strong connection between the médersas of Algeria and the recently organized médersas of West Africa. By the time he sent his letter to the Governor-General, however, that time had passed. French “Muslim policy” was a malleable force in the early years of French empire in West Africa, and changes wrought by administrators shaped both individual lives and institutions, including the médersas.

Four médersas opened in West Africa between 1906 and 1914, part of a larger effort to govern the large and expanding Muslim population of French West Africa. These were located in Djenné (French Soudan), Saint-Louis (Senegal), Timbuktu (French Soudan), and Boutilimit

¹ ANS 1G/52, Ibrahima Sow to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 2 February 1912.

² Sow's posting to Louga appears in the *Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'A.O.F.*, 1912, 15. Attendance records for the Algiers médersa for the 1910s are preserved in the archives of the Lycée Amara Rachid, Algiers, boxes 8 and 9.

(Mauritania). Unevenly, in fits and starts, the *médersa* became an established part of the landscape of power in West Africa in the early twentieth century. Its role differed from that of the Algerian *médersas*, and its practices of order evolved accordingly. In particular, the *médersas* in West Africa were shaped by changeable “Muslim policies” and an increasingly consistent colonial articulation of a racial politics based on European ideas that at times overlapped with local racial discourses. This chapter charts this evolution from a system integrated with Algeria—as Ibrahima Sow believed it to be in 1912—to one distinctly French West African, where the Algerian connections were more tenuous and local imperatives more influential. In other words, this chapter examines how the *médersa* became a “multi-local” institution.

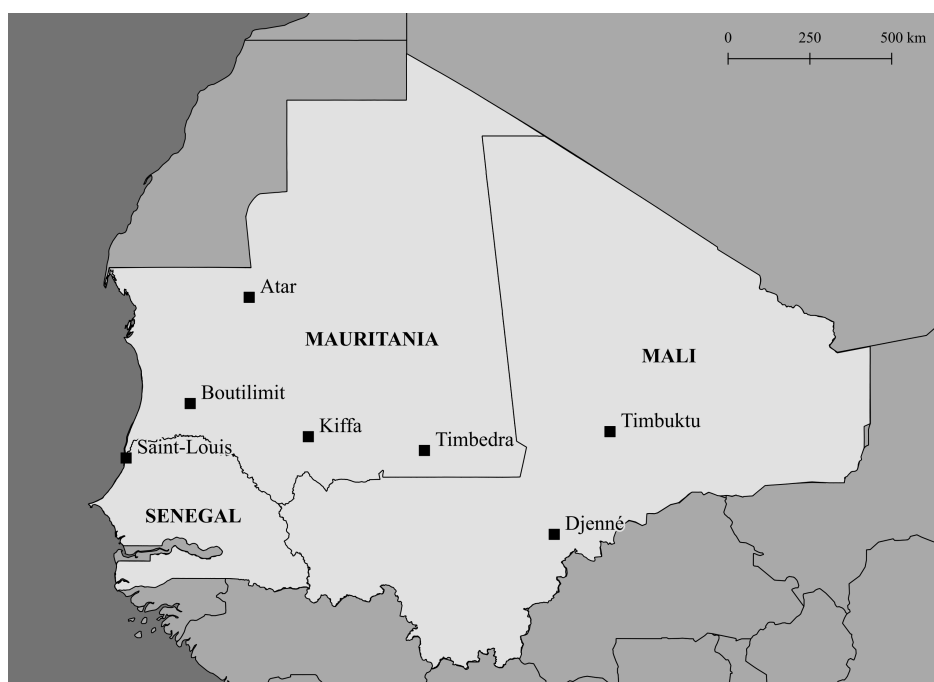


Figure 3.1 The West African *médersas*.

Precedents and Proposals

The French presence in West Africa predated the conquest of Algeria by nearly two hundred years; the practice of Islam in West Africa dates back far further. Just as the *médersa* grew in Algeria out of a context including Amazigh, Arab, and Ottoman influences, in West

Africa the *médersa*'s development took place in a complex historical context. Unlike the three sites in Algeria—which shared many socio-cultural characteristics—the sites in West Africa differed significantly. As such, each *médersa*'s trajectory diverged in particular ways, in keeping with different local contexts and different colonial imperatives.

The great medieval empires of West Africa—Ghana, Mali, and Songhai chief among them—forged connections with the Maghrib and beyond.³ Trans-Saharan trade was a primary vector of this connection, through which slaves, salt, and gold from West Africa traveled north.⁴ Many West African traders converted to Islam, which had by the eighth century become firmly established throughout North Africa. The Almoravid conquest of the Ghana Empire in the eleventh century marked a major turning point in the Islamization of West Africa. The Almoravids brought Maliki legal practice to the southern Sahara and western Sahel, expelling the theretofore dominant *Ibadiyya*.⁵ The successor West African empires also adopted Islam and accrued great wealth as a result. Under the Mali Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Timbuktu and Djenne flourished as centers of Islamic learning. Mansa Musa's famous *hajj* voyage of the 1320s, via Cairo to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, neatly encapsulates both the wealth of West African empires, the importance of Islam to their elite, and the burgeoning interest of West Africa by Europeans and others. Mansa Musa also sponsored

³ See, for example, Michael Gomez, *African Dominion*; John Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghīlī to the Questions of Askia al-Hājj Muhammad* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985); Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey J. Fisher, eds., *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987).

⁴ Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*; Edward William Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors: West African Kingdoms in the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1958).

⁵ See, e.g., Paulo de Moraes Farias, "The Almoravids: Some Questions Concerning the Character of the Movement," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, série B, 29:3–4 (1967), 794–878; on broader changes in this period and region see E. Ann McDougall, "The View from Awdaghust: War, Trade and Social Change in the Southwestern Sahara, from the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 26 (1985), 1–31, and Timothy Cleaveland, *Becoming Walata: A History of Saharan Social Formation and Transformation* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

students who traveled to study in Fes.⁶ Through trade networks and migrations, Sufi orders, especially the Qadiriyya, spread throughout the region. The Kunta clan was particularly important in establishing centers of Qadiri learning from the sixteenth century on, from the Niger Bend to Senegambia, the Futa Jallon, and Mauritania.⁷ Other Sufi orders arose in the region, such as the Tijaniyya in Saharan Algeria in the 1780s.⁸ Until the Moroccan invasion of 1591, Timbuktu and to a slightly lesser extent Djenne remained intellectual capitals of western Africa; even after their ensuing decline, the region's reputation for learning and riches extending to Europe.⁹

Timbuktu's purported wealth spurred European exploration to the interior of western Africa.¹⁰ Prior to the voyages of René Caillié, Heinrich Barth, and other European adventurers in the first half of the nineteenth century, much of the European presence in western Africa had been limited to the coast. This was the case from the late fifteenth century, when advances in maritime technology first allowed European ships to traverse Cape Bojador in what is now Western Sahara, through the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In 1659, French sailors established a trading post at Ndar, at the mouth of the Senegal River, and christened it Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal. More trading posts were founded along the Senegal River—in Rosso, Podor, and Boghé, among others—and along the Atlantic coast. Saint-Louis and a cluster of three posts

⁶ Gomez, *African Dominion*, 156–158.

⁷ Ira Lapidus, *A History of Muslim Societies* 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 409.

⁸ Jamil Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya*; Jean-Louis Triaud and David Robinson, eds., *La Tijâniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

⁹ Elias Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 130–147; Seydou Cissé, *L'Enseignement islamique en Afrique Noire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 13–21.

¹⁰ William B. Cohen, "Imperial Mirage: The Western Sudan in French Thought and Action," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7:3 (December 1974), 417–445.

on the Cap-Vert peninsula—Dakar, Rufisque, and Gorée—became known as the Four Communes, where distinct métis communities grew out of the intermarriage of European men and local women.¹¹ In 1848, under the Second Empire, those born in the Four Communes were granted French citizenship. This included the African *originaires* and métis communities, though full exercise of the rights of citizenship was difficult and it was only in 1914 that a black politician, Blaise Diagne, was elected to the French Chamber of Deputies.¹² This unusual situation with regards to the personal status of residents of the Communes persisted throughout the colonial period; although Algeria was nominally part of metropolitan France, residents of these four Senegalese communities had greater rights and representation than the vast majority of Algerians.

Senegal and Algeria experienced similar developments in “Muslim policy” and institutional practices from the mid-nineteenth century on. Soon after the creation of the *médersas* in Algeria in 1850, government-sponsored Muslim institutions arose in Senegal as well. In 1857, Saint-Louis’s Muslim community convinced the governor Louis Faidherbe (1818–1889) to create a Muslim Tribunal modeled on the Algerian precedent after twenty years of petitions.¹³ Parallel debates over law, citizenship, and Islam endured in both colonies throughout the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Similarly, millenarian movements and *jihads* such as the war of al-Hajj Umar Tall (c. 1794–1864) deployed Islamic rhetoric and strategies to resist European

¹¹ Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*, 19–40.

¹² G. Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971); Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 138–161.

¹³ Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa*, 11–23; Ghislaine Lydon, “Droit islamique et droits de la femme d’après les registres du Tribunal Musulman de Ndar (Saint-Louis du Sénégal)” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 41:2 (2007), 289–307.

¹⁴ Christelow, “The Muslim Judge and Municipal Politics.”

encroachment throughout West Africa, as in the Maghrib.¹⁵ Faidherbe's dictum that Senegal should "be no more than a sub-division of Algeria" influenced French "scholar-administrators" in Senegal for decades.¹⁶ In much scholarship of West Africa, Algeria is acknowledged as a vague precedent for French policy and practice. The *médersas* show, however, that the connections were far more direct than usually acknowledged.

In the late nineteenth century, especially following the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, the French began military campaigns to conquer the West African interior as part of the so-called Scramble for Africa. Costly in terms of lives and money, the conquest never achieved the promised *pax gallica* but did formalize French rule over a vast territory that linked Mediterranean Algeria with the Bight of Benin, and stretched from the Atlantic coast of Senegal to Lake Chad.¹⁷ The region comprised nine colonies (Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, the French Soudan, Niger, Upper Volta, the Ivory Coast, Benin, and Togo), and was united into an administrative unit, French West Africa (*Afrique Occidentale Française*, or AOF) in 1895 with its capital in Saint-Louis. The conquest sparked widespread social upheaval, often with unintended consequences. One of these was the widespread conversion to Islam by emancipated former slaves, especially in the savannah and forest zones of what is today southern Mali, northern Côte d'Ivoire, and eastern Guinea, where Muslim communities had not yet taken root.¹⁸

¹⁵ Robinson, *Holy War*.

¹⁶ Faidherbe cited in Harrison, *France and Islam*, 15.

¹⁷ A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 142–173.

¹⁸ Brian Peterson, *Islamization from Below: The Making of Muslim Communities in Rural French Sudan, 1880–1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

French colonial policy, and especially Muslim policy, had to respond to this changing situation, which entailed both overt and more subtle forms of resistance.¹⁹

The formation of the colonial administration in AOF occurred in tandem with the application of French republican discourses of civilization and religion. The “civilizing mission,” as in Algeria, was closely tied to education. In West Africa, the application of these ideas differed from the Algerian case, largely because of race and despite the shared Islamic practices of the colonized populations. Before the First World War, especially, education was considered part of a broader program of *mise en valeur*, making West African territories productive and profitable. Mass education on the French metropolitan model was in theory ideal, but in practice impossible given limited resources and African resistance.²⁰ The Government General, which moved in 1902 from Saint-Louis to Dakar, settled for an initial effort training specialized intermediaries in the urban centers of the Senegalese coast. This effort comprised a “decade of reorganization” of colonial schooling, centered in Senegal but radiating throughout AOF.²¹ These new schools included an *école normale*, founded in 1903; a school for naval mechanics, created in 1907; and a secondary school with roots dating back to the 1820s but formally reorganized in 1903.²² Missionary schools, run by orders known as the Ploërmel Brothers and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny, were first organized in Saint-Louis in the 1830s but were shuttered following laicization measures, also in 1903.²³ The discourse of a civilizing mission

¹⁹ See, e.g., Yves Person, *Samori: Une révolution dyula* (Dakar: Institut fondamental d’Afrique noire, 1968).

²⁰ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 73–141.

²¹ Bouche, *L’enseignement*, 703.

²² Bouche, *L’enseignement*, 502–558.

²³ Bouche, *L’enseignement*, 93–214.

never had the far-reaching impact it claimed. Rather, the education system primarily worked to train a small class of French-speaking intermediary figures.

French education was often coercive. Indeed, one of the first European schools in Saint-Louis was known as the School of Hostages. Created in 1855, during Faidherbe's tenure, the school hosted—or held—the sons of hereditary chiefs from the Senegalese interior who had capitulated to the French, and trained them to be friendly interlocutors when they assumed power themselves.²⁴ This institutional model was replicated elsewhere in West Africa, most notably in Kayes (French Soudan); it was also reminiscent of early French efforts to send the sons of Algerian notables to be educated in France in the 1830s and 1840s. The colonial presence asserted itself even in schooling for non-elite social classes, especially in the form of surveillance. In Senegal and elsewhere, the French administration sought to insinuate French influence through elementary education, in the *daara* schools where children memorized the Qur'an under the tutelage of local marabouts, or Sufi teachers. A series of regulations, dating from the Faidherbe period in the 1850s to the 1910s, proved the limitations of French influence: requirements mandating French instruction and the joint enrollment of students at Qur'anic schools and French schools all failed to achieve their desired results.²⁵ Indeed, as Kelly Duke Bryant has argued, French incursions into Islamic education in Senegal had the unintended effect of mobilizing Muslim participation in colonial politics.²⁶ Debates over Islamic and colonial education illustrate how discourses of race, religion, and civilization intersected with the

²⁴ See Yves Hazemann, "Un outil de la conquête coloniale : L'École des otages de Saint-Louis," *Contributions à l'histoire du Sénégal*, Cahiers du Centre de recherches africaines no. 5 (1987), 135–160; B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin, "Education for Colonial Dominance in French West Africa from 1900 to the Second World War," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7:2 (June 1974), 347–356.

²⁵ Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 49–69; Bouche, *L'enseignement*, 704–717.

²⁶ Duke Bryant, 49–69.

practical requirements of training an intermediary elite. The *médersas* are one example of how these debates—and imperfect French understandings of West African societies—were enshrined in certain institutions, which in turn shaped the lives of colonized West African Muslims.

Three scholar-administrators were instrumental in introducing the *médersa* to West Africa and situating it within the new “Muslim policy” of the colonial administration. The first was Octave Houdas (1840–1916). He was the Inspector of *Médersas* in Algeria and a professor of Arabic at *École des Lettres* in Algiers, who had also made forays into studies of West African Islam.²⁷ Houdas was also a mentor to William Marçais, future director of the *Médersa* of Tlemcen, and father-in-law to Maurice Delafosse, a colonial ethnologist who was instrumental to defining French ideas of African culture.²⁸ In April 1899, Houdas suggested to the Minister of Colonies that several “young Soudanese” should be sent to the *Médersa* of Algiers. There they would “find an education as useful for us as for them when they return to their homeland.”²⁹ Allowing some young West Africans to study in the Algiers *médersa* “could have positive consequences in minimizing the dangerous agitations in our possessions in the Soudan,” he suggested.³⁰ In other words, *médersa* studies could help “domesticate” Islam in West Africa by training friendly intermediaries who would take a leading role in defanging the more “fanatic” Muslims there. Houdas claimed to have the support of the Governor-General of Algeria, but he gave no indication of correspondence with officials in AOF itself. Louis Archinard (1850–1932), who led the conquest of the French Soudan, did send Houdas a copy of the *Tarikh as-Sudan*

²⁷ Pouillon, ed., *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 497–498.

²⁸ See Amselle and Sibeud, eds., *Maurice Delafosse*.

²⁹ ANOM Séries Géographiques Soudan/X/4, Houdas to Ministre des Colonies, 17 April 1899.

³⁰ ANOM Séries Géographiques Soudan/X/4, Houdas to Ministre des Colonies, 17 April 1899

around this time, so it is tempting to speculate that the idea sprang from that connection.³¹ Nevertheless, this proposal never gained much traction among administrators in the Government-General or the various West African colonies, and it was never enshrined in official policy. Over the next decade, at least two Senegalese students—the brothers Bokar Amadou Ba and Mamadou Ba—would travel to Algeria, study at the Médersa of Algiers, and return to careers in colonial service as teachers and interpreters, largely in Mauritania, but they were rare examples of this practice and the reasons behind their voyage are obscure.

Others soon suggested bringing Franco-Muslim education to AOF territory itself. Xavier Coppolani (1866–1905), architect of the French “pacification” of Mauritania, proposed in 1904 that France organize “three or four Franco-Muslim universities” in AOF.³² Coppolani’s career was, like Houdas’s, rooted in the Maghrib and in Algeria in particular. He had co-authored what was considered a definitive study of Sufi orders in North Africa.³³ In 1902, Coppolani had been tasked with the conquest of the Saharan regions of Trarza, Brakna, and Tagant, which would become southern Mauritania; in May 1905 he was assassinated by a group of Moors at Tidjikdja, a Tagant oasis. His proposal for “Franco-Muslim universities” the year before his death drew on his North African knowledge and indeed cited his work on Sufi orders at length. He drew the attention of the Governor-General to the power of the *zawiya*, the shrines to Sufi saints that appeared across Muslim northwest Africa. The *zawiya* could become, Coppolani argued, a “Franco-Muslim” site through the creation of adjacent service centers where the colonial administration could provide medical care and education to locals and pilgrims. Such centers, jointly French and Muslim, would “make [the Muslim population] love the Government...at the

³¹ Pouillon, ed., *Dictionnaire des orientalistes*, 497–498.

³² ANS J91, Coppolani to GGAOF, n.d. (1904).

³³ Octave Depont and Xavier Coppolani, *Les confréries religieuses musulmanes* (Algiers: Jourdan, 1897).

same time and in the same place that the imam recites prayers.”³⁴ According to Coppolani’s proposals, one such center would be in the Adrar region of Mauritania, to harness the prestige of *Bilad Shinqit* and its intellectual heritage among Muslims.

Coppolani’s interpretation of northwest African Islamic practice justified the strategy of building Franco-Muslim educational institutions in the Sahara and AOF. In North Africa, administrators like Houdas feared that anti-colonial religious “fanaticism” was fostered through Islamic education. South of the Maghrib, Coppolani wrote, the situation was different. In his view, black populations in West Africa had “more religiosity than religion,” and Saharan Moors had “an eclecticism unknown in Morocco, Algeria, or Egypt.”³⁵ This made those populations easier to manipulate. In his view, effective surveillance over Qur’anic schools was impossible to achieve; his imagined medical and educational centers and “Franco-Muslim universities” would better accomplish the colonial goal of shaping Islamic education and practice. His death meant that his proposals went unrealized, although the “pacification” of Mauritania continued into the 1930s.³⁶ Though he did not explicitly refer to the Algerian *médersas*, with which he was undoubtedly familiar, he nevertheless presaged their arrival in West Africa by advocating for a Franco-Muslim educational institution. By aligning patterns of religious practice and belief with racial categories, Coppolani’s proposal also foreshadowed the various local adaptations that the *médersas* would undergo in AOF following similar logic.³⁷ Even his suggestion of *Bilad Shinqit*

³⁴ ANS J91, Coppolani to GGAOF, n.d. [1904].

³⁵ ANS J91, Coppolani to GGAOF, n.d. [1904].

³⁶ See the memoir of the military leader Général Gouraud, *Mauritanie, Adrar: Souvenirs d’un Africain* (Paris: Plon, 1945). Another of Coppolani’s heirs was Henri Gaden. On Gaden’s role in AOF, see Roy Dilley, *Nearly Native, Barely Civilized: Henri Gaden’s Journey through Colonial French West Africa (1894–1939)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

³⁷ See also ANOM Séries géographiques MRT/IV/1, Coppolani, Rapport interministérielle sur le nord-ouest-africain, 14 October 1901.

as a potential site for one of these institutions would bear fruit decades later with the creation of a médersa in Atar in 1933. In the years after Coppolani's death, his supporters sought repeatedly to name a street after him in Paris.³⁸ His influence in Mauritania was more fundamental, and more long-lasting.

The most explicit advocate for the médersa model of Franco-Muslim education was named Antoine Mariani. He was an obscure figure whose personal information went unrecorded in the archives. Mariani traveled throughout AOF as Inspector of Muslim Education at the turn of the twentieth century, tasked with the surveillance of Qur'anic schools and gathering information on marabouts and other Muslim leaders. He was the first to hold the post, created in 1908.³⁹ Affiliated with the *Service des Affaires musulmanes*, an office of the Government General created in 1906, Mariani corresponded regularly with the Governor-General in Dakar and the Lieutenant-Governors of the various colonies through which he passed. He traveled widely across French West Africa, covering urban and rural zones alike.

During his visits to Guinea in 1907 and 1909, Mariani was shocked to observe the extent of Islamic education across the colony.⁴⁰ The Fulbe population of the Futa Jallon, in the highlands of the Guinean interior, had been Islamized in the seventeenth century and stood geographically, socially, and politically apart from the rest of the territory.⁴¹ It had also been the stronghold of Samori Toure, whose Wasulu empire was one of the fiercest anti-colonial forces in

³⁸ ANOM FM EE/II/852/4 (Coppolani), Préfet du Département de la Seine to Ministre des Colonies, 14 June 1912.

³⁹ Arrêté du Gouverneur général concernant le recrutement des fonctionnaires de l'Enseignement musulman, 6 June 1908, *Journal officiel de la Guinée Française*, 1908, 627.

⁴⁰ Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 460–462.

⁴¹ On the Futa Jallon's place in Guinea, see John Fredrick Straussberger, III, "The 'Particular Situation' in the Futa Jallon: Ethnicity, Region, and Nation in Twentieth-Century Guinea," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2015.

West Africa until his defeat in 1898.⁴² Mariani, wary of the power of Muslim resistance to French rule, proposed the *médersa* as a solution over the course of several reports written between 1907 and 1910. In these reports, he emphasized the political outcomes the *médersa* would foster rather than the practical steps needed to achieve those goals. He wrote that a *médersa* would “canalize” Islam in the region, allowing the colonial administration to guide its development and negate the potential for Samori’s heirs to stage further challenges to French rule.⁴³ He was confident that this “laicization” of Islamic education would only have happy results.⁴⁴ Mariani proposed several sites for this Guinean *médersa* over the years. His most consistent choices were Labé, the main city of the Futa Jallon, and Touba, a smaller town to the west.⁴⁵ The Lieutenant-Governor of Guinea, Victor Liotard, who served in that position from 1908 to 1910, rejected the idea of any official embrace of Islamic education or practice. His preferred Muslim policy was constant surveillance of the various “Muslim personalities” of the region in an effort to track and control their influence.⁴⁶ These opposing approaches to Muslim policy could be attributed, in the Guinean case, to the recent struggle with Samori, and indeed no *médersa* would ever open in Guinea. Engagement and surveillance would, however, continue to be the two poles around which the debate over Muslim policy revolved, across AOF and throughout much of the colonial period.

Mariani’s proposal for a Guinean *médersa* coincided with a broader surge of interest in the *médersas* across AOF, one that made direct institutional connections between West and

⁴² Person, *Samori*.

⁴³ ANS J12, Mariani to GGAOF, Rapport sur le cercle de Ditinn, 8 Dec. 1910.

⁴⁴ ANS J12, Mariani, Note sur l’inspection de l’enseignement, Guinée Française, 20 April 1907.

⁴⁵ ANS 7G/70, Mariani reports of 28 July 1909, 27 July 1910, and August 1910.

⁴⁶ ANS 7G/86, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Guinée to GGAOF, 13 July 1909.

North Africa. This period lasted between 1906 and 1908. During this time, the Governors-General Ernest Roume (1858–1941), Martial Merlin (1860–1935), and William Ponty (1866–1915) conducted extensive correspondence with French diplomats and officials across the Muslim world with questions about educational strategies. Roume wrote to the Director of Education in Tunisia—a French protectorate since 1886—to ask about the so-called *medersa ta'adibiyya* which had opened in Tunis in 1894.⁴⁷ Organized to train teachers for “official” local Qur’anic schools, this institution would have appealed to those administrators in AOF who sought intensive oversight of marabouts and their schools.⁴⁸ Indeed, Roume inquired about the question of “how far to intervene in the training of a corps of marabouts, of nearly official character.”⁴⁹ This telling remark suggests how far the administration in AOF considered extending their oversight of elementary Islamic education. Without using the exact terminology of the Algerian *culte officiel*, officials in AOF replicated the idea.

In 1907 and 1908, Roume and his successors sought information about British and Egyptian efforts to modernize al-Azhar and other educational institutions in Egypt.⁵⁰ They would also correspond with a French consul in Constantinople who sought information about *médersas* in 1908. In one letter to the consul, Ponty described his satisfaction with the two *médersas* currently open (in Saint-Louis and Djenné) and mentioned that he intended to open a third, in

⁴⁷ ANS J91, GGAOF to Directeur de l’Enseignement en Tunisie, September 1906.

⁴⁸ Tunisia’s experience of Franco-Muslim education differed significantly from both Algeria’s and AOF’s. These “official” Qur’anic schools persisted into the 1940s—there was no equivalent of this in either Algeria or AOF. See CADN Tunisie 1TU/1V/2492 and Tunisie 1TU/1V/2831; see also Nouredine Sraïeb, “L’idéologie de l’école,” 239–254. Tunis also had a secular Franco-Arab high school, the Collège Sadiki, that, like the Ecole normale in Algiers and the Ecole William Ponty at Gorée, birthed an important bicultural colonial elite. See Nouredine Sraïeb, *Le Collège Sadiki de Tunis, 1875–1956 : Enseignement et nationalisme* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1995).

⁴⁹ ANS J91, GGAOF to Directeur de l’Enseignement en Tunisie, September 1906.

⁵⁰ ANS J91, Correspondence between GGAOF and Consul de France en Egypte, 10 March 1907 and February 1908.

Guinea.⁵¹ That letter captured a particular moment in the early history of the *médersas* in AOF: the Guinean *médersa* would never open, and Ponty would soon sour on the whole idea of Franco-Muslim education. In 1911, he banned the use of Arabic in official documents across AOF, arguing that Arabic was a “foreign language” across the federation.⁵²

The clearest example of a North African connection, and another about-face on the *médersa* idea, came in 1906. In that year, when the first *médersa* opened in Djenné and the Saint-Louis *médersa* was approved, Joseph Clozel (1860–1918), then Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d’Ivoire, traveled to Algeria to study the three *médersas* there. During his voyage, Clozel visited Algiers, Constantine, and Tlemcen where he was impressed by the successful operation of Algeria’s Franco-Muslim education. In his report, he wrote that regrettably it would be too expensive to replicate the magnificent new *médersas*, just inaugurated in Tlemcen and Algiers, in Djenné or Timbuktu. Budgetary challenges notwithstanding, Clozel concluded that “our path is clear”: the Algerian *médersas* were a model worth emulating exactly in AOF.⁵³ He went so far as to praise individual professors and encouraged the Governor-General to hire one in particular as a professor in AOF. That professor, Edmond Destaing (1872–1940), taught the sciences at the *Médersa* of Tlemcen and would indeed be hired as director of the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis in 1907. More generally, Clozel recommended replicating the policies and procedures currently in use in Algeria (after the Combes reforms), in such realms as recruitment and promotion, in West Africa.⁵⁴ Clozel would go on to lead the colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger (the French Soudan),

⁵¹ ANS J91, GGAOF to Interprète de l’Ambassade de France à Constantinople, 16 October 1908.

⁵² Ponty’s decision was entitled “Circulaire no. 29 au sujet de l’emploi de la langue française dans la rédaction des jugements des tribunaux indigènes et dans la correspondance administrative,” 8 May 1911, *Journal Officiel du Sénégal*, 1911, 346–347. See also Lydon, “Obtaining Freedom,” 139–140.

⁵³ ANS J91, Clozel, *Rapport sur les médersas algériennes*, 1906.

where, by 1910, he would come to oppose the continuing operation of the *médersas* in Djenné and Timbuktu. The next section considers how that reversal came about.

Soudan: Djenné and Timbuktu

The Djenné *médersa* was created on 4 July 1906, with the express dual intention of developing Muslim education in the city by training the teachers in Qur’anic schools and giving the region’s young Muslim elite the “correct views” of France’s civilizing role in Africa.⁵⁵ The choice of Djenné as the site for the *médersa* was never clearly explained in its foundational documents, although its symbolic value—in a city renowned across West Africa for its famous Great Mosque and its scholarly reputation—seems undeniable. Indeed, the year after the foundation of the *médersa*, the colonial administration oversaw the reconstruction of the Great Mosque after centuries in disrepair.⁵⁶ Despite this effort by the administration to embrace the city’s Islamic heritage, both the local townspeople and the local French officials seem to have reacted negatively to the *médersa*’s presence, though for different reasons. The townspeople rejected the professors, many of whom were outsiders, as drunkards; the administrators thought the *médersa* drained too many resources and did not provide any benefits.⁵⁷

In accordance with Clozel’s recent recommendations, the Djenné *médersa* closely resembled its Algerian antecedents in structure. The instructional content comprised a French curriculum including “practical notions of France’s civilizing role in Africa and of course the

⁵⁴ ANS J91, Clozel, Rapport sur les *médersas* algériennes, 1906.

⁵⁵ ANS J94, Arrêté créant une *médersa* à Djenné, 4 July 1906.

⁵⁶ Jean-Louis Bourgeois, “The History of the Great Mosques of Djenné,” *African Arts* 20:3 (May 1987), 54–63 and 90–92.

⁵⁷ Bouche, *L’Enseignement*, 728–732. This opinion was also reproduced in a contemporary travel account. See Félix Dubois, *Notre Beau Niger* (Paris: Flammarion, 1911), 205–221.

goal of colonial expansion.”⁵⁸ The Islamic curriculum encompassed Arabic grammar “according to the methods adopted in Algeria”; Islamic jurisprudence; interpretations and commentaries on Qur’anic exegesis; “lessons on the history of Arab philosophical schools”; and a theological course “following the *Risāla* of Shaykh Abduh as taught in the Algerian *médersas*.”⁵⁹ This latter work was presumably the *Risāla al-tawhid*, published by the Egyptian reformist Mohammed Abduh in 1897.⁶⁰ The teaching staff was enumerated as follows: “a Muslim professor...charged with the Muslim curriculum,” a native assistant (Fr. *moniteur*) from Djenné, “chosen among the Muslims who are literate and support our cause,” and a Frenchman to teach the French curriculum.⁶¹ This decree was promulgated by William Ponty, then Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger and future Governor-General of AOF. His design of the *médersa* was more or less explicitly copied from the Algerian model, especially in its Islamic curriculum, though its teaching staff was more modest.

The Djenné *médersa* also began a tradition that would be much further developed in other West African *médersas* in later years: the hiring of Algerian *medérsiens* as professors. In the case of Djenné the professor charged with the Islamic curriculum was a certain Mohammed Merzouk, a Tlemcen native and a graduate of that city’s *médersa*.⁶² How and why he came to West Africa is unexplained in the archives, but for several years before and after the founding of the Djenné *médersa* he taught in several schools in the French Soudan. In any case, he was well-regarded by

⁵⁸ ANS J94, Arrêté créant une *médersa* à Djenné, 4 July 1906.

⁵⁹ ANS J94, Arrêté créant une *médersa* à Djenné, 4 July 1906.

⁶⁰ I have not seen reference to this work being taught in the Algerian *médersas* although Abduh’s 1903 visit to Algeria would have meant it was familiar to many *medérsiens*. If indeed this work was taught in Djenné and elsewhere in West Africa, it demonstrates the *médersa*’s central role in spreading *istlah* in West Africa.

⁶¹ ANS J94, Arrêté créant une *médersa* à Djenné, 4 July 1906.

⁶² ANOM FM EE/II/1377/16, Notice individuelle, Mohammed Merzouk, 31 October 1910.

some of his French superiors. William Ponty, for example, wrote a glowing report of Merzouk in particular after a visit to the Djenné médersa in 1907.⁶³ Merzouk had begun to preach occasionally at the city's great mosque, garnering a following among the city's Muslim population. Along with his teaching responsibilities, Merzouk had, according to Ponty, contributed to the spread of positive French influence in the city. Not all Merzouk's reviewers were so kind, however: in 1910, an education inspector named Méray concluded that Merzouk's mediocre teaching had contributed to the decline of the médersa, which was in his view no longer worth its expense to the colony. Méray also reported a widespread rumor from Djenné that despite his frequent appearances at the mosque, Merzouk was secretly a Christian.⁶⁴ By 1911, Merzouk returned to Algeria to work not in education but as an *adel*, an assistant in the official Islamic court system, in the town of Ammi Moussa in the Rélizane district of western Algeria.⁶⁵ That same year, the administration of AOF decided to close the Djenné médersa. In the eyes of the responsible administrators, it was too costly and did not produce satisfactory graduates.⁶⁶ Merzouk's departure and the médersa's closure also coincided with Ponty's elimination of Arabic in official documentation in AOF. The era of enthusiasm for médersas in West Africa had come to a sudden close.

That same year, however, administrators in Haut-Sénégal et Niger opened another médersa in the colony, in Timbuktu. Timbuktu, of course, had been a major Saharan commercial and intellectual center since the medieval period. Though it had declined somewhat in

⁶³ ANS J94, Ponty, Note au sujet de la médersa de Djenné, 11 May 1907.

⁶⁴ This rumor is cited in Bouche, *L'Enseignement*, 728–732; see also ANS J94, Méray, Rapport sur la médersa de Djenné, 23 February 1910; ANOM SG SOUD/X/7, Inspecteur de l'Enseignement musulman to GGAOF, 15 January 1908 and n.d. (1908).

⁶⁵ ANOM FM EE/II/1377/16, Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie, nomination Merzouk, 8 September 1911.

⁶⁶ ANS J94, GGAOF, Note au sujet de la suppression de la médersa de Djenné, 1911.

importance by the early twentieth century it was still a major symbolic site in the French colonial imagination.⁶⁷ With the city's symbolic place firmly established in the minds of administrators, their goals for the *médersa* were explicitly political. Clozel—author of the 1906 report endorsing the *médersa* idea for AOF and by 1910 the Lieutenant-Governor of Haut-Sénégal et Niger—wrote to the Governor-General in Dakar arguing that a *médersa* in Timbuktu would be a way “to control indirectly the actions of indigenous teachers and to manage part of the French instruction of their young students.”⁶⁸ This effort to quietly insert French instruction into Timbuktu's scholarly traditions was in the end unobtrusive. The French *médersa* in the city was named the Sankoré, after the Sankoré mosque that had been the center of the intellectual life of Timbuktu for centuries. The French effort to affiliate European education with the Sankoré would not be a runaway success by any means, dogged by criticisms by administrators and rejected by the city's population. It would, however, far outlast the Djenné *médersa*.

Like its counterpart in Djenné, the Timbuktu *médersa* was subject to administrative disputes from its earliest years. These debates were rooted in different opinions about France's *politique musulmane* and, more explicitly than in Djenné, about the racial comparison between *medérsiens* in Algeria and West Africa. Antoine Mariani, the inspector of Islamic education and proponent of the Guinean *médersa*, visited Timbuktu in 1911. In his report on the *médersa*, he recommended immediate reforms to bring the *médersa* more in line with the Algerian model. He wanted to emphasize Islamic subjects rather than French language courses, and encouraged the replacement of the first director. That director, Ali ben Ahmed Mohamadi, was an Algerian

⁶⁷ Shamil Jeppie and Souleyman Bachir Diagne, eds., *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town: HSRC, 2008); Saad, *Social History*; Cohen, “Imperial Mirage.”

⁶⁸ ANS J94, Clozel to Ponty, Analyse au sujet de la Médersa de Tombouctou, 14 October 1910.

interpreter, like Merzouk in Djenné; he was also rumored to be a drunkard.⁶⁹ Mariani, then, continued to argue that in Timbuktu as elsewhere the Algerian model was the best path forward for the West African *médersa* system.

Clozel rejected Mariani's suggestions. Clozel's understanding of the Muslim communities he governed had clearly changed in the four years since his Algerian report, and he accused Mariani of misunderstanding the local conditions in Timbuktu. He asked why the administration should seek, through the potential Islamic curriculum of the *médersa*, to "to infuse a hostile force with new vigor," referring to Islam.⁷⁰ Clozel went on to enumerate reasons why the Algerian *médersas* were not useful in the Soudan: Arabic was nothing but scholarly language; Islam was a foreign religion; the colony did not need so many Muslim functionaries; too many French administrators trained in Algeria sought to apply that knowledge without adapting it to the local context. Moreover, "the Algerian *médersas*, being designed to receive Arabs, have nothing in common with ours [in Soudan] that instruct young blacks."⁷¹ Using racial language to separate blacks from "white" Arabs would become a constant trope in French critiques of the *médersas* in Timbuktu and elsewhere in West Africa. While Clozel's relatively abrupt shift from embracing to rejecting the Algerian model is surprising, it is unsurprising that Timbuktu—a point of contact between the Soudan's "white" and "black" populations—was where this racial language emerged.

Though Mariani remained a powerful voice in French Islamic policy in West Africa, in the case of the Timbuktu *médersa* he lost the debate. Clozel's vision of a political, rather than pedagogical, *médersa* won out. Unlike in Djenné, the *Médersa* of Timbuktu continued to operate.

⁶⁹ Bouche, *L'enseignement*, 732–736; ANS J94, Mariani rapport, March 1911. Mohammedi's personnel file contains a receipt for household goods, including a significant amount of alcohol: ANOM FM EE/II/2547/9, 30 June 1911.

⁷⁰ ANS J94, Clozel to GGAOF, 14 May 1911.

⁷¹ ANS J94, Clozel to GGAOF, 14 May 1911.

In 1914, the position of director went to a former missionary, a White Father named Auguste Dupuis, who had left the church and taken the local name Yakouba.⁷² He remained for about two decades, keeping the school open but out of the maelstrom of administrative debate and disarray. Under his leadership, the médersa oriented itself more towards the education of the “white” nomadic populations of the region.⁷³ In the late 1910s, the médersa began to offer instruction in both Hassaniyya Arabic and Tamashek, the Berber language of the Tuareg, to better cater to those non-black populations.⁷⁴ This reorientation, away from “black” and toward “white” students, is consistent with the médersa policies in Senegal and Mauritania during the same period. It also helps explain why Brenner, in his study of Malian schooling, concluded that the médersa had such a minimal impact on Muslim society.

Senegal: Saint-Louis

Saint-Louis was the capital of Senegal and of French West Africa until 1902; it remained capital of Mauritania until 1957. As such, the city hosted a wide range of colonial institutions, including a variety of schools, many dating from Faidherbe’s tenure as governor, which lasted from 1852 to 1865. Chief among these was the *école des otages*, later renamed the *école des fils de chefs*, where the sons of Wolof and Fula leaders who had capitulated to the French were sent to learn to speak French and to guarantee the political cooperation of their families.⁷⁵ Most, if not

⁷² On the famous personality of Dupuis-Yakouba, see Owen White, “The Decivilizing Mission: Auguste Dupuis-Yakouba and French Timbuktu,” *French Historical Studies* 27:3 (summer 2004), 541–568. The White Fathers, founded in Algeria in 1868, had operated in Timbuktu since 1895. See Leonhard Harding, “Les écoles des Pères Blancs au Soudan Français, 1895–1920,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 11:41 (1971), 101–128.

⁷³ Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 41–49.

⁷⁴ Arrêté créant un cours de tamachek à la médersa de Sankoré, 12 April 1917, *Journal Officiel du Haut-Sénégal et Niger*, 1917.

⁷⁵ Bouche, *L’enseignement*, 321–356.

all, of these students were Muslim, but Islamic education was not emphasized in the French school. (At least on one occasion, in 1893, some of them were sent to study at a Franco-Arab *lycée* in Tunis.⁷⁶) An *école normale* was also created to train Africans as teachers for regional schools. A large number of *daaras*, small Qur’anic schools, also operated in Saint-Louis. Faidherbe and his successors sought to impose various regulations on these schools, like limiting their operating hours to the morning and evening and requiring French training for the *marabouts* who taught in them. Fearing their potential as sites of resistance, Faidherbe instituted a large-scale but largely ineffective surveillance regime monitored the *daaras*, which had the unintended consequence of expanding Muslim engagement in colonial politics.⁷⁷ Islamic education and French education were bifurcated into these separate institutions until the creation of the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis.

Officially declared in 1906 but soon delayed, when the Saint-Louis *médersa* finally opened in 1908 it was closely connected to the School for Sons of Chiefs. The two schools shared a building, a two-story European structure in the Sor quarter, near the bridge connecting the mainland to the older city on the island of Ndar (Figure 3.2). The sons of chiefs and the *medérsiens* shared classes in the French curriculum. This arrangement was not long to last: in June 1909, the School for Sons of Chiefs was closed, rendered obsolete by the French abolition of hereditary chieftaincy in Senegal.⁷⁸ Administrative attention turned to the perceived Islamic threat posed by the *marabouts*: Mariani’s plan to create an “official corps of *marabouts*,” friendly to the French colonial mission, came to the fore.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ M’bayo, *Muslim Interpreters*, 81.

⁷⁷ Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 49–69.

⁷⁸ ANS O173 (31), Arrêté supprimant l’école des fils de chefs, 9 June 1909.

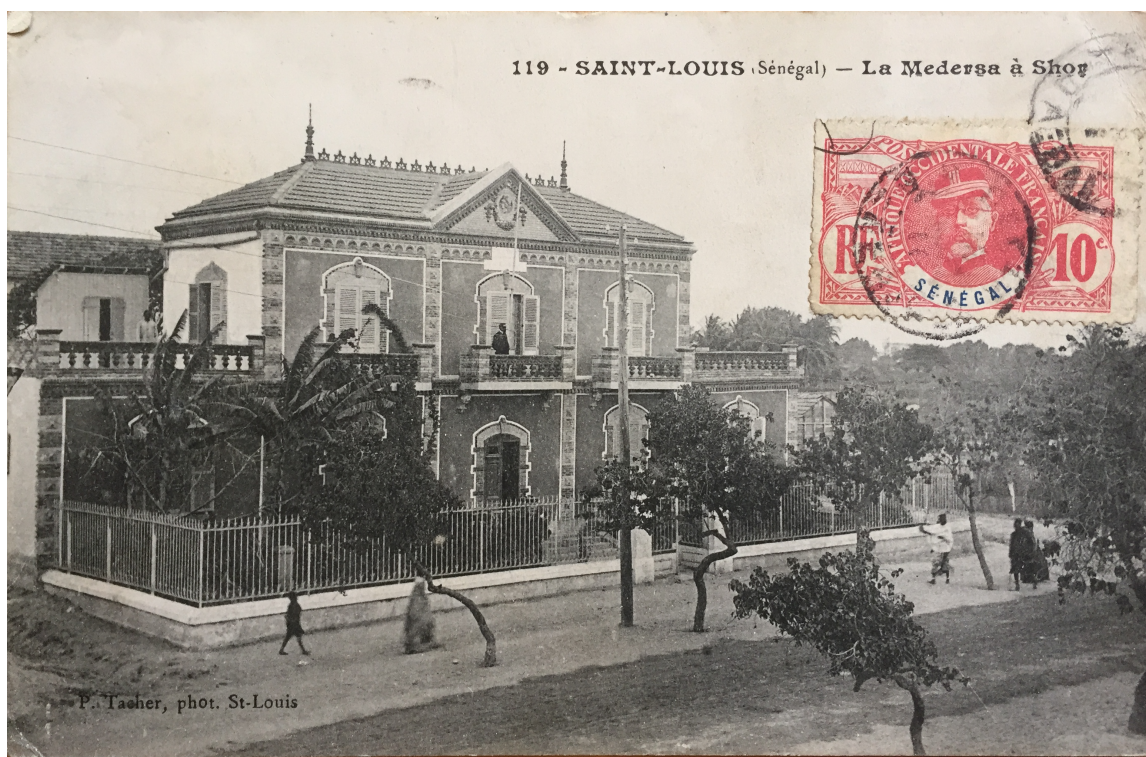


Figure 3.2. Médersa of Saint-Louis, c. 1915. Postcard from author's collection.

To accomplish this task, the administration recruited a faculty familiar with the médersa project. The médersa's first director was Edmond Destaing, a young professor at the Médersa of Tlemcen and a linguist specialized in North African dialects of Arabic and Berber. Clozel had noted Destaing's promise in his 1906 study visit to the Algerian médersas and proposed recruiting him to direct a médersa in West Africa. Despite his displacement from the Maghrib, in Saint-Louis Destaing was surrounded by Algerians. The professor of Arabic grammar, Nacef Bokhary, had taught in schools across AOF after graduating from the Médersa of Tlemcen. The first professor of Islamic theology and jurisprudence was Abdallah Benmansour, another graduate of the Médersa of Tlemcen. Benmansour died in 1909 and was replaced at the médersa by Souleyman Seck. Seck, son and brother respectively of the interpreters Bou El Mogdad and

⁷⁹ ANS J92, Mariani to GGAOF, 10 November 1906. See also Harrison, *France and Islam*, 57–67.

Doudou Seck, would be named qadi of the Saint-Louis Muslim Tribunal in 1911.⁸⁰ Ahmed Benhamouda, a Cherchell native who graduated from the Médersa of Algiers, would also teach at the Médersa of Saint-Louis in the early 1910s. The médersa's teaching staff also drew from the Muslim elite of Saint-Louis, but initially a greater number of professors came from Algeria and from the Médersa of Tlemcen in particular.

Despite the médersa's close connection to the School for Sons of Chiefs, the practices of student recruitment differed from other colonial schools in Senegal. Initially, prospective students had to pass an entrance exam. This was also the practice in Algeria, where médersa graduates with the post of *mouderrès* directed talented boys towards the médersas. French Senegal lacked that level of bureaucratic organization, so recruitment remained a challenge in the médersa's early years. The exam itself posed problems: it examined students in Arabic and in French, neither of which was widely spoken among the predominant Wolof, Halpulaar, or Fula communities of Senegal.⁸¹ By October 1909, a preparatory course was launched to provide a basic instruction in the two languages.⁸² Recruitment in the early years of the médersa was a jumble of policies and practices, some from Algeria and others resembling the School for Sons of Chiefs, as the ideal of replicating the Algerian model clashed with local practices and realities.

The médersa's students came from across Senegal, and from points even further afield. Their numbers were initially small, but grew to over one hundred in the following years. Destaing and his successors kept inconsistent records indicating the origins—by turns ethnic,

⁸⁰ On this important family of interpreters and intermediaries, see Saliou Mbaye, "Personnel Files and the Role of Qadis and Interpreters in the Colonial Administration of Saint-Louis, Senegal, 1857–1911," in Lawrance et. al., *Intermediaries*, 289–295. See also M'bayo, *Muslim Interpreters* 39–55.

⁸¹ ANS J92, Arrêté créant la Médersa de Saint-Louis, 15 January 1908.

⁸² ANS J92, GGAOF to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, Organisation définitive de la médersa de Saint-Louis, 12 October 1909.

regional, and familial—of the students, but certain patterns are discernable. In 1908, Destaing provided brief reports on 31 of his students, indicating a breakdown of fifteen Wolof students, eleven Tukolor (Halpulaar), one Peul and one Moor. Of this group, two were from Nioro, in the upper Senegal Valley in the neighboring colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger, and one from Souet el Ma, a settlement in the central Trarza region of Mauritania. Only four students came from Dakar and four from Saint-Louis, the main urban centers of French Senegal. The remainder of the Senegalese students were from the towns along the Senegal River, the *escales* where the French had long established trading posts. Some came from ruling families, but Destaing listed most as the sons of poorer marabouts or farmers.⁸³

In early 1909, before he returned to Algeria as the new director of the Médersa of Algiers, Destaing made a tour of the coast from Saint-Louis south to Dakar, what had been the kingdom of Cayor. His reports on the region's Qur'anic schools noted the names of talented students who could be recruited to the médersa—an echo of the mouderrès's task in Algeria. He stopped in both larger towns, such as Tivaouane, Thiès, and Rufisque, and in smaller villages, including Kelle, Mekhé, and Sebikotane.⁸⁴ Many of those names he noted in his report later appear in the médersa's attendance records. His outreach effort seems to have been successful: a total of 56 students attended the médersa in the 1909–1910 school year, including nine from Mauritania, two from Haut-Sénégal et Niger, and eleven from Senegal's southern Casamance region. The Senegal River Valley remained the largest source of students that year, with twenty-

⁸³ ANS J93, Notes sur les élèves, 15 June 1908.

⁸⁴ ANS J86, Destaing, Rapport sur les écoles coraniques, undated [1909].

seven from the *cercles* of Dagana, Podor, Matam, and Salde, compared with six from Saint-Louis and only three from Dakar.⁸⁵

The effort to recruit a wide range of students continued past Destaing's departure and past the disruption of the First World War, which closed the *médersa* from 1914 to 1916. A report from 1917 lists, out of a total of 136 students, sixty-eight funded by the administration of Senegal, thirteen by Mauritania, and one by Haut-Sénégal et Niger, along with forty-nine *élèves libres*, locals who did not require government assistance to cover their living expenses.⁸⁶ Requests for study grants arrived from colonies as distant as Côte d'Ivoire, though these were rarely successful.⁸⁷

One particular case demonstrates the extent of the *médersa*'s influence during this period. Over five thousand kilometers east of Saint-Louis, in October 1911, Dudmurrah, the sultan of Wadai, capitulated to the French. A Sahelian sultanate neighboring Dar Fur, Wadai attracted attention from the French, as well as the British and the Ottomans, each seeking to shore up their spheres of influence in central Africa.⁸⁸ The question of what to do with the sultan's three young sons (Bachir, Ourada, and Abougrin) prompted a flurry of correspondence among French administrators and diplomats in Fort-Lamy, Brazzaville, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, Paris, and Dakar. The three *fils de chef* could have joined a considerable number of their compatriots studying at Al-Azhar, or perhaps could have studied under closer surveillance in French schools in Tunisia

⁸⁵ ANS J92, Rapport sur la Médersa, 19 April 1910.

⁸⁶ ANS J92, Rapport sur le fonctionnement de la Médersa, 3 September 1917.

⁸⁷ ANS 1G/50, Mademba Guèye to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 7 September 1911. This *fonctionnaire* requested a place for his son at the Médersa of Saint-Louis and had the support of the Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d'Ivoire, but his son's name does not appear in the *médersa*'s records.

⁸⁸ Mostefa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 61–79.

or Algeria. Ultimately, these administrators decided that the Médersa of Saint-Louis “offered the best home for their intellectual and moral development,” far from the “militant Mahometanism” of North Africa.⁸⁹ The three princes traveled to Saint-Louis in 1913. They remained there, along with two “servants” named Hanoun and Izrik, until at least 1919.⁹⁰ This consensus, reached by administrators from colonies and consulates across the French empire in Africa, suggests how important the Médersa of Saint-Louis was to French Muslim policy. It also how central racial discourse was to this strategy: the “Wadai princes” were sent to Saint-Louis explicitly because they were black Muslims, because their education depended on remaining among their fellow *noirs*.⁹¹

Amid this broad and seemingly successful effort to enroll a broad range of students in the Saint-Louis médersa, the Moors posed a vexing problem. Their numbers remained low, despite the proximity of Saint-Louis to the Trarza and Brakna regions and despite the ongoing support of Shaykh Sidiyya Baba for the French colonial cause.⁹² For example, in November 1912, a young man named Mohamed Saloum Ould Ahmed Abdelaziz, from Port Etienne (now Nouadhibou), arrived in Saint-Louis. That same month, a Moor named Mustapha Ould Zeidane was expelled for reasons unrecorded.⁹³ Others left suddenly without explanation: December 1911 saw two Moors, Mohamed El Habib and Ahmedou Ould Lamana, quit their studies and return to their

⁸⁹ CADN Le Caire 353PO/2/87, Ministre des Colonies to Ministre des affaires étrangères, 19 May 1913.

⁹⁰ ANS 1G/59, Ministre des Colonies to GGAOF, 27 December 1912; ANS 1G/59, Note au sujet du jeune Izrik, 23 January 1919. Izrik, one of the two servants, left Saint-Louis in 1919 on a ship bound for Matadi, in the Belgian Congo, on his way back to Wadai.

⁹¹ CADN Le Caire 353PO/2/87, Ministre des Colonies to Ministre des affaires étrangères, 19 May 1913.

⁹² Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 178–193.

⁹³ ANS 1G/50, Col. Mouret to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 5 November 1912.

families in Mauritania.⁹⁴ Administrators in Mauritania, charged with recruiting students, found the task difficult. One wrote, in 1911, that although many parents and children had a “very real desire” for French instruction, they rarely overcame their “repugnance” for the black population of Saint-Louis or their discomfort with the city’s humid climate.⁹⁵ This explanation could not have been a full one, as *bidan* Moors lived among blacks in Mauritania and many traveled regularly to Saint-Louis and the Senegal River basin. The *médersa* of Saint-Louis could not, in its early form, solve the particular problem of extending French education to the Moors.

Reforming the *médersa*’s structure was an ongoing process: a committee of local notables (*comité de perfectionnement*) met regularly to suggest changes. One of the realms in which this adaptation was clearest was the *médersa*’s curriculum. The question of curriculum was central and had broad repercussions within the institution for students, teachers, and administrators. It became the primary mode of engaging racial and religious questions in Saint-Louis, more so even than student recruitment, and it is through the curriculum that the impact of *islam noir* is clearest.

Initially, the Saint-Louis *médersa* replicated exactly the curricula at the three Algerian *médersas*. In their earliest discussions of creating the *médersa* in Saint-Louis, French administrators and the city’s Muslim leaders alike envisioned a seamless connection between *médersas* north and south of the Sahara. The best students from Saint-Louis, like their compatriots in Constantine and Tlemcen, would complete a higher education at the Superior Division of the *Médersa* of Algiers before returning to Senegal as “excellent professors of the

⁹⁴ ANS 1G/50, Lt. Patey to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 12 December 1911.

⁹⁵ ANS J22, Rapport sur l’enseignement, 1911.

Islamic sciences.”⁹⁶ Under Destaing and his successor Charles Manenti, the Islamic curriculum matched the Algerian *médersas*’ work for work. *Medérsiens* read Ibn Malik’s *Alfiyya* and Sanhaji’s *Ajurumiyya* in Arabic grammar classes, and Sidi Khalil’s *Mukhtasar* and the commentaries of Mohammed Abduh in Islamic law classes.⁹⁷ Given the shared mission of the Algerian and Senegalese *médersas*, and the Algerian experience of Destaing, Bokhary, and many other professors, this initial close connection made sense.

In autumn 1912, a new director challenged that logic. Jules Salenc, a schoolteacher who had taught in several secular French schools in Algeria, began to change the curriculum immediately after his arrival in Saint-Louis. He quickly convinced his superiors in the colonial administration of his reforms’ merits: only three weeks elapsed between his first report suggesting curricular changes and an order formalizing them.⁹⁸ He oversaw a dramatic reshaping of the *médersa*’s programs, especially a drastic reduction in the Islamic curriculum. The courses in theology and Qur’anic exegesis were excised completely; Islamic law shrank significantly but remained officially present. Secular materials including the “Thousand and One Nights” and the *Rihla* of Ibn Battuta replaced overly religious texts used in the Arabic language course. Salenc justified these changes by appealing to Islamophobic fears that the *médersa* could spread dangerous Islamic influence without any benefit to the administration.⁹⁹ This move came shortly after Governor-General William Ponty’s pivot to a *politique des races* and his 1911 ban on using

⁹⁶ ANS J92, Procès-verbal de la réunion préparatoire en vue de la création à Saint-Louis d’une *médersa*, 19 February 1906.

⁹⁷ ANS J93, Règlement intérieur de la *Médersa* de Saint-Louis, 9 March 1909; ANS 1G/48, Règlement intérieur, plan d’études et programmes de la *Médersa* de Saint-Louis, 25 October 1912.

⁹⁸ ANS J92, Salenc to Chef du Bureau Politique, 4 October 1912; ANS 1G/48, Arrêté réorganisant la *médersa* de Saint-Louis, 25 October 1912.

⁹⁹ ANS J92, Salenc to Chef du Bureau Politique, 4 October 1912.

Arabic in official documents. The creation of an “official corps of marabouts,” only a few years earlier the médersa’s primary purpose, had disappeared from official discourse in Senegal.

Salenc reoriented the médersa toward the training of interpreters. The Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal, Henri Cor (1864–1932), supported this project, writing to the Governor-General of his desire to move the médersa “in all ways in a more practical direction.”¹⁰⁰ Salenc’s decision to reduce the Islamic curriculum, and Cor’s support for his reforms, mean that the linguistic proportions of the médersa’s instruction inverted. Under Destaing, the médersa had provided forty-five hours of instruction per week in Arabic, and twenty hours of French. Under Salenc, Arabic instruction shrank to twenty-eight hours, while French grew to forty-four hours.¹⁰¹

If, after these reforms, the médersa’s Arabic professors would have had more spare time, the medérsiens would have had much less. Salenc introduced training in “regional dialects,” or rather several of the languages spoken in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone. With a basic knowledge of Wolof, Serer, and Pulaar, medérsiens would be better prepared to serve the colonial administration in any part of Senegal. (It is worth noting that Salenc never envisioned training in Hassaniyya, the Arabic dialect spoken by the Moors in the region.) To accomplish this goal, Salenc made older students responsible for teaching their mother tongues to their classmates. In 1913, for instance, Salenc praised a fourth-year student named Amadou Alpha for his work teaching Pulaar.¹⁰² In the same report, however, he went on to question if such a multilingual curriculum was “beyond the intellectual aptitude” of his students.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ ANS J92, Cor to GGAOF, 6 November 1912.

¹⁰¹ Babacar Mbengue, “L’enseignement de l’arabe dans le système scolaire colonial du Sénégal,” mémoire de maîtrise, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1993, 81.

Under Salenc, the *médersa* lost much of its unique “Franco-Muslim” character, instead coming to resemble other French schools in West Africa. Questioning the capacity of black students, in particular, for the *médersa*’s complex course of study earned him the approbation of Paul Marty, the new Director of Muslim Affairs in AOF and the major proponent of *islam noir*.¹⁰⁴ Marty arrived in AOF from Tunisia in 1912, and he would go on to publish a series of extensive studies of Islam in the West African colonies. Salenc and Marty published a book together, joining together a report on the *médersa* from 1913 and a report on Qur’anic schools in Senegal from the same year, in one of the first clear articulations of *islam noir*. Salenc is not so well remembered as Marty because he published less, but his influence is clear. His tenure at the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis demonstrates how *islam noir* came to be institutionalized in West Africa.

Salenc was mobilized during the First World War; in 1918 he directed a technical school in Gorée and in 1919 he moved to direct the *collège musulmane* in Fes. In this move from Senegal to Morocco he preceded both Marty himself and the more well-known education inspector Georges Hardy.¹⁰⁵ His successor at the *médersa* was Charles Mercier, a young professor who had taught at the *Médersa* of Constantine. Like Salenc, Mercier sought to reorient the *médersa* soon after his arrival. Unlike Salenc, Mercier advocated returning to the Algerian model. This effort fared poorly. In consultation with René Basset (a linguist, Orientalist, and dean at the University of Algiers, with no expertise in West Africa), Mercier proposed several

¹⁰² Jules Salenc and Paul Marty, *Les écoles coraniques du Sénégal - La Médersa de Saint-Louis* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1914), 19.

¹⁰³ Salenc and Marty, *Les écoles – La Médersa*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ On Marty’s career, see Arthur Pellegrin, *Un Africain: Le Lt.-Colonel Paul Marty, Sa vie et son Œuvre (préface de Louis Massignon)* (Tunis: Édition de la Kahina, 1939); and Pessah Shinar, “A Major Link Between France’s Berber Policy in Morocco and Its ‘Policy of Races’ in French West Africa: Commandant Paul Marty (1882–1938),” *Islamic Law and Society* 13:1 (2006), 33–62.

¹⁰⁵ Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul*, 61–87.

reforms. Among them was the standardization of the *brevet de langue arabe*, an Arabic language certificate and, he proposed, a teaching credential for médersa professors in Algeria and AOF. Imposing this requirement in Senegal would, Mercier argued, transform the médersa from the “excellent primary school” it had become into “a Muslim university [*une faculté musulmane*]...of primary value to our work of colonization.”¹⁰⁶ He would have reversed several of Salenc’s reforms by increasing the number of hours devoted to Arabic instruction and by focusing recruitment efforts on the “maraboutic lineages” of the region.¹⁰⁷ Implicitly, Mercier suggested a return to the ideal of an official marabout corps, an echo of the Algerian *culte officiel* he knew well.

Salenc, asked to review these proposals, made his displeasure clear. In a response double the length of Mercier’s initial document, Salenc attacked both this new idea of the médersa and the qualifications of its new director. Apparently, Mercier was unaware of even basic regulations governing the médersas in Algeria and in Senegal. The Algerian médersas had never awarded an Arabic *brevet* diploma, despite Mercier’s claims to the contrary; a recommendation to focus recruitment on students in their mid-teens had in fact already been a policy for nearly a decade. Most damningly, Salenc accused Mercier of being ignorant of the difference between the two colonies. “We are not in Algeria,” Salenc wrote, “and it would be desirable for M. Mercier to realize this as soon as possible.”¹⁰⁸ He went on: “any less superficial study of black Islam [*l’islam en pays noir*] would have shown him the problems with the ideas he proposed: excellent, perhaps, in Algeria, but completely useless and even dangerous in Senegal.”¹⁰⁹ To Salenc and

¹⁰⁶ ANS J92, Mercier to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 29 May 1919.

¹⁰⁷ ANS J92, Mercier to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 29 May 1919.

¹⁰⁸ ANS J92, Salenc to Chef du Service des Affaires Civiles, 30 June 1919.

increasingly to other administrators in Senegal, the North and West African cases were fully incompatible. Mercier, freshly arrived from Algeria, did not understand his new context, and his proposals were rebuffed. He returned to Constantine the next year, having made a negligible impact on the *médersa* in Saint-Louis.

The figure of Jules Salenc is intimately tied with the evolution of the Saint-Louis *médersa*. During his tenure there, the *médersa* shifted from an institution dedicated to the creation of an Algerian-style Muslim intermediary class to a secularized center for the training of interpreters. It is unsurprising that Ibrahima Sow's hopes to study at the *Médersa* of Algiers were quashed during Salenc's time in Saint-Louis. Salenc actively participated in the articulation of *islam noir* as a guiding principle in French "Muslim policy" in Senegal and oversaw its institutionalization at the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis. Though his name is not recalled alongside Paul Marty's, William Ponty's, and Robert Arnaud's in the annals of French Muslim policy in West Africa, his work at the *médersa* upended the "landscape of power" in colonial Senegal, redrawing the possibilities and the limitations placed on the *medérsiens*, privileged intermediaries in the colonial system.

Salenc's writing also reveal a subtle influence on his racial thought from the Moors he encountered in Saint-Louis. His 1913 report on the *médersa*, published alongside one of Marty's reports on Qur'anic schools in 1914, cites Moorish racial ideas as evidence of a particular "black Islam." He wrote: "the Moors...declare bluntly that the black's brain is absolutely refractory to Islamic dogma. It is the same for the grammatical studies that are so advanced among the Moors. The extreme subtlety of [Arabic] morphological and syntactical gymnastics is outside the intellectual capacity of the black."¹⁰⁹ He concluded that the sort of Islamic study that had been on

¹⁰⁹ ANS J92, Salenc to Chef du Service des Affaires Civiles, 30 June 1919.

offer at the médersa was foreign to “the mentality and the traditions” of “our Senegalese of all races.”¹¹¹ This conclusion echoed colonial conceptions of race, especially blackness, in the Niger Bend and elsewhere in West Africa that coalesced during this period.¹¹² Salenc’s transformation of the Saint-Louis médersa, and his recourse to the racial rhetoric of the *bidan* Moors, illustrates how local notions of race became ensconced in colonial institutions.

Mauritania: Boutilimit

During Salenc’s tenure in Saint-Louis, another médersa opened in the northern part of the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone, in Boutilimit. This was in keeping with a consensus among administrators, especially those in Mauritania, that the *bidan* would only accept French schooling in the *pays maure* of the desert. Unlike the far-flung correspondants who debated the model to adopt in Saint-Louis, in the case of the Boutilimit médersa the focus remained resolutely on Mauritania, and on the southern Trarza and Brakna regions in particular. It too evolved over the course of the 1910s, through a process of negotiation that reflected changes in colonial society across southern Mauritania.

The central figure in the creation of the Boutilimit médersa was not a colonial officer, but rather the Qadiri shaykh Sidiyya Baba. Boutilimit, a small settlement with a good well, was younger than the great cities of *Bilad Shinqit* to the north, but by the early twentieth century it had a reputation as an important center due to its association with Sidiyya Baba and his Sufi network.¹¹³ One of the pioneers of the accommodation between West African Muslim leaders

¹¹⁰ Salenc and Marty, *Les écoles - La Médersa*, 36.

¹¹¹ Salenc and Marty, *Les écoles - La Médersa*, 36.

¹¹² Hall, *A History of Race*, 130–172.

¹¹³ Constant Hamès, ‘Pour une histoire de Boutilimit,’ *Journal des africanistes* 55:1–2 (1985), 219–230.

and French colonial authorities, Sidiyya Baba had forged close ties with the administration over the course of several years. His 1903 fatwa arguing that Muslims should accept benevolent rule by the French insured for him a particularly prominent role in the development of colonial rule in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone.¹¹⁴ Baba befriended and advised Coppolani before his 1905 assassination and Henri Gouraud, Coppolani's successor in the conquest of the northern Adrar region. From 1903 to 1907, Baba was entrusted with the custody of Amadu Bamba, the Murid leader exiled from Senegal. The two shaykhs grew close; after leaving the Trarza region for Diourbel, Bamba followed Baba's example in working out a mutually beneficial relationship between his Muridiyya network and the French in Senegal.¹¹⁵ (This strategy led, if indirectly, to the establishment of a *médersa*-like *école franco-mouride* in Diourbel in 1932, discussed below.)

Sidiyya Baba's involvement in the *Médersa* of Boutilimit dated from its earliest inception. In January 1914, the *médersa* held its first classes; before a separate building was constructed near the French fort, classes were held in Baba's unsuitably dark and airless "casbah" or compound.¹¹⁶ The *médersa*'s first director, Joseph Rouget, came to Boutilimit from Djenné, where he had directed the *médersa* there until its closure a few months before. Rouget and Baba consulted closely on the development on the *médersa* and the progress of its students, a relationship that Baba would continue with Rouget's successors. Rouget noted that Baba had "furnished" a professor for the Islamic courses, one of his followers named Ahmed Ould Moktar Fall, who would "present in the eyes of the natives all the necessary guarantees of Islamic

¹¹⁴ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 208–227.

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 208–227; Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 141–161.

¹¹⁶ ANS J94, Rouget, Rapport sur la création d'une *médersa* de fils de chefs à Boutilimit (Mauritanie), 31 January 1914.

orthodoxy.”¹¹⁷ Rounding out the teaching staff was Mamadou Ba, a Halpulaar graduate of the Saint-Louis médersa. As mentioned above, Ba had studied in the Superior Division of the Médersa of Algiers before the shifts in colonial policy made such an idea unthinkable. Ba’s brother Bokar Amadou Ba, another graduate of the Saint-Louis médersa, also lived in Boutilimit, teaching a course for *élèves-moniteurs* training to work as schoolteachers. These two brothers would go on to important careers as intermediaries in the region. This small faculty replicated the range of influences—colonial Algeria and Saint-Louis, and Baba’s network in the region—present in the institution.

If the 1913 arrival of the Wadai princes in Saint-Louis signaled that médersa’s role as a center for black Muslims across the French empire, the Boutilimit médersa’s range of influence was intentionally much more circumscribed. The new médersa was for the children of influential *bidan* leaders, and no one else. In this focus, the Boutilimit médersa echoed both the Timbuktu médersa’s exclusively political orientation and the older model of schools for sons of chiefs. French administrators’ efforts at recruiting students explicitly intended to earn the trust of local elites and thus extend French control over the whole of Mauritania, the Saharan “hyphen” linking the North and West African colonies. The practices of recruitment were meant to end, or at least diminish, the violent tribal conflicts that made the French “pacification” much more difficult. The military commander of Mauritania, Lieutenant-Colonel Mouret, wrote in February 1914 that the médersa of Boutilimit would bring together “children of diverse provenance, warriors and marabouts both,” from all corners of the colony, “which can only...have happy consequences.”¹¹⁸ By referring to “warriors and marabouts” (*guerriers et marabouts*), Mouret

¹¹⁷ ANS J94, Rouget, Rapport sur la création d’une médersa de fils de chefs à Boutilimit (Mauritanie), 31 January 1914.

addressed a social division in bidan society between *hassan* and *zwaya* tribes, loose distinctions that nevertheless served as important social reference points and dated back to the seventeenth century Sharr Bubba war.¹¹⁹ A médersa for the Moors would facilitate the political and military path for the French. For Sidiyya Baba, it offered a chance to consolidate his influence.

In its first year, nine young men enrolled at the Boutilimit médersa. All of them had previously memorized the Qur'an and studied Islamic sciences with local Qadiri scholars. Most were from the Trarza and Brakna regions, where Sidiyya Baba's influence was strongest. One of the nine, named in attendance records as Mohamed Saloum, hailed from Port-Etienne (Nouadhibou).¹²⁰ It is very likely that this is the same Mohamed Saloum Ould Ahmed Abdelaziz who enrolled at the Saint-Louis médersa in November 1912; his appearance in Boutilimit suggests that he, at least, was motivated to return to Mauritania to continue his studies. Baba's role in student recruitment is not explicit, but the médersa's first cohort of students fit a general profile of his followers. They also fulfilled the French mission of recruiting the sons of chiefs. Indeed, in its early years, at least, the Boutilimit médersa was officially termed the *médersa des fils de chefs*. Students from all other family backgrounds were directed to the neighboring school for *élèves-moniteurs*.

The First World War interrupted instruction in Boutilimit, as it had in Saint-Louis, between 1915 and 1917. After the war, the director Rouget was replaced by a teacher, previously posted in Tunisia, named Adrien Larroque. Larroque's reports on the médersa reveal a fascination with the desert environment, and for the mysterious "Moorish soul" (*l'âme maure*) he perceived in those he encountered. He did not change the policy of recruiting the sons of chiefs

¹¹⁸ ANS J94, Lieutenant-Colonel. Mouret to GGAOF, 22 February 1914.

¹¹⁹ Charles Stewart and Elizabeth Kirk Stewart, *Islam and Social Order in Mauritania: A Case Study from the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 54–64.

¹²⁰ ANS J94, Notices sur les élèves de la Médersa des Fils de Chefs de Boutilimit, 31 January 1914.

and other notables, but he oversaw an expansion of the student body, from an average of ten students to, by 1920, approximately twenty. In part, this expansion came about as a result of a long overland tour he made of the Mauritanian interior, not unlike Destaing's 1909 recruiting and reporting trip between Saint-Louis and Dakar. The geographical origins of the students are not recorded in Larroque's reports, but their names suggest that only *bidan* Moors studied at Boutilimit. Students with names suggesting Wolof or Tukolor origin who were awarded scholarships from the Mauritanian administration were sent to Saint-Louis instead.¹²¹ Mauritania's few other French schools—mostly small *écoles de village*—had student populations that were more mixed, in terms of both race and status, than the *médersa*.¹²² The project of “canalizing Islam” in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone resulted in the canalization of schooling along racial lines.

The curriculum at the *Médersa* of Boutilimit never prompted the same dramatic debate as it did in Saint-Louis. The *médersa*'s directors concentrated on reforming the “medieval” local teaching methods as a way to penetrate the “Moorish soul.” The *mahadra*, a local institution for advanced study similar to a madrasa, and its practices of master-disciple study and rote memorization resulted in a deep scholarly culture among *bidan* elites, especially the *zwaya* groups, but it was difficult for the French to penetrate them.¹²³ This difficulty led to a sense that the Moor was “intelligent, [but] nonchalant, fatalist, attached to his routine and his distrust.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ ANS O82 (31), Arrêtés, bourses, 12 October, 18 October, 30 October, and 8 December 1920.

¹²² Mame Moussé Mbengue, “L’Enseignement en Mauritanie de 1904 à 1940” (mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Dakar, October 1982), 35.

¹²³ On educational traditions in southern Mauritania, see Fortier, “Une pédagogie coranique”; on the *mahadra*, see Erin Pettigrew, “Colonizing the Mahadra: Language, Identity, and Power in Mauritania Under French Control,” *Ufahamu* 33:2–3 (Winter 2007), 62–89.

¹²⁴ ANS O82 (31), Djenidi to Inspecteur Général de l’Enseignement de l’AOF, 17 April 1922.

Over its first years of operation, parts of the médersa's curriculum came to closely resemble that of the *mahadra*, extending to the study of the “six favorite poets” whose works were studied by local scholars.¹²⁵ The Islamic curriculum remained in place, primarily as a lure to convince reluctant parents, especially mothers, to send their children to the new school.¹²⁶ It is also worth noting that by the time students enrolled at the Médersa of Boutilimit, around the age of fifteen, they had most often already committed the Qur'an to memory and begun more advanced study.¹²⁷

In this effort to open the minds of young Moors to the French, the hours of instruction leaned heavily toward the French curriculum. In 1917, for example, medérsiens studied French subjects for 22 hours per week and Arabic-Islamic subjects for only 6 hours.¹²⁸ These proportions remained similar throughout this period. Physical challenges, rather ideological or racial questions, seemed more perturbing to the directors. Larroque complained in one report that the médersa's maps of Africa and France had been torn to shreds first by the wind and later by termites. He wished also to create a small museum for the students, to teach them the French words for the local plants and animals, but lacked the resources to do so.¹²⁹ These challenges, Larroque wrote, kept his students in their “raw state” (*à l'état brut*), limited by social mores that led them to reject manual labor, for instance.¹³⁰ Both light manual labor and school museums

¹²⁵ ANF 20000046/19, Paul Dubié, “L'enseignement en Mauritanie: La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 4.

¹²⁶ ANRIM E2/44, Circulaire du Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, Recrutement élèves pour Médersah, 15 January 1929.

¹²⁷ ANS J94, Notices sur les élèves de la Médersa des Fils de Chefs de Boutilimit, 31 January 1914.

¹²⁸ ANS J22, Larroque to Colonel Commandant le Territoire Civil de la Mauritanie, 10 November 1917.

¹²⁹ ANS J22, Larroque to Colonel Commandant le Territoire Civil de la Mauritanie, 10 November 1917

¹³⁰ ANS J22, Larroque to Colonel Gaden, Rapport trimestriel, 15 January 1918.

were standard pedagogical tools in wide use in France in the early twentieth century, but they were poorly suited to the Saharan context of Boutilimit.

To change these attitudes, Larroque proposed a series of adaptations to the médersa's French curriculum that were remarkable for their attention to local traditions. For example, one and a quarter hours per week were devoted to a drawing class. Larroque noticed that the medérsiens particularly enjoyed this class, but lamented that the standard curriculum, designed for schoolteachers across AOF, was so far removed from the Moorish and Arab arts with which students were familiar. Larroque substituted the standard art exercises for intricate Andalusian geometric designs from the Alhambra, in Granada, which were of more interest to the students. He decorated the médersa classroom with the students' best works.¹³¹

A similar problem arose in the history course, which took up one and a half hours per week. Larroque and his colleague Mamadou Ba taught from a standard textbook in French schools across AOF, André Leguillette's 1913 *Histoire de l'Afrique occidentale française*. Larroque wrote that the book was "insufficient and useless" for his Moor students, who had no interest in the history of West Africa and cared only for the history of their own tribe, clan, and family. This narrow-mindedness, part of what the French believed to be the "Moorish soul," could be "destroyed or at least attenuated" with history curricula more directly related to *bidan* historical thought. To that end, Larroque volunteered to write a new history text focused on connecting *bidan* tribal history to the Maghrib, beginning with the Berber and Arab dynasties and ending with the "pacific, regenerative rule that the French have imposed in Muslim lands."¹³² Sidiyya Baba explicitly shaped Larroque's proposal in this case: Larroque began his

¹³¹ ANS J22, Larroque to Colonel Gaden, Rapport trimestriel, 15 January 1918.

¹³² ANS J22, Larroque to Colonel Gaden, Rapport trimestriel, 15 January 1918.

reading for this project in Baba's personal library in Boutilimit. In particular, he read through the works of Ibn Khaldun and the *Istiqsa'* of Shaykh Ahmad, presumably al-Nasiri's *Kitab al-istiqsa' li-akhbar duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*, a history of the Maghrib completed in the late nineteenth century, upon Baba's recommendation. It seems that Larroque never finished the work: in late 1918 he was named sergeant in a company of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and had to leave the médersa behind.

Sidiyya Baba's close relationship with the French enabled him to shape the médersa in crucial ways. His hand in the recruitment of young medérsiens ensured the school's survival in the face of resistance from bidan families. Recruiting students from his family or from among his followers deepened his connection to the colonial administration by placing those close to him in intermediary positions. Because of the limited nature of French rule in Mauritania, the notion of *culte officiel* was never a real factor in administrative ideology or strategy as it had been in Algeria or elsewhere in AOF. Instead, many of the médersa's graduates found employment as important interpreters and teachers. Baba's proximity to the médersa's directors also enabled him to influence the médersa's teaching. This is clearest in the case of Larroque's proposed new history curriculum, a case all the more remarkable because it was part of the French curriculum standardized across all colonial schools. The médersa, then, became a way for Baba to broaden his own path of accommodation with the colonial administration. He did so in part by working within the set of practices of order in the médersa, shaping the médersa's instruction while embracing the changes in pedagogy and institutional structure.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the *médersa*'s arrival in French West Africa in the early twentieth century. Telling this story requires a “multi-local” approach: the four sites of Djenné, Timbuktu, Saint-Louis, and Boutilimit (as well as the proposed site in Futa Jallon) were united by the shared presence of the institution but divided in other aspects of local context. Unlike Algeria, where the three *médersas* of Algiers, Tlemcen, and Constantine were governed by a shared set of regulations and thus evolved more or less in tandem with one another, the West African examples offer more intricate histories of accommodation, adaptation, and institutional change.

One common factor in the development of these West African *médersas* is the influence of the Algerian antecedent. After the creation of the AOF federation in 1895, the colonial administration developed the institutional infrastructure to carry out a “Muslim policy” for West Africa’s Muslim communities. The fear of “fanaticism” and future jihads meant that much of this “Muslim policy” was intended to control Islam as a social force. For some administrators, this meant an intensive and invasive regime of surveillance over Qur’anic schools and other existing Islamic institutions. For others, such as the Education Inspector Mariani, it meant a more active “canalization” effort, through which the French could guide Muslim communities in certain harmless or even productive directions. The *médersa* was one way to achieve this goal. Through extensive study of other antecedents in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, the Algerian *médersas* became operative models on which the West African *médersas* were based. Following Clozel’s glowing 1906 report, Algerian practices of student recruitment, professor hiring, and curriculum were all followed precisely in Djenné, Timbuktu, Saint-Louis, and Boutilimit. The goal of creating an “official corps of marabouts” expressed by Roume and others was an echo of the

Algerian *culte officiel*. Though administrators held differing views about how analogous Algeria and West Africa actually were, between approximately 1900 and 1910 the Algerian model was the singular reference for administrators in AOF.

Soon after the four *médersas* opened, however, the influence of the Algerian model faded. The main reason for this was the French understanding of African racial categories. Namely, scholar-administrators like Paul Marty, and less scholarly officials like Jules Salenc, developed the idea of *islam noir*, a practice of “black Islam” that was unique to black populations and that was inferior to the supposedly purer Islam of “white” Arab and Moor populations in the Sahara, Maghrib, and Middle East.¹³³ The *médersas*—especially those of Saint-Louis, Boutilimit, and Timbuktu—were sites where this idea developed and where it was put into practice. As the comparison of the experiences of Saint-Louis and Boutilimit has shown, the “practices of order” including recruitment and curriculum were adapted to this racial logic. Students—with their ethnic affiliation subsumed to racial categories—saw their prospects change as institutional paths and barriers changed with these developments. A local approach to each *médersa* would reveal the specific personalities and factors involved in these institutional adaptations. Taken together, the multi-local history of the *médersas* in West Africa shows the importance of broader factors—the Algerian precedent, *islam noir*, and Muslim policy in particular—to the evolution of the *médersa* as it moved from Tlemcen to Timbuktu, and beyond.

¹³³ See also Triaud, “L’islam au sud du Sahara.”

Chapter 4: The Saharan Apogee, 1920s–1940s

The domestication of the *médersa* in Algeria involved bicultural negotiations between Maghribi intellectual traditions and European modern instructional techniques. That process was more complicated further south. In Boutilimit and in Timbuktu, where *médersas* persisted longer than their short-lived counterparts in Saint-Louis and Djenné, a third cultural component entered the mix. The *médersas*, institutions forged in Algeria, had to be adapted to a Saharan context that differed in significant ways from that of North Africa's Mediterranean coast. This domestication in the desert resulted in a relatively broad embrace of the *médersa*, such that it became the dominant mode of colonial education in Mauritania.

In Algeria, the figures involved in the *médersa*'s domestication fell into two camps: French scholar-administrators and Algerian intellectuals, some of whom had themselves been educated in the *médersas*. In the Sahara, where the French colonial presence was much lighter than in the Algerian settler colony, the importance of French scholar-administrators faded. Rather, the chief representatives of the colonial administration in these negotiations were Algerian *medérsiens* recruited as *médersa* professors. In Boutilimit and Timbuktu, and later in the Saharan towns of Atar, Kiffa, and Timbédra, where *médersas* opened throughout the 1930s, Algerian professors and Saharan elites propelled adaptations to the *médersas*. These adaptations primarily concerned the *médersas*' practices of order, as in Algeria and in the earlier period in West Africa. The recruitment of students, their care while at the *médersa*, the curriculum, and the mode of instruction: Saharan communities necessitated changes to each of these practices to render the *médersas* acceptable for their sons to attend.

Algerians were, in this Saharan context, the agents essential to this process of domestication. As graduates of the *médersas* in Algeria, they understood the place of the *médersa* in the colonial education system. As Muslims, they were better able than their French colleagues to negotiate with local Muslim communities about their expectations and needs. Fluent in both French and Arabic, they were the best situated intermediaries for the delicate task of creating lasting institutions in a new environment. Two men in particular, Boualem Ould Rouis and Abderrahmane Nekli, exemplify the *medérsiens*' "double culture" in their West African careers, both of which spanned Mauritania and the French Soudan and which together encompassed the whole of the "Saharan apogee," through the interwar period and Second World War, from the 1920s to the 1940s. Working with Mauritanian, Soudanese, and French counterparts, the Algerian directors were instrumental to the domestication of the *médersa* in the Sahara and Sahel.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the *Médersa* of Boutilimit, taking up its story where the previous chapter left off. In the 1920s, the *médersa* underwent a series of transformations that changed its function and reputation, such that it became the foremost colonial educational institution in Mauritania. However, as an analysis of the *médersa*'s student recruitment and curriculum demonstrates, the institution maintained some longstanding Saharan educational traditions while also adopting others more directly linked to French Algeria. The result was a new kind of institution, one credible in the eyes of both colonizer and colonized. The second part of the chapter focuses on the Algerian directors, especially Ould Rouis and Nekli, in their itinerant careers across AOF. As agents of the colonial administration they had direct influence over the evolution of the *médersa* system in West Africa; through their actions,

the process of domestication becomes clear. Through this joint narrative, the chapter argues for a particular process of institutional adaptation in the Sahara.

Domestication in Boutilimit and Mederdra

Unlike the other three *médersas* created in the early twentieth century, the *médersa* of Boutilimit blossomed under the patronage of Shaykh Sidiyya Baba. The trajectories of the *médersas* in Djenné and Saint-Louis indicate the power of *islam noir* as a guiding principle for French administration; the way that the Timbuktu *médersa* languished in relative obscurity suggests dynamics of power relations particular to that region of the French-colonized Sahel. In the 1920s, the Trarza region entered a new phase of its colonial history following Baba's death in 1923. Despite the death of its first patron, the *médersa* in Boutilimit would be a central landmark in the landscape of power in southern Mauritania in this period.

One important shift at this time was who held the office of *médersa* director. In 1917 Sergeant Larroque, the zealous traveler and desert enthusiast, departed Boutilimit to lead a battalion of *tirailleurs sénégalais*.¹ He would be the last European to direct that *médersa*. His interim successor was Bokar Ahmadou Ba, an early graduate of the Saint-Louis *médersa* who had taught at the Boutilimit *médersa* for several years and who periodically worked, alongside his brother Mamadou, as an interpreter for the French military across the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone.² In 1922, Bokar Ba was replaced as director by Mekki el-Djenidi. Djenidi had graduated from the Superior Division in Algiers, and had spent several years as an itinerant teacher in West Africa, with posts in Senegal, Guinea, and Soudan before arriving in Boutilimit. The practice of

¹ ANS J22, Larroque to Inspecteur de l'Enseignement de l'A.O.F., 3 September 1918.

² ANS J22, Bokar Ba to Inspecteur de l'Enseignement de l'A.O.F., 22 December 1918; ANS J22, Mamadou Ba to Inspecteur de l'Enseignement de l'A.O.F., 4 January 1919.

naming Algerians to the directorship of Mauritanian *médersas* would persist for decades, though Djenidi's tenure in Boutilimit was hardly an auspicious debut. The logic behind this shift was racial: black teachers—the Ba brothers or others trained in the *école normale* in Senegal—were considered inappropriate for Moorish students. This opinion was held both by French administrators and by the local population, and is representative of a larger racist dynamic in the southwestern Sahara.³ The French directors Larroques and Rouget had struggled to recruit students despite Sidiyya Baba's blessing. Algerians, especially *medérsiens*, were more convincing candidates to integrate the *médersa* into Trarza society.

Naming Djenidi to the post of director was thus in part an effort to ease the *médersa*'s operation in Boutilimit. However, personal animosities derailed this attempt. Following Djenidi's "misunderstanding with the marabouts" and "intrigues with the emir," the administration swiftly moved the *médersa* outside of Boutilimit.⁴ Archival records are unfortunately sparse in their descriptions of these misunderstandings and intrigues, but they indicate the degree to which the institution's fate was tied to personal relations among colonial officials and local authorities. Perhaps Djenidi had a difficult personality that led to his itinerant career; surviving documents do not confirm this conjecture.

Following these disputes between Djenidi and Boutilimit's notables, the *médersa* reopened in Mederdra, a small settlement roughly halfway between Boutilimit and Saint-Louis. While it lacked the renown that the Ahel Shaykh Sidiyya bestowed on Boutilimit, Mederdra was nonetheless a settlement of some importance in southern Mauritania. In 1926, for example, the restive Tijani shaykh Hamallah was imprisoned in Mederdra, far from his base in Nioro, in the

³ Francis de Chassey, *Mauritanie 1900–1974* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1978), 154–155; see also Hall, *A History of Race*.

⁴ de Chassey, *Mauritanie*, 155.

Soudan.⁵ The médersa seems to have endured this period away from Boutilimit without many changes to its core operations; indeed, between 1922 and 1927 its library grew from 508 works to 880, suggesting that it may even have flourished.⁶

Djenidi left his post at the médersa in 1928 and returned to Algeria. Under his successor, the interim director Bokar Ba, the médersa returned to Boutilimit in 1929.⁷ There it took up residence in an old mosque, built by the French years earlier but never used by the local population, “who preferred to pray out in the open.”⁸ Soon thereafter, Ba was replaced by an Algerian newly arrived in Mauritania named Boualem Ould Rouis. Before turning to Ould Rouis’s tenure, the following section examines on the adaptation of the médersa’s practices of order in both Boutilimit and Mederdra in the period following Sidiyya Baba’s death.

The question of who should attend the médersa bedeviled médersa directors, regional administrators, and local families across northwest Africa. In the case of Saint-Louis, administrators and professors squabbled over whether or not to limit admission to the sons of chiefs and struggled to recruit Moors from the region. The practice of sending “hostages” from the interior to the French schools at Saint-Louis guaranteed at least a minimal number of students. When the Boutilimit médersa opened in 1914, Sidiyya Baba helped recruit some students, but local *bidan* families put up more resistance than their Senegalese, Soudanese, or Algerian counterparts. With the complex socio-racial strictures of Moorish society, the ongoing military “pacification,” and the shoestring budget attributed to Mauritania from the colonial

⁵ On Shaykh Hamallah, see Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 62–71.

⁶ Bah Ould Zein and Ambrose Queffélec, *Le Français en Mauritanie* (Vanves: EDICEF, 1997), 24.

⁷ In May 1928, Djenidi was named a *mouderrès* in Bône (Annaba), in eastern Algeria. *Journal Officiel de l’Algérie*, 4 May 1928.

⁸ ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, “La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 5.

offices in Dakar and Paris, recruiting a sufficient number of students became a dominant preoccupation at the *médersa* of Boutilimit.

One indication of the difficulty of *bidan* recruitment is that even Shaykh Sidiyya did not enroll his own family members to the *médersa*. Only in 1930 did a French administrator in Boutilimit note with relief that some members of the Ahel Shaykh Sidiyya clan had finally enrolled at the *médersa*.⁹ Many of the *médersa*'s students in these years came not from the *bidan* elite but rather from the lower castes of Moorish society: they were the “sons of traders, interpreters, guards, and *haratines*.”¹⁰ This latter group, the *haratīn*, constitute a class of formerly enslaved people, ethnically Wolof, Bambara, or Fulani and identified with having dark skin, who occupied the lowest rungs of the Mauritanian social ladder. Their voices are by and large obscured in archival records, but it seems nevertheless that these black populations saw the *médersa* as a potential avenue to improve their status. In 1929, the governor of Mauritania complained to his subordinates in the Brakna, Tagant, and Adrar regions that too many black students sought to enroll at the *médersa*, which “distorted the purpose of the institution.”¹¹ He urged them to redouble their efforts to convince Moorish families—especially mothers—to send their sons to the *médersa*.

This pattern consternated French administrators in the Trarza and beyond, who sought to use the *médersa* less for its educational purpose and more as a way to bring the leaders of intractable but important clans into closer contact with the colonial administration. That even their ally Sidiyya Baba would not send the younger members of his clan to the *médersa* must have stung some administrators as a personal affront. The presence of the sons of interpreters and

⁹ ANRIM E2/44, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Commandant du cercle du Trarza, 23 October 1930.

¹⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Commandant du cercle du Trarza, 23 October 1930.

¹¹ ANRIM E2/44, Circulaire du Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, Recrutement élèves pour Médersah, 15 January 1929.

other lower-class families, especially the haratīn, at the médersa would have hurt efforts to recruit the sons of elite families. Several administrators' reports note that the ruling bidan families of the region, especially the wives of chiefs and mothers of potential medérsiens, rejected the idea of sending their sons to study with lower-caste and black children.¹² Moorish society in the Trarza region and elsewhere can seem intractably complex, with internecine conflicts among various clans and tribes, divisions between hassan and zwaya classes (holy men and warriors), and a deep-rooted racism separating bidan and haratīn (white and black, in local as well as European terms).¹³ Recruiting students to attend the médersa plunged French administrators into social relations they barely understood—indeed, they often misunderstood.¹⁴

These problems were exacerbated in places farther from Boutilimit, where local populations were less familiar with the French and often less closely affiliated with Sidiyya Baba. Whereas in Algeria, Soudan, and Senegal, the médersas were located in existing administrative and intellectual capitals, in Mauritania Boutilimit and Mederdra lacked the same status.¹⁵ One French administrator in Mederdra wrote, during the médersa's time there, that it “should be a general institution for all of Mauritania,” a magnet to attract students from important families.¹⁶ Administrators in other regions complained about the litany of excuses used

¹² ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, “La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 3.

¹³ On Moorish society, see Stewart and Stewart, *Islam and Social Order*; Genviève Désiré-Vuillemin, *Histoire de la Mauritanie. Des origines à l'indépendance* (Paris: Karthala, 1997); Mohamed Saïd Ould Hamody, *Mauritanie: 1445–1975 (Relations séculaires avec l'Europe)* (n.p., 2002); Ibrahima Abou Sall, *Mauritanie du Sud. Conquêtes et administration coloniales françaises, 1890–1945* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); and Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, *Eléments d'histoire de la Mauritanie* (Nouakchott: Institut Mauritanien de Recherche Scientifique and Centre Culturel Français, 1988). On racial divisions in the Sahara and Sahel more generally, see Bruce Hall, *A History of Race* (2011).

¹⁴ On French interpretations of Saharan elites and society in this period, see Timothy Cleaveland, “Islam and the Construction of Social Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Sahara,” *Journal of African History* 39:3 (1998), 365–388.

¹⁵ Constant Hamès, “Pour une histoire de Boutilimit.”

by the Moors to keep their sons from enrolling at the médersa. In 1929, Captain Lenore, stationed at Tidjikja in the central Tagant region, summarized the Moors' objections. First, they disliked sending their sons away so young, between the ages of ten and twelve. Lenore disputed this reasoning, since the locals saw departing from the region at any age as "a sort of exile."¹⁷ He also reported on rumors that the Mederdra médersa would soon close, which the leaders he had spoken to cited as a reason not to send their sons away. These rumors were not necessarily unfounded: by the end of that year the médersa would leave Mederdra and return to Boutilimit. Finally, some of the chiefs told Lenore that the médersa had been discredited in their eyes by the presence there of black students: this meant that the school was not meant for the *bidan*, and the chiefs would never send their sons there. Lenore characterized these excuses as "lies" and "bad pretexts" and urged the intensification of French propaganda among the Moors of the Tagant. He admitted that this would undoubtedly be a "long-term effort...before bearing fruit," and that in the short term, he would be unable to recruit the required number of students, five, from his region to send to the médersa.¹⁸ Administrators across Mauritania echoed this frustration with médersa recruitment throughout the 1920s.

In this case as in many others, French colonial records are generally spotty, often inaccurate, and sometimes contradictory. The archives of the Trarza médersa demonstrate the degree to which this is the case: for example, records for 1924 show at one point an enrollment of 24 and at another an enrollment of 87. Over the course of the 1920s, however, these records show a modest and relatively steady growth in enrollments, from approximately ten early in the decade to around 30 by 1929 (see Figure 4.1). For the most part they do not provide the names of

¹⁶ ANRIM E2/44, Bokar Ba and Résident à Mederdra to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 4 January 1929.

¹⁷ ANRIM E2/44, Lenore to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 1 July 1929.

¹⁸ ANRIM E2/44, Lenore to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 1 July 1929.

students, nor do they categorize them by ethnicity, tribe, or any other measure. It is nonetheless probable that during this period the recruitment of *baydhan* students remained an unrealized aspiration on the part of the *médersa*'s directors and the various local administrators tasked with recruiting them.

Year	Enrollments reported
1922	10–12
1923	14
1924	24
1925	[no data]
1926	20
1927	20–31
1928	40
1929	34

Figure 4.1. Enrollment figures for the Trarza *médersa* (Boutilimit and Mederdra) 1922–1929.¹⁹

Once students had enrolled at the *médersa*, they posed another challenge to the *médersa* director and to the local *commandant de cercle*, one unique to Mauritania. In Algeria and in Saint-Louis, *medérsiens* lodged with families and used their scholarship payments to buy food and other necessities. Lacking such an infrastructure in Boutilimit and Mederdra, it fell to the *médersa*'s administrators to provide for the students. Less overtly political than the issue of recruitment, the provisioning of students demonstrates the degree to which life in the Mauritanian *médersas* differed from those elsewhere. This practice of order also illustrates another factor in the adaptation of the institution to local conditions.

¹⁹ 1922: ANS O82, Inspecteur de l'Enseignement, Situation de l'Enseignement en Mauritanie, 3 March 1922 and ANS O82, Mekki el-Djenidi to Inspecteur de l'Enseignement, 17 April 1922. 1923: ANS O36, Statistique, enseignement musulman, 1923. 1924: ANS O36, Statistique, enseignement musulman, 1924. 1925: no records in the archives. 1926: ANS O36, Statistique, enseignement musulman, 1926. 1927: ANS 2G/27/116, Rapport statistique, année 1926–1927, Colonie de la Mauritanie, 30 September 1927 and ANS O36, Statistique, enseignement musulman, 30 September 1927. 1928: ANS O36, Statistique, enseignement musulman, 1928 and ANS 2G/28/121, Rapport statistique, année scolaire 1927–28, 20 September 1928. 1929: ANRIM E2/44, Bokar Ba to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 4 January 1929.

In March 1932, the Lieutenant-Governor of Mauritania, a métis Saint-Louisien named Gabriel Omer Descemet, enumerated the five categories of materials that the colonial administration would provide to medérsiens at Boutilimit. First was food: daily rations included biscuits for breakfast and rice, millet, and meat for other meals; tea and sugar; and salt and “local butter” for seasoning. Meals were prepared by haratīn cooks. Second, the administration provided clothing to students each year, including three boubous or robes, known as *dharā’a*; three pairs of pants or *sirwāl*, including one specified as white in color; a cloth cap or head covering; and a pair of “indigenous” leather sandals. Third, for sleeping, students received two mats and a covering (they slept under tents, “à la mode du pays”). Fourth, students also received a set of silverware, cups, tea glasses and tea pots, and bowls; pots, pans, and ladles were also provided for the cooks. Finally, each month each student received a kilogram of soap for bathing and three *boules de bleu* for cleaning and dyeing their clothing blue, per local custom.²⁰

These rations were modified periodically but never drastically between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s. Generous, perhaps, to students, they caused problems for the médersa’s staff. In 1929, for example, Bokar Ba, then interim director of the Mederdra médersa, complained to Mauritania’s Lieutenant-Governor that his heavy workload overwhelmed him. Beyond his teaching responsibilities—he was the only teacher of the French curriculum for all three classes—he had to arrange the feeding and clothing of the 34 students in his charge. Their stocks depleted, he needed to ship rice and clothing from the Senegal River port of Rosso, approximately forty kilometers to the south, to Mederdra. Bâ was also responsible for overseeing the construction of a new classroom to relieve overcrowding in the existing two-room structure.

²⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, Décision, 8 March 1932.

Pleased with his students' progress, Bâ nevertheless urgently requested another teacher or assistant be named to the médersa to help him in juggling these duties.²¹

To keep students happy and healthy, and to convince their parents to enroll them at the médersa in the first place, the Trarza médersa had to be adapted to the local physical and cultural environment. In recruiting students, the médersa's administrators ran into difficulties understanding Saharan social and racial divisions, which initially made the target population of *bidan* elites reluctant to embrace Franco-Muslim education.²² The practice of feeding and lodging students also marked an inversion of the traditional structure of education in the region, wherein students paid their master periodically in food, livestock, and other valuables.²³ These changes entailed adaptations to the physical structure and daily regime of the médersa, which in turn altered the institution's purpose and reputation.

The age of students admitted to the Boutilimit médersa was an issue that bridged the practices of recruitment and teaching. In Algeria, *medérsiens* were usually adolescent young men, between the ages of 15 and 18, as fixed in the 1894 reforms. In Mauritania, however, children usually completed their elementary education at an earlier age: many had memorized the Qur'an by the age of 12 and were prepared to begin more advanced study.²⁴ This fact confounded colonial administrators, who were stunned to see such young children, especially those they considered intellectually inferior, mastering complex material. It also required concomitant shifts in the organization of the médersa. Students required more oversight outside

²¹ ANRIM E2/44, Bokar Ba to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 4 January 1929.

²² See also Mohamed Vall Ould Cheikh, "Le français en Mauritanie: Bilan et Perspectives," thèse de doctorat, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III (1996), 88–91.

²³ Fortier, "Une pédagogie coranique."

²⁴ El Hamel, "The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge."

the classroom, for example, and parents responded differently to colonial arguments in favor of sending their sons away for *médersa* studies.

As far as the curriculum was concerned, the young age of Mauritanian *medérsiens* entailed a dual shift. The Islamic curriculum could be more advanced than in Algeria, where few students arrived at the *médersa* with such advanced knowledge. At the same time, a more basic French curriculum was necessary, since in Mauritania students had next to no exposure to French in their young, nomadic lives. In Algeria, the *médersas* were classified as *enseignement supérieur musulman*, part of the higher education system, but in Mauritania (and elsewhere in AOF) they more closely resembled elementary schools. They were, however, distinguished from more rudimentary *écoles de village*, village schools, which taught only basic literacy and numeracy to young children and were mostly clustered in the towns and villages along the Senegal River. Though restricted nominally, and to varying extents in practice, to elite *bidan* populations, the *médersas* were the only option for students to gain the education required for employment in the colonial administration. Otherwise, students had to enroll in schools in Senegal, such as the *École normale* at Gorée or the *École Blanchot* in Saint-Louis, to earn the necessary qualifications; this was not a popular option among the *bidan* elite, as their objections to studying in the *Médersa* of Saint-Louis made clear.

Traditionally, after young students had finished memorizing the Qur'an, they would move on to a *mahadra* to continue their studies. Nominally limited to members of the *zwaya*, or “maraboutic” class, the *mahadra* was the closest local institutional analogue with the *médersa*. Roughly similar to the *madrassa* of North Africa and the Middle East, the *mahadra* was distinctive because of its lack of both *waqf* endowment funding and a permanent physical location.²⁵ A

²⁵ El Hamel, “The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge”; Pettigrew, “Colonizing the Mahadra.”

“school on camelback,” the mahadra consisted of a learned master who taught students, either in specific subjects or in a wide range of Islamic knowledge, including jurisprudence, literature, and Sufi mystic knowledge. At the conclusion of their studies, students were awarded an ijaza, or certificate, widely recognized as the necessary qualification to begin teaching students of his or, rarely, her own.²⁶ Unlike sedentary, urban societies in the Maghrib, in nomadic, sparsely populated Moorish society the socio-religious roles of Islamic authorities—imam, mufti, qadi, marabout—were often played by a single individual. And unlike Sahelo-Saharan regions to the east, such as Timbuktu, where both *sudan* and *bidan* ‘ulama served as imams at the city’s famous mosques, in Mauritania Islamic learning was racially delineated even before French scholar-administrators coined the terms *islam noir* and *islam maure*.²⁷

Like Senegal and other parts of the Islamic world, “carrying the Qur’an within oneself” was a cardinal value of education.²⁸ In the Trarza region and elsewhere in Mauritania, embodying the Qur’an and other sources of knowledge was achieved through mnemonic devices and other strategies of memorizing vast and complex texts. A learned scholar would know a whole library of texts, ranging from grammar to jurisprudence to rhetoric to poetry to exegesis, by heart.²⁹ Physical copies of books were hard to obtain except through trade networks or, in the famous case of Shaykh Sidiyya al-Kabir, a lengthy and expensive shopping spree in Marrakesh.³⁰ In its methods and practices, the mahadra was an institution adapted to Mauritania’s segmented and nomadic social environment.

²⁶ El Hamel, “The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge,” and Ould Ahmedou, *Enseignement traditionnel*.

²⁷ El Hamel, “The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge,” 72–73; Elias Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu*, 108–114.

²⁸ Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’”; Ware, *The Walking Qur’an*; Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*.

²⁹ Fortier, “‘Une pédagogie coranique’.”

The Moorish emphasis on Islamic learning, and existing socio-cultural boundaries limiting access to that knowledge to a bidan elite, meant that the médersa found something of a welcoming environment in Boutilimit and Mederdra. Nevertheless, as elsewhere, the médersa's instruction underwent some changes in adapting to its new Saharan context. Curiously, descriptions of the curriculum at the médersa of Boutilimit (and Mederdra) are rare in French documentation. The authors of these reports—the médersa's directors, as well as the roving school inspectors who passed through the region—focus instead on the médersa's teaching practices.

These administrators agreed that the purpose of the médersa was “to transform the medieval education system of the Moors and to progressively guide them toward a modern and liberal culture.”³¹ This meant a range of changes differentiating the médersa from the mahadra in many fundamental ways. No longer would students follow a master from place to place, studying alongside their herds; medérsiens were required to stay in Boutilimit permanently for the duration of their studies. Fixing the period of study, studying several subjects in a single day, learning with paper rather than with memory: these practices and more changed the modes of knowledge transmission in the Trarza. It is unclear how the introduction of these techniques were intended to guide the Moors to a “modern and liberal culture,” but the goal remained remarkably consistent over the médersa's first decades in operation.

Descriptions of the médersa's curriculum lack the detail included in reports from Algeria or Saint-Louis. A typical example is from Paul Dubié, an administrator who wrote about the Boutilimit médersa for his thesis at the Centre de Hautes Études en Administration Musulmane

³⁰ El Hamel, “The Transmission of Islamic Knowledge”; Krätli and Lydon, eds., *Book Trade*.

³¹ ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, “La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 4. Here Dubié quoted from a 1914 report by Rouget, the médersa's first director.

(CHEAM), in Paris, in 1941: “the Arabic program, inspired by the Moorish schools of higher education, included Qur’anic exegesis, theology, law, grammar, history, prosody, and versification.”³² Dubié emphasizes changes to the curriculum, rather than the continuities in its content. For example, in 1922, Mekki el-Djenidi realized that to attract the bidan elite, the médersa should more closely resemble a mahadra. To that end, he incorporated the Moors’ “six favorite poets” into the literature course, and included the “best-loved authors of the region” in the other Arabic-language courses. He also invited “Moorish notables” to sit on the examination committee, so that the value of the médersa’s education could be better known.³³ The exact content of those examinations, however, remains unsaid.

One way to approach the question of content in the médersa’s Islamic curriculum is through books. French administrators, like generations of Saharans before them, looked to the north for books and manuscripts. Whereas Shaykh Sidiyya al-Kabir and others traveled to Marrakesh for books, in the colonial period Algiers was a new center of modern book production and publishing. In 1937, the *commandant de cercle* of Boutilimit wrote a typical request for books to be included in the library at the médersa. Divided into seven categories—Qur’anic commentaries, “tradition” or hadith, law, theology, history, grammar, and literature—the list closely resembled the médersa’s courses of study. Thirty-five works in total, the list included works by major scholars in the northwest African tradition, such as Sidi Khalil, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Malik.³⁴ (The list is reproduced in full in Appendix B.)

³² ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, “La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 4.

³³ ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, “La Médersa de Boutilimit,” CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 4. He did not name the beloved poets and authors he incorporated into the curriculum.

³⁴ ANRIM E2/44, Commandant de cercle de Trarza, Liste des ouvrages demandés pour la bibliothèque de la médersah de Boutilimit, 5 May 1937.

From this list three conclusions can be drawn. First, the request demonstrates the degree to which the Algerian and Mauritanian cases differed. In Algeria, the French administration created new institutions, such as the University of Algiers and what would become the National Library, to amass collections of books and manuscripts. Existing manuscript and library collections were also catalogued, as in Mohammed Bencheneb's 1909 compilation of works in the library of the Great Mosque of Algiers. The Algerian *médersas* also held such collections (that of Tlemcen was the most important, though it totaled less than half the size of the library of the Great Mosque of Algiers), but they were only part of a much larger bibliographic institutional landscape.³⁵ In Mauritania, in the 1930s, no such colonial institutions existed. Reference works such as those listed above had to be sent via the colonial centers—Algiers, Dakar, and Saint-Louis.

Of course, Saharan bibliophiles had amassed large collections of works in the centuries before colonization through other means.³⁶ Shaykh Sidiyya Baba loaned works from his personal library, one of the largest in the western Sahara, to *medérsiens* and to administrators in the earliest years of the Boutilimit *médersa*. When, in 1936, the French created another *médersa* at Atar, one administrator proposed purchasing the entire personal library of Shaykh Mohammed Ould Habbot, of the most distinguished family of *Bilad Shinqūt*, for the use of the *medérsiens*.³⁷ The library included 215 manuscripts divided into 473 volumes. It is unclear if this transfer ever occurred, although, as discussed below, the Ould Habbot family became intimately involved in

³⁵ Bencheneb, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*; Cour, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*.

³⁶ Ghislaine Lydon, "A Thirst for Knowledge: Arabic Literacy, Writing Paper and Saharan Bibliophiles in the Southwestern Sahara," in Krätli and Lydon, eds., *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 35–72.

³⁷ ANRIM E2/44, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Commandant du cercle de l'Adrar, 24 January 1936.

the Atar médersa in other ways. The effort to procure books from older local collections demonstrates how closely interwoven the médersas were with Saharan scholarly practices.

A comparison between the 1937 requests, reproduced above, and the historic “core curriculum” across the Sahara and Sahel described by Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart reveals a surprising disjuncture. Of the thirty-five works requested for the médersa’s library, only five appear in Hall’s and Stewart’s list. These five include al-Jawhari’s *Sihāh*, a noted Arabic dictionary; Ibn ‘Aqil’s *Masā’id*, a work on Arabic syntax; al-Damāmīnī’s commentary on the *Masā’id*, al-Qalashānī’s *Tahrīr al-maqāla fī sharh al-risāla*, a fiqh handbook, and Mālik b. Anas’s *Kitāb al-Muwatta’*, a fiqh manual broadly used across northwest Africa. Of the two largest subject categories on the list, hadith and law, only two of nineteen works appear in the “core curriculum.”

It is improbable that the *commandant de cercle* in Boutilimit was enough of an *arabisant* to know what works he was requesting; very few colonial officials spoke Arabic well. The imprecise transliterations of Arabic titles and authors seems to confirm this. Two figures stand out as possible sources for this list, which was then sent on via the local French administrator: Boualem Ould Rouis, then the médersa’s Algerian director, and Haroun Ould Sidiyya Baba, the son of Sidiyya Baba and a powerful figure in Boutilimit. The latter had inherited his father’s massive library.³⁸ Perhaps he sought to exploit the médersa’s library acquisitions to fill gaps in his family’s vast collection. It is also possible that Ould Rouis, trained in Algeria’s médersas, saw an opportunity to bring texts important in Maghribi Islamic learning traditions to Mauritania.

³⁸ C. C. Stewart, “The Haroun Ould Sidia Collection of Arabic Manuscripts,” *History in Africa* 18 (1991), 349–358. See also Louis Massignon, “Une Bibliothèque saharienne : la bibliothèque du Cheikh Sidia au Sahara,” *Revue du monde musulman* 8 (1909), 409–418.

In either case, this list shows how the *médersa* was a conduit for new texts and new ideas to be introduced into Mauritanian practices of Islamic learning. Whether copies of the other thirty texts (those not found in the regional “core curriculum”) were present in Boutilimit before 1937, the request to include in the *médersa*’s library indicates a new step in Mauritania’s intellectual history. If the texts were indeed unknown in Boutilimit, they represent an expansion of Islamic knowledge, one that came about due to a colonial institution. More likely, the texts and authors were part of the extant corpus of Islamic learning in the region. In this case, procuring copies for the *médersa* library meant a shift in learning practices, if not learning content. Access to the texts would have been expanded through additional copies. More profoundly, physical copies would have pushed students to rely more on books and less on memory as the primary repository of knowledge.

This example encapsulates the broader impact of the *médersa* on the learning traditions of Mauritania in general and of Boutilimit in particular. The introduction of a French curriculum marked a new entry in the intellectual field of the region. The Islamic curriculum represented certain continuity in terms of its subject material. In both cases, the strong pressure of students and older scholars led the *médersa*’s administrators to adapt curricula to local interests and tastes. However, the European learning practices of the *médersa*, honed in Algeria—entrance and exit examinations, combining multiple subjects in a single school day, and the shift from orality and memorization to written sources of knowledge—departed significantly from the earlier practices of the *mahadra*. By the mid-1930s, the Boutilimit *médersa* and its new counterparts in Atar and Timbédra still resembled their Algerian forebears in their unique “Franco-Muslim” character. Adaptations to the Saharan environment and the Moorish cultural context, however, illustrate the

process of “domestication” at work, through which Moorish students and their families reshaped the institution and its practices in ways that suited their own interests.

Boualem Ould Rouis in Boutilimit, Atar, and Timbuktu

The Algerians who served as médersa directors in Mauritania were key actors in this process of institutional domestication, and in the related expansion of the médersa system in Mauritania in the 1930s. That decade is often considered a high-water mark in the colonial history of French West Africa.³⁹ Between 1933 and 1940, three new médersas opened in the towns of Timbedra (in 1933, in the eastern Hodh ech-Chargui region), Atar (in 1936, in the northern Adrar region), and Kiffa (in 1940, in the south-central Assaba region). Timbedra was until 1945 part of the colony of French Soudan.⁴⁰ The remainder of this chapter examines this expansion of the médersas during this period, through studies of both these institutions and the Algerians who directed their development. In particular, it focuses on the cases of the médersas in Atar and Timbuktu as two “successful” examples of institutional adaptation. Two “unsuccessful” cases from Senegal, of a proposed médersa in Dakar and an *école franco-mouride* in Diourbel, both from this period, serve as counterexamples. Taken together, the four Franco-Muslim schools illustrate the extent of the “Saharan apogee” of the médersas in West Africa in the interwar period.

By the mid-1930s, the French had established more or less stable control over the Mauritanian interior. The resistance led by the shaykh Ma’ al-Aynayn continued to oppose colonial control, but its efforts were mostly confined to the Spanish colony of Rio de Oro (today

³⁹ Jean Suret-Canale calls the interwar period the apogee of colonialism in Black Africa. *Afrique Noire, Occidentale et Centrale : L’ère coloniale (1900–1945)* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1964), 199.

⁴⁰ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Rapport sur les médersas de Mauritanie, 29 December 1944.

Western Sahara) to the north of Mauritania.⁴¹ In an indication of the small social world of the western Sahara in this period, his brother, the shaykh Saad Bou, would become a professor in the Médersa of Atar in this period. In the Trarza, French rule was more firmly established. The médersa of Boutilimit entered this new period in 1929 with the departure of Mekki el-Djenidi. As in 1922, when the médersa was forced to move to Mederdra because of Djenidi's "intrigues" in Boutilimit, Djenidi returned to Algeria under a cloud. He had opposed the French administrator in Mederdra through "political agitations," and had "been totally discredited in the eyes of the Moors by his non-observation of many of the ritual obligations of Islam."⁴² His departure ended a period, dating back to 1918 and the exit of the previous director, Larroque, when the médersa lacked a "competent director," in the later assessment of the administrator Paul Dubié.⁴³

Following a brief period under the interim direction of longtime professor and interpreter Bokar Ba, another Algerian was hired to take over the direction of the médersa. Though he was not the administration's first choice, Boualem Ould Rouis, a judicial assistant (*oukil judiciaire*) in Montgolfier (now Rhouia), a town between Oran and Algiers, was named director at Mederdra.⁴⁴ Born in Médéa, Ould Rouis had graduated from the Superior Division of the Algiers médersa in July 1928 with "irreproachable morals and conduct," in the words of the médersa's

⁴¹ On this Saharan colonial conflict, see Francesco Correale, "Mā al-'aynayn, il Marocco e la resistenza alla penetrazione coloniale (1905–1910)," *Oriente Moderno*, nuova serie, 17:78:2 (1998), 227–278.

⁴² ANRIM E2/44, Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to GGAOF, recrutement d'un directeur de Médersah pour Atar, 4 April 1937.

⁴³ ANF 20000046/19, Dubié, "La Médersa de Boutilimit," CHEAM thèse, November 1941, 8.

⁴⁴ ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, Service du personnel to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 31 May 1929. The administration's preferred candidate, Omar Kesraoui, chose to remain in Algeria as an "investigator of indigenous property." Ould Rouis was chosen over at least three other candidates, all living in Médéa: Mohammed Djebes, Hadj Mahmoud Stambouli, and Ali Saghir. See ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, GGA to GGAOF, 13 June 1929.

director Charles Saint-Calbre.⁴⁵ He was twenty-six years old. Though his correspondence leaves few clues as to why Ould Rouis would leave Algeria for the Sahara, one reason may have been that, given the different administrative structures of Algeria and AOF, he would have earned more money and enjoyed a higher title than a *mouderrès* in Algeria, the other post for which he was qualified as a graduate of the Superior Division.⁴⁶ Although administrators, especially those in AOF, sought to hasten Ould Rouis's arrival so that it would coincide with the start of the 1929–1930 school year, he only embarked on the longest leg of his voyage, from Marseille to Dakar, on 20 November 1929, and thus arrived in Mederdra after the year's studies had begun.⁴⁷ Despite the delay, he soon had made a very positive impression. The Lieutenant-Governor of Mauritania, in a year-end evaluation, wrote that Ould Rouis was “entirely satisfactory” as the *médersa*'s director, and that “the confidence and respect he inspired in his students and their parents are the greatest guarantees of the *médersa*'s success.”⁴⁸

Ould Rouis's arrival marked a new period in the *médersa*'s development. Whereas in previous years administrators voiced reservations about the *médersa*'s contributions to their political and educational missions, by 1930 their evaluations became more positive. For instance, in June 1930, one administrator wrote to Jules Carde, the Governor-General of AOF, that the *médersa* “obtains excellent results and has gained the trust of the population...[Its results] are impossible to ignore.”⁴⁹ As a sign of Ould Rouis's positive relationship with the local French

⁴⁵ ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, Directeur de la Médersa d'Alger to Préfet d'Alger, 25 May 1929.

⁴⁶ ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, Direction du Personnel to Ould Rouis, 29 November 1929. The letter containing this information arrived after his departure for Mauritania.

⁴⁷ ANOM FM EE/II/3916/14, Notice complémentaire, Port de Marseille, 20 November 1929.

⁴⁸ ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, Bulletin Individuel de Notes, 22 November 1930.

⁴⁹ ANS O493 (31), unsigned note to GGAOF, June 1930.

administrators, the médersa returned to Boutilimit by the beginning of the 1930–1931 school year; in the words of the Lieutenant-Governor, it “rapidly prospered” there. Ould Rouis had even succeeded in enrolling the sons of several important bidan families, including the members of Sidiyya Baba’s clan and the Awlad Dayman.⁵⁰ Under his leadership, the médersa continued to grow in enrollments and in importance throughout the 1930s. As in Algeria, the Boutilimit médersa became an important landmark in the colonial landscape: Odette du Puigaudeau, a prominent French traveler and researcher, featured the médersa in her travelogue recounting her voyage through the Sahara, published in 1936.⁵¹

These developments must have inspired confidence in Ould Rouis’s superiors, because they embarked on a major expansion of the médersa system soon after his arrival. In 1933, a médersa opened in Timbédra, a small town in what was then the French Soudan (though after a shift in the border in 1945, it is now located in southeastern Mauritania). Its organization closely followed the adapted institutional structure of the Boutilimit médersa: its director had to be an Algerian medérsien, for example. Like Boutilimit, its students were to be recruited among the local bidan notability. They would study an adapted Franco-Muslim curriculum, and live under conditions closely resembling, down to their daily food rations, those in Boutilimit.⁵²

Despite the renewed emphasis on the education of noble bidan boys and the growing reputation of the Boutilimit médersa, the Timbédra médersa struggled to recruit and train a sizable number of students. The same was true in Kiffa, where a médersa opened in 1940. There too the médersa followed the adapted Boutilimit model. In both places, the reasons for the

⁵⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Commandant du cercle du Trarza, 1 December 1930.

⁵¹ Odette du Puigaudeau, *Pieds nus à travers la Mauritanie* (Paris: Plon, 1936), 81–88.

⁵² CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Arrêté créant une école médersa de fils de chefs et de notables maures à Timbédra, 12 September 1933.

relatively weak impact of the *médersas* can be hypothesized as the confluence of several factors: a simple reluctance or refusal on the part of these more remote local populations to embrace foreign schooling practices; a smaller French presence (neither Timbédra nor Kiffa hosted as large a French base as Boutilimit); or the absence of an Algerian director with Ould Rouis's charisma and skill. The logic behind the creation of these *médersas* and the ongoing support they received is not clear in their documentation; it seems, however, that they operated more or less consistently throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

The third of the new *médersas*, located in Atar and opened in January 1936, presents a clearer case of domestication and institutional adaptation. According to its foundational decree, the *médersa* had two purposes: first, “the preservation of classical Arab culture in northern Mauritania” and second, “the formation of an indigenous elite in the region.”⁵³ The first of these is unique among the *médersas*, in Mauritania and elsewhere, and suggests the importance of the Adrar plateau to the intellectual history of the western Sahara and of northwest Africa. Chinguetti (Ar. *Shinqīt*), Adrar's largest and most historically important city, lent its renown to a much wider region: in Arabic, *Bilād Shinqīt* refers to the whole of the western Sahara.⁵⁴ The area was also home to Azougi, what had been an important city on the trans-Saharan trade routes linking Morocco and the Ghana empire and a base for the Almoravids during their eleventh-century conquest of the region. Chinguetti would have been a natural choice for a *médersa* in northern Mauritania. The city remained a scholarly center at the time of the French conquest and was therefore an important strategic site for the extension of French influence. Atar, younger and lacking the same scholarly prestige, was chosen instead.

⁵³ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Décision créant une *médersa* à Atar, 13 January 1936.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Timothy Cleaveland, *Becoming Walata: A History of Saharan Social Formation and Transformation* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

The *commandant de cercle* of Adrar, Captain Bachmann, wrote regarding this choice that “Chinguetti is an abandoned city [which would be] very difficult to revive.”⁵⁵ Atar, by its proximity to Chinguetti (approximately 85 kilometers to the west), retained some of the latter’s reputation for Islamic scholarship. More importantly for Bachmann, Atar was home to a French fort, much like Boutilimit. From that perch, he and his fellow administrators could oversee the preservation of a certain kind of classical Arab culture and the formation of a certain kind of indigenous elite. In Bachmann’s proposal, the patriarch of the eminent Ahel Habbot clan of Chinguetti would lend his name and prestige to the Atar médersa—an arrangement not unlike Shaykh Sidiyya Baba’s patronage of the Boutilimit médersa in the 1910s.

The choice of Atar had an inter-imperial strategic value as well. To the north, the Spanish colony of Rio de Oro represented a challenge to French authority in the Sahara. To the French, Mauritania was a *trait d’union*, a hyphen linking the North and West African colonial territories; the Spanish Sahara held the potential to rupture that link. From coastal Villa Cisneros (today Dakhla) the Spanish struggled to control the Saharan interior even after the death of the shaykh Ma’ al-Aynayn in 1910. In the Moorish populations, whose tribal affiliations and nomadic peregrinations crossed the borders of French and Spanish control, the French saw an opportunity to extend their influence and demonstrate their superiority over the Spanish. Bachmann wrote that “our Spanish neighbors irritate their subjects through an absolute ignorance of their customs and habits, which we observe in reports of frequent attacks.”⁵⁶ Creating a médersa in the Adrar was a foray, deep into the Sahara, of the broader French West African policy of positioning France as a “Muslim power,” or *puissance musulmane*, uniquely suited among colonial powers

⁵⁵ ANRIM E2/44, Bachmann to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 13 November 1934.

⁵⁶ ANRIM E2/44, Bachmann to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 13 November 1934.

to rule over African Muslims.⁵⁷ As one of the last parts of western Africa to come into direct contact with the colonial state, in the mid-1930s, Adrar serves as a particularly interesting case study of institutional and political adaptation.

In Atar, the *médersa* took on a form that distinguished it from the others in Boutilimit, Timbédra, and Timbuktu, and that distinguished French “Muslim policy” in the Adrar from its policy elsewhere. As in the earliest years of the Algerian *médersas*, French instruction was minimized. Following a formula of “Arabic instruction, given by Arab professors to Muslims,” the *médersa* would slowly gain the trust of the local population and eventually convince them of the benefits of French rule.⁵⁸ Shaykh Sidiyya Baba’s influence had never been as widespread in the Adrar as in the Trarza, and his 1903 fatwa encouraging acceptance of foreign rule was not particularly influential in the north. Promising students were encouraged to study French with the schoolteacher stationed at the French primary school in Atar, but initially, at least, French had no formal place in the *médersa* curriculum. Of course, the colonial influence was obvious: the school was organized and funded by the colonial administration, and as in Boutilimit students received food and lodging at French expense. But the formal French component of the *médersa*’s “Franco-Muslim” instruction receded dramatically in Atar.

Hiring local scholars as *médersa* professors was of paramount importance. First among them was the shaykh Mohammed Ould Habbot, of the famous Chinguetti family, as the professor of theology and Qur’anic exegesis. Others targeted by the administration included shaykh Saad Bou as professor of Arabic grammar and Mohammed Ould Brahim Ould Shaykh Ma el Ainin as

⁵⁷ Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power”.

⁵⁸ ANRIM E2/44, Bachmann to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 13 November 1934.

professor of Arabic literature.⁵⁹ These latter two scholars were both members of Ma' al-Aynayn's immediate family; their presence at the médersa would, the French hoped, defang the last bastions of overt resistance to their rule. Professors proposed for courses in Islamic law, prosody, and the traditions of the Prophet—Sidi Mohammed Ould Lahbib Ould Abdelhai and Sidi Ould Khalil—came from other prominent families in the region.

As for the position of director, the choice was obvious: Boualem Ould Rouis, under whose leadership the Boutilimit médersa had blossomed for the past six years. Indeed, Ould Rouis's influence over the médersa of Atar began in the planning stages. In October 1935—three months before its foundational decree was promulgated—Ould Rouis traveled to Atar and Chinguetti to consult with local populations about the proposed médersa. In Boutilimit he was replaced by another Algerian, Mustafa Ben Moussa. He recounted in a letter to the lieutenant-governor of Mauritania that the leaders he met with, “marabouts and warriors” both, universally approved of a médersa so long as it closely resembled a mahadra. It was he, most likely, who negotiated curricular adaptations and who identified potential professors, all of whom, he insisted, must come from the region's intellectual elite so as to burnish the new school's reputation among skeptical *bidan* families.⁶⁰ The Reguibat, a confederation of *grands nomads* whose territory stretched from the Adrar in the south north to Guelmim in what is now southern Morocco, and whose persistent resistance proved to be the greatest obstacle to Spanish control in Rio de Oro, were especially enthusiastic about Ould Rouis's proposals.⁶¹ Convincing such a reticent group to send their sons to the médersa was a major coup for the Algerian professor as well as for the administration.

⁵⁹ ANRIM E2/44, Inspecteur des Ecoles to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 6 December 1934.

⁶⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Ould Rouis to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 26 October 1935.

⁶¹ ANRIM E2/44, Bachmann to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 26 October 1935.

The official organization of the médersa followed Ould Rouis's proposals very precisely. His influence extended to the choice of the physical site—a shady palm grove called Kanawal, near the French post about two kilometers from Atar's old ksar. At a remove from both the town center and the fort, the medérsiens would be able to study free of distractions from the town and away (in theory, at least) from the overly watchful eyes of the colonial administration. He recommended building a modest compound, with housing for the director and the students alongside a new building for the médersa itself (see Figure 4.2), and enumerated a list of materials, ranging from classroom furniture to kitchen utensils, to be provided by the administration. Ould Rouis believed that this arrangement, adapted in concert with local demands and traditions, would achieve an ambitious set of goals: “vanquishing prejudice and inspiring confidence” among the Moors, “awakening a sense of humanity and a sort of French consciousness” in students, and replicating, in some senses, the Zaytuna of Tunis and al-Azhar of Egypt.⁶²

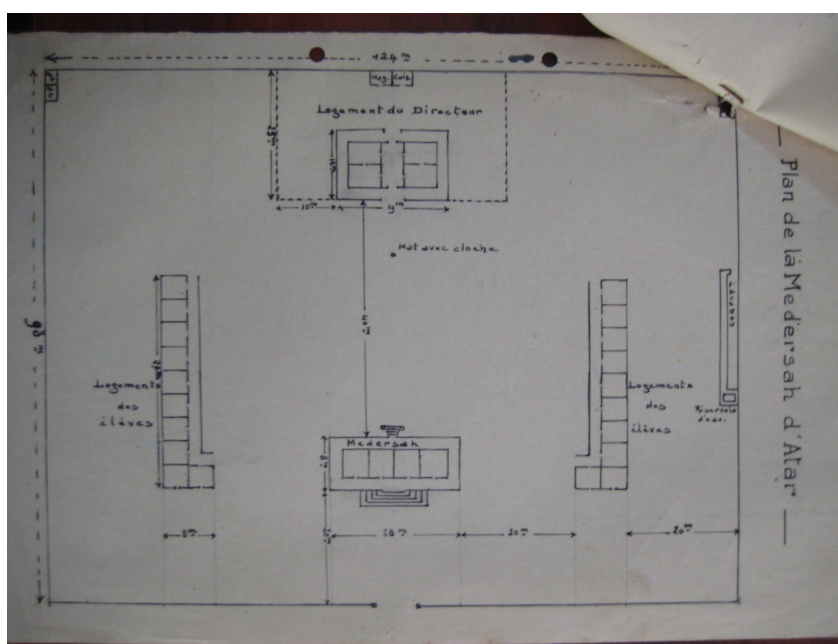


Figure 4.2. Plan for the Atar médersa, 26 October 1935.

⁶² ANRIM E2/44, Ould Rouis to Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 26 October 1935.

No new institution could achieve so much so soon, but the médersa of Atar was quickly deemed a success by the colonial officers who oversaw it. Ould Rouis had become a trusted figure: in following his recommendations, the administration ignored the advice of more famous metropolitan figures such as Louis Massignon. The famous Orientalist suggested two young French graduates of the elite *École des langues orientales vivantes* in Paris when asked to recommend candidates for the post of médersa director in 1936.⁶³ The administration instead decided to require the director to be an Algerian medérsien, who would both be better able to adapt to the Saharan milieu and command a lower salary than a European teacher. “Entirely satisfactory” as the médersa’s director, in the words of one education inspector, Ould Rouis remained at Atar until 1939, when he was succeeded by another Algerian medérsien, Abderrahmane Nekli.⁶⁴

In 1939, Ould Rouis returned to Algeria. His departure caused an administrative headache because he did not follow the usual bureaucratic procedures to alert his superiors in Atar, Saint-Louis, and Dakar. He led them to believe he was traveling to Algeria for personal reasons, his parents having arranged his marriage to take place on 1 January of that year.⁶⁵ He neglected to mention that he did not intend to return to Mauritania and had in fact secured a post at the Médersa of Constantine beginning on the same date.⁶⁶ He never fully explained to the administration why he chose to leave Mauritania. One might suspect that the supposed wedding was a ruse: he had long been married to a Moorish woman, with whom he had a son, Bachir,

⁶³ ANRIM E2/44, Direction de l’enseignement, note on Massignon, 8 September 1936.

⁶⁴ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Rapport sur la Médersah d’Atar, 24 March 1936.

⁶⁵ ANRIM E2/44, Ould Rouis to Lieutenant-Gouverneur de la Mauritanie, 11 September 1938.

⁶⁶ ANRIM E2/44, Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Inspecteur de l’Enseignement du Sénégal, 22 October 1938.

born in 1932.⁶⁷ The administration had to scramble to find a replacement. Several candidates withdrew their applications at the last minute, leaving only one Algerian willing to take the job— Abderrahmane Nekli, who was named director of the *médersa* and arrived in Atar in March 1939.⁶⁸

Unusually for this period, Ould Rouis returned to Algeria overland, rather than by sea. He traveled east to Gao, in the French Soudan, before joining the long northward route to Algiers.⁶⁹ Along the way he paused in Timbuktu where he compiled a report on that city's *médersa*. It is unclear if Ould Rouis volunteered for this project or if the AOF administration sought to wring more work from him for the troubles he had caused them in Mauritania. In any case, he missed his wedding day in Algeria: he spent the first half of 1939 concluding his duties in West Africa. Despite his rocky relationship with the West African administration, he was recognized as the preeminent expert on Franco-Muslim education in the Sahara and Sahel. Under his leadership, the *médersas* of Boutilimit and Atar were considered major successes in the colonial educational effort and his recommendations for the *Médersa* of Timbuktu were taken seriously.

The Timbuktu *médersa* had operated continuously since its foundation in 1911. Unlike its counterparts in Djenné and Saint-Louis, founded around the same time, it had survived persistent calls for its closure from local administrators and regional education inspectors. Its profile within Timbuktu and across the region seems to have been fairly low. Administrators insisted throughout the 1930s that the *médersa*'s goal was primarily the “political domestication” (*apprivoisement politique*) of Timbuktu's elite.⁷⁰ This marked a contrast with the other West

⁶⁷ ANOM FM EE/II/6385/OULDROUIS, Bulletin individuel de notes, 1938.

⁶⁸ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to GGAOF, 4 March 1939.

⁶⁹ ANOM FM EE/II/3916/14, Notice de débarquement Gao-Blida, 21 June 1939.

African médersas, where reforming “medieval” educational practices was more frequently cited as the médersa’s foremost purpose. In Timbuktu, the local population resisted embracing the médersa as their fellows in Boutilimit and Atar had. The local administration struggled to enroll students, especially the sons of Tuareg chiefs they targeted. Once at the médersa, students of different backgrounds—nomadic or sedentary, or from the diverse ethnic groups of the region—often came into conflict with one another.⁷¹ Many of the médersa’s professors were also regarded with suspicion by the local populace. This long-simmering situation frustrated the French administration, which sought throughout this period to use the médersa as a tool to more firmly implant colonial rule in the Niger Bend.

From 1914, the médersa’s director was a man named Auguste Dupuis, also known as Yakouba. Born in 1865 in the Aisne region of northern France, Dupuis came to Timbuktu as a missionary in the Order of the Missionaries of Africa. The order, also known as the White Fathers, was founded in Algeria by the cardinal Charles Lavigerie in 1868 to evangelize Africans.⁷² The White Fathers were particularly active in the Sahara, and Dupuis’s arrival in Timbuktu, in 1895, marked the first permanent presence of a Christian mission in the city.⁷³ Dupuis took readily to life in Timbuktu and actively pursued scholarly work, including the publication of the first Songhai–French dictionary in 1897. Around 1904, he left the order, but remained in Timbuktu where he married a local woman named Salama Bouba, worked as an interpreter, and continued to write about the city for a range of colonial publications. A friend of Joseph Clozel, the scholar-administrator who served in the French Soudan and as Governor-

⁷⁰ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, GGAOF to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Soudan, 22 May 1936.

⁷¹ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Rapport sur la Médersah de Tombouctou, 17 October 1936.

⁷² Joseph-Roger de Benoist, *Eglise et pouvoir au Soudan français: Les relations entre les administrateurs et les missionnaires catholiques dans la Boucle du Niger, de 1885 à 1945* (Paris: Karthala, 1987).

⁷³ White, “The Decivilizing Mission,” 543. The mission would close in 1907.

General of AOF in the 1910s, Dupuis was named director of the Timbuktu médersa in 1914. The post was a testament to his renown among well-connected administrators, given the politically sensitive role of the médersa in French policy in the Niger Bend. He would remain in the post until 1934, despite opposition from some administrators who questioned his qualifications.⁷⁴

In the 1920s, as French rule gradually opened Timbuktu up to foreign visitors, Dupuis gained a certain degree of celebrity. He symbolized a particular kind of colonial curiosity, the European “gone native,” or *décivilisé*. To his admirers, his adopted name, Yakouba, demonstrated his degree of assimilation to local culture; his intermediary position running the Franco-Muslim médersa proved the viability of the colonial project. One such supporter was a famous American traveler and journalist named William Seabrook, who visited Dupuis-Yakouba in Timbuktu and recounted the experience in a book. Seabrook described him as “high-handedly” managing “a legitimate and honest Arabic school...[that] would help make the desert and jungle a safe and profitable investment for the Banque de France.”⁷⁵ Albert Londres, the pioneering investigative journalist, also profiled Dupuis-Yakouba in a book entitled *Terre d’ébène*, a major early critique of colonial rule in West Africa, published in 1929. In that work, Dupuis-Yakouba emerges as a positive force for promoting French civilization in Africa.⁷⁶ At the epicenter of colonial concerns about civilization and religion, Dupuis-Yakouba became a lightning rod for these debates via his coverage in the European press.

⁷⁴ White, “The Decivilizing Mission,” 555–556. Gabriel Angoulvant, Clozel’s replacement as GGAOF, was one of the detractors.

⁷⁵ William Seabrook, *The White Monk of Timbuctoo* (London: Harrap, 1934), 191.

⁷⁶ Albert Londres, *Terre d’ébène* (Paris: A. Michel, 1929), 100–111.

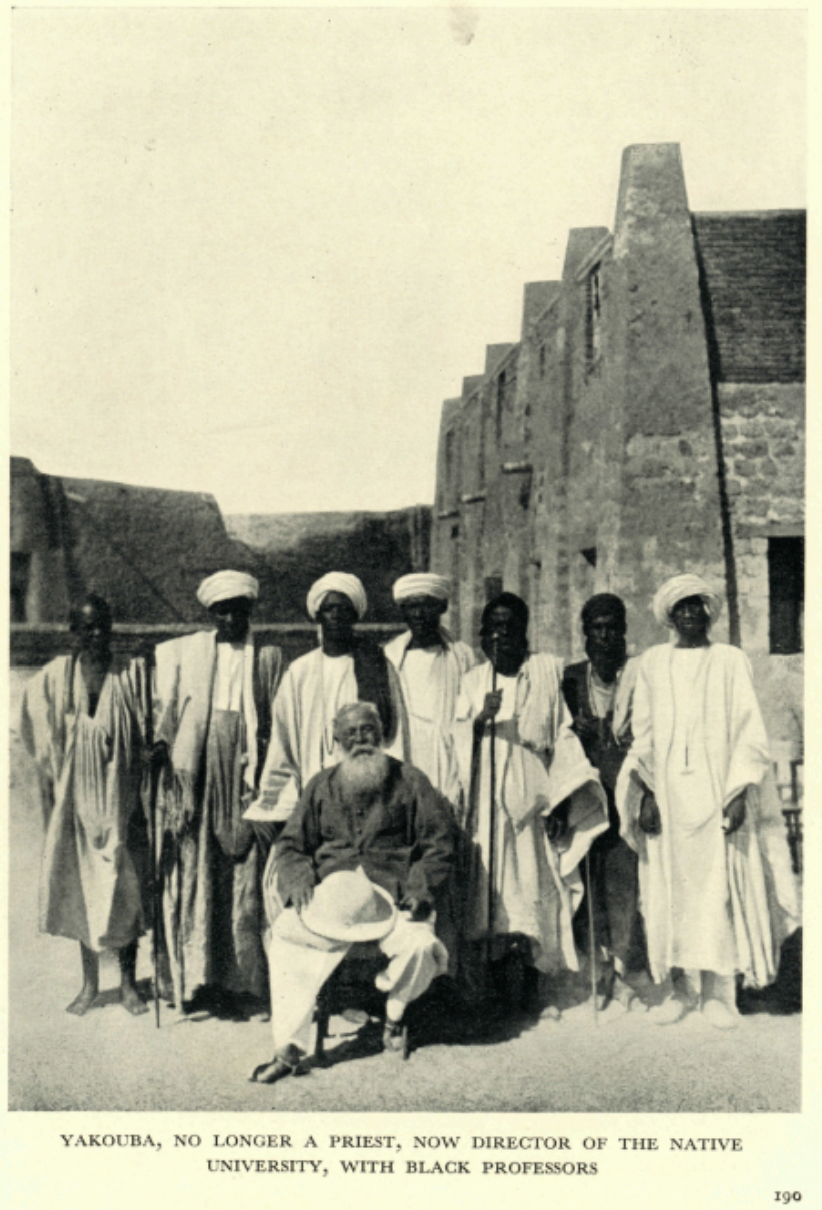


Figure 4.3. Dupuis-Yakouba and colleagues in front of the médersa. From William Seabrook, *The White Monk of Timbuctoo* (1934).

Throughout this decade of celebrity, he remained in Timbuktu as director of the médersa. Famous though he may have been, his management of the médersa received consistent criticism during inspections. For example, in 1921, the prominent inspector Robert Arnaud reported that Dupuis-Yakouba had only “superficial” knowledge of Arabic—though that was better than Alfa Seidou, the eighteen-year-old assistant teacher, who knew none—and concluded his report by

arguing that the direction of so important an institution “should not be considered a sinecure, to be given to an old, incapable, and otherwise useless agent.”⁷⁷ And yet Dupuis-Yakouba hung on for over a decade in that position, seemingly without making any changes to the *médersa*’s operations or its reputation in the community.

He left the *médersa*, finally, in 1934. His successors, a Soudanese teacher named Bouillagui Fadiga and a French teacher named Vermande (his first name went unrecorded), were each tasked with reforming the *médersa* but their efforts faltered. Fadiga was one of the most prominent French-educated functionaries in the French Soudan; his patron, Frédéric Assomption, rose through the ranks of colonial schoolteachers to become the colony’s Education Inspector. Assomption was also, in the words of Amadou Hampâté Bâ, “the French teacher who made the most profound impact on the colony” of French Soudan.⁷⁸ Assomption and Fadiga attempted to overhaul the *médersa* after Dupuis-Yakouba’s departure; Fadiga’s heavy-handed approach to disciplining students and staff raised the ire of many in the city. He left, fearing for his physical safety, in 1935.⁷⁹ His replacement, Vermande, resembled the Saint-Louis director Jules Salenc in his disdain for the institution he led. In a 1936 report, Vermande made a splash in the French Soudan’s colonial circles by proclaiming “Timbuktu is not a holy city. It is no longer a center of Islamic culture.”⁸⁰ Like Assomption and a range of other administrators who echoed Clozel’s founding proclamation of 1911, Vermande wrote that the *médersa*’s utility, as an “instrument of Muslim politics,” had run its course. He recommended either closing the *médersa* completely or

⁷⁷ ANS O85 (31), Extrait du rapport Arnaud, 14 November 1921.

⁷⁸ Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *Amkoullel, L’enfant peul. Mémoires* (Arles: Actes sud, 1991), 386–388. See also Louis Brenner, “Becoming muslim in Soudan français,” in David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds., *Le temps des marabouts* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 467–492.

⁷⁹ Brenner, “Becoming muslim,” 473.

⁸⁰ ANS O530 (31), Vermande, La Médersah depuis sa création, 17 October 1936.

embarking on a large-scale reorganization. This long-simmering reform project, dating to Fadiga's nomination in 1934, was assigned to Ould Rouis at least as early as August 1938, though he did not come to the French Soudan until early the next year.⁸¹

When Ould Rouis arrived in Timbuktu in the spring of 1939, he too was dismayed by the state of the *médersa*. To ameliorate its condition, he suggested transforming it in nearly every way to better match the *médersas* of Atar and Boutilimit with which he was so familiar. This marked a shift from the *médersa*'s previous decades, when Dupuis-Yakouba focused solely on the city or region of Timbuktu and his successors including Fadiga and Assomption drew from references elsewhere in the French Soudan. It took a figure like Ould Rouis—who could easily draw connections between his Mauritanian and Algerian experiences—to see the Timbuktu example in a different light.

In a brusque report, Ould Rouis's first suggestion was to change the physical location of the *médersa*. Situated in the middle of Timbuktu's "native town" (*ville indigène*), the *médersa* ought to move to the outskirts of the city. This suggestion echoed his decision to build the Atar *médersa* at the Kanawal site outside the town center. He also criticized the *médersa*'s system of *externat*, in which students lived at home—either with their own families or, for those from elsewhere, with host families. Students also received a modest stipend to cover their food and clothing. Better, Ould Rouis thought, to introduce an *internat* system, in which students lived under tents located in the *médersa*'s compound. The administration would provide food and clothing to students directly and eliminate the scholarships and stipends that had previously been granted to students. This system would both facilitate surveillance of the students and improve

⁸¹ ANS O530 (31), GGAOF to Gouverneur du Soudan Français, 31 August 1938.

their comfort and standard of living; in support of this suggestion he cited the positive response from medérsiens and their families to such a system, especially to the tents, in Mauritania.⁸²

Ould Rouis's vision for replicating the Mauritanian experience in Timbuktu extended to the teaching staff. He decried the current teaching assistants (*moniteurs*) Alfa Saloum and Omar Ahmed Baba as "mediocre," especially in their knowledge of Arabic.⁸³ Indeed, he blamed their ignorance for the medérsiens' discouraging results. He was more generous with another instructor, Samassekou, who he praised as conscientious and esteemed by the local population. He recommended supplementing the faculty with two Mauritians who would guarantee a greater Arabic fluency on the staff. One, Mohamedou Ould Abdillah, was a jurist, grammarian, poet, and writer, as well as a professor of Qur'anic studies at the Atar médersa. Ould Rouis recommended hiring him as a professor of Arabic at Timbuktu, and suggested a replacement—Mahfoud Ould Amadya, of the Ida oul Hassan of Boutilimit—for his post in Atar. The other, Beddi (or Badadi) Ould Mounir from Chinguetti, was still a student at the Atar médersa but Ould Rouis proposed hiring him as a *moniteur* for Arabic classes in Timbuktu. In the estimation of Rossignol, an administrator at Atar, Ould Abdillah was indispensable to the continued progress of students in Atar and so should not be sent to Timbuktu; Ould Mounir was a promising candidate but it was doubtful that he would accept the post.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, their nominations moved up the chain of command and, by the next year, Ould Mounir, at least, was employed as a monitor at the Timbuktu médersa.⁸⁵

⁸² ANRIM E2/44, Rapport de M. Ould Rouis, 3 May 1939.

⁸³ ANRIM E2/44, Rapport de M. Ould Rouis, 3 May 1939.

⁸⁴ ANRIM E2/44, Télégramme, 29 October 1939.

⁸⁵ ANS O502 (31), Bulletin d'inspection, médersa de Tombouctou, 15 October 1940.

As Bruce Hall has shown, the “French regime in the Niger Bend was fundamentally structured along lines of racial difference.”⁸⁶ The *médersa*’s recruitment practices and student population matched this pattern, which melded local racial concepts with European techniques of differentiation. Colonial officials were annoyed that so many of the *médersa*’s students came from Timbuktu’s sedentary black population. A 1935 report enumerated a typical range of origins: out of 105 students, there were 85 Songhai, seven Peul, and one Bellah (a French term denoting those enslaved by the Tuareg), for a total of 88% blacks; the remaining *medérsiens* included eight “Cherifs” (probably denoting those residents claiming Moroccan ancestry, dating back to the 1591 invasion by Ahmad al-Mansūr⁸⁷), three Berabich, and one Kel-Arawan.⁸⁸ Only 12% of the students came from the elite, white, Arab-Berber, nomadic population that the *médersa* was intended to educate. Following, or so they claimed, the local custom, the French separated the students into three classes. One, called the Moroccan section, had the Moroccan students and was evaluated separately in reports. Even this group, however, lacked the crucial target demographic of sons of chiefs.

In his 1939 recommendations, Ould Rouis dismissed this arrangement and the administration’s concerns as easily solved. In his view, the *medérsiens* should be divided into two sections, with the Moroccans joining the class of the other white Moors, and the black students remaining in a separate group. That way, he wrote, “the question of race cannot be posed, since they are all of the [same] race.”⁸⁹ Indeed, in his report Ould Rouis barely mentioned

⁸⁶ Hall, *A History of Race*, 132.

⁸⁷ See Michel Abitbol, “Une élite soudanaise des XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles : les Arma de Tombouctou,” *Outre-mers. Revue d’histoire* 237 (1977), 445–455.

⁸⁸ ANS O530 (31), Renseignements sur la Médersa de Tombouctou, n.d. [1935].

⁸⁹ ANRIM E2/44, Rapport de M. Ould Rouis, 3 May 1939.

the Songhai or other black students, focusing instead on Timbuktu's white population. To increase the number of the desired white nomadic elite, he suggested, the administration should simply "accept only the sons of noble families."⁹⁰ These ideas demonstrate the degree to which Ould Rouis drew upon his Mauritanian experience, where recruitment was facilitated by the French alliance with the Ahel Shaykh Sidiyya and other prominent families. They also suggest a certain ignorance of the social context in Timbuktu, where both white and black populations had different relationships with colonial authorities than their counterparts in Mauritania.

Ould Rouis's final recommendation was that the *médersa*'s director should always be an Algerian *medérsien*. Europeans, even those with advanced Arabic training, were incapable of fully assessing the work of their colleagues and students, and of fully understanding the complex Saharan social and political context of Timbuktu. Only an Algerian would be able to garner the trust of the local population and thereby transform the *médersa* by following Ould Rouis's prescriptions: "to recruit the sons of good families, make them evolve (*les faire évoluer*) in their milieu, under the *internat* system, following an appropriate curriculum...is a path to success."⁹¹ Dupuis-Yakouba, Fadiga, and Vermande had all failed to successfully guide the *médersa* in the administration's desired direction. At the end of his long career in the Sahara, Ould Rouis offered a detailed, informed (if incompletely), and convincing path forward for the administration.

Ould Rouis left Timbuktu for Gao, where he turned north and crossed the Sahara to return to the Algerian coast. He took a post first at the *Médersa* of Constantine, and around 1942 he moved to the *Médersa* of Algiers, where he taught until his retirement. There he was esteemed

⁹⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Rapport de M. Ould Rouis, 3 May 1939.

⁹¹ ANRIM E2/44, Rapport de M. Ould Rouis, 3 May 1939.

by his colleagues and students, who referred to him by the honorific title of Cheikh with respect to his erudition. In 1972, Ould Rouis was named a Grand Officer in the Mauritanian National Order of Merit (*Istihqāq al-Watani al-Muritanī*).⁹² In other words, after leaving Mauritania Ould Rouis continued to fit the cosmopolitan image of the Algerian medérsien, a reputation that persisted even after the social and cultural upheaval of Algerian independence.⁹³ His career in West Africa exemplified a sort of “proxy colonialism” unusual in French-colonized territories: a Muslim, who spoke perfect Arabic and French and who gained the respect of both Saharan leaders and French administrators.⁹⁴ His status was a result of the particular training he received in the Algerian médersa system, and it enabled him to make a personal and deeply felt impression on the médersas of West Africa.

In Ould Rouis’s Footsteps: Algerian Directors in Mauritania’s Médersas

If Ould Rouis exemplifies a kind of colonial proxy particular to the médersas, other Algerians in the same mold also shaped Franco-Muslim education in AOF. Following in Ould Rouis’s footsteps, these men left a smaller archival trail but nevertheless made a major impression on the médersas they ran. Their work in Mauritania and the French Soudan continued through the 1940s and into the era of decolonization in the 1950s, marking a transition from the first period of the “Saharan apogee” typified by Ould Rouis’s work in Boutilimit, Atar, and Timbuktu.

⁹² *Journal Officiel de la République Islamique de Mauritanie*, 16 December 1972.

⁹³ Ould Rouis’s younger brother Ahmed Ould Rouis, another medérsien, also fit this mold. From 1958 to 1975 he was married to the novelist Fatima Zahra Imalayen, better known by her *nom de plume*, Assia Djebar. Both Imalayen and the junior Ould Rouis were active supporters of Algerian independence.

⁹⁴ Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy*.

The least known of these figures was Abde Tebikha, named director of the Médersa of Timbuktu in 1939 or 1940.⁹⁵ In November 1939, he had been considered for the director post at the Médersa of Timbédra, having applied from a previous position as director of a colonial school at Collo, in eastern Algeria.⁹⁶ The fact that he had previously worked at the Collo school suggests that, unusually for médersa directors, he may have studied at the École normale in Bouzareah rather than at a médersa. It was rare for Algerian medérsiens to work in education outside the role of mouderrès in urban mosques or in the médersas themselves. Tebikha left very few traces in the archives other than a remarkable proposal, submitted in 1940 while director at Timbuktu. In it he argued for building a connection between the Timbuktu médersa and the French lycée (called the Lycée Terrasson de Fougères) in Bamako, for students who wanted to pursue professions outside the Islamic sciences.⁹⁷ Tebikha rejected the racial logics underpinning the separation of the medérsiens into separate black and white sections, suggesting instead that the médersa should be a pipeline for all talented auxiliaries of the administration, be they Songhai, Tuareg, or one of the many other groups living in the Timbuktu region. In so doing, he also argued against the longstanding practice, in Algeria as in AOF, of dedicating particular positions to medérsiens alone. Tebikha's proposals were innovative, reasonable, and could have offered a way to revitalize the médersa which still struggled to meet the goals of the administration. Instead, they were summarily rejected by Frédéric Assomption, the colony's education inspector, who had vehemently opposed the médersa since at least the mid-1930s,

⁹⁵ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 47–48.

⁹⁶ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives to Directeur du Personnel, 25 November 1939.

⁹⁷ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 47–48, citing Archives Nationales du Mali, 1-G-176 FR, Tebikha, Rapport, 27 July 1940.

when his ally Bouillagui Fadiga was forced out as director.⁹⁸ Tebikha did not remain long in Timbuktu. By 1941, he was replaced by his fellow Algerian Abderrahmane Nekli, who, like Ould Rouis before him, came to Timbuktu from Atar.

Nekli left a larger archival trail than Tebikha, but his is less complete than that of Ould Rouis. I was able to meet and interview two of his children, Malika and Khalil Nekli, in Nouakchott in 2016, and their memories of their father, who died in 1991, allow a more complete picture to emerge. Nekli was born in El Kseur, a town in Kabylia, in 1914. His father, a qadi, sent him to study at the Médersa of Constantine and after that the Superior Division in Algiers. Nekli's brother, Abdallah Nakli, was also a medérsien. (French administrators responsible for the *état civil* frequently transliterated names from Arabic and other African languages in idiosyncratic ways, leading in this case to two brothers with official names that are spelled differently.) Nakli published in Arabic grammar in 1935 and a historical play, *La Kahina*, celebrating the role of the Berber queen who led resistance to the Arab invasions of the Maghrib in the seventh century C.E. This latter work aroused such suspicion in colonial authorities that Nakli was imprisoned throughout the Algerian war (1954–1962). Nakli was also involved in a printing press that published schoolbooks distributed throughout Algeria.⁹⁹ Nekli, similarly ambitious and engaged, arrived in Mauritania in February 1939, at the age of 25.¹⁰⁰

After serving very briefly at the Médersa of Kiffa, Nekli replaced Ould Rouis as director of the Médersa of Atar. Ould Rouis had already made many of the important arrangements for the médersa, but his departure for Timbuktu and Constantine left a good deal of work for Nekli. Ould Rouis had suggested involving members of the Ould Habbot clan in the médersa, much as

⁹⁸ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 47–48.

⁹⁹ Interview with Malika Nekli and Khalil Nekli, 31 March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ ANRIM E2/44, Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to GGAOF, 28 April 1944.

Sidiyya Baba's family became closely involved with the Médersa of Boutilimit. One professor at the Atar médersa, Sidi Mohamed Ould Ahmed Ould Habbot, was indeed from this prominent family. Nekli took the strategy a step farther: soon after his arrival, he married the professor's daughter, Maryem Mint Habbot. Under normal circumstances such a marriage between an outsider and a daughter of the Ahel Habbot would have been unthinkable in the social world of the Adrar. According to family lore, the bride's friends jokingly arranged a mock funeral for her during her engagement ceremony, so serious was this breach of tradition.¹⁰¹

The marriage solidified Nekli's positive reputation in Atar and throughout the Adrar region. Known as *al-mudir*, the director, he stood out for the European suit he wore, an emblem of the particularly Algerian "double culture" he represented. Beyond his close relationship with the Habbot family, Nekli also befriended the French commanders in the region, with whom he would carry on long debates about Islam and Saharan culture. He assisted visiting scholars, developing particularly close ties with a group of ethnologists and archaeologists from the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, with whom he corresponded throughout his career. According to his children, he and his wife would share their modest resources by providing food to families in Atar and Chinguetti, especially in times of scarcity.¹⁰² Through these personal connections, Nekli tied his personal charisma to the reputation of the médersa, and both he and the school became tightly woven into the local social fabric of Atar.

One of Nekli's most influential contacts, both professionally and intellectually, was his colleague at the médersa, the Mauritanian historian Mokhtar Ould Hamidou. Originally from the Trarza region, and the descendant of a prominent scholarly lineage of the Awlad Dayman,

¹⁰¹ Interview with Malika Nekli and Khalil Nekli, 31 March 2016.

¹⁰² Interview with Malika Nekli and Khalil Nekli, 31 March 2016

Ould Hamidoun was hired to teach Arabic at the Médersa of Atar in 1943.¹⁰³ He remained there until 1949, when he took up a post as a researcher at the French West African research institute, the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN), in Saint-Louis. (IFAN also maintained a research station in Atar, and another in Dakar.) There, in the company of such luminaries as Théodore Monod, Amadou Hampaté Bâ, and Jean Suret-Canale, he began his scholarly career in earnest, eventually publishing an encyclopedic range of works on the history and cultures of the peoples of the Sahara.¹⁰⁴ Ould Hamidoun eventually became one of northwestern Africa’s most prominent historians and scholars in the twentieth century.

Together, Ould Hamidoun and Nekli cemented the prestige of the Atar médersa. Mohammed Saïd Ould Hamody, a student there in the late 1940s, who rose from *haratīn* status to become Mauritania’s ambassador to the United Nations and the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, recalled Ould Hamidoun as the médersa’s most impressive teacher.¹⁰⁵ Even Marebbi Rebbo, the son of France’s persistent adversary Shaykh Ma’ al-Aynayn, allowed two of his nephews to study at the Atar médersa in the 1940s.¹⁰⁶ Between their presence and the groundwork laid earlier by Ould Rouis, the Atar médersa became as respected an institution as the older médersa of Boutilimit among the Saharan elite.

In the mid-1940s—sources contradict each other as to the exact date—Nekli was transferred from Atar to Timbuktu where he again served as médersa director. Unlike Ould

¹⁰³ G.-J. Duchemin and A. Leriche, “Avant-propos,” in Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun, *Précis sur la Mauritanie* (Saint-Louis: Centre IFAN-Mauritanie, 1952), 5–6.

¹⁰⁴ Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun, *Hayāt Mūrītānīyā* (Rabat: Manshūrāt al-Zaman, 2009). See also Pierre Bonte, Edouard Conte, Constant Hamès, Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, eds., *Al Ansāb: La Quête des origines*, (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1991), 7–8.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Mohammed Saïd Ould Hamody, 17 May 2015.

¹⁰⁶ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Directeur des Affaires Politiques et Administratives to Directeur du Personnel, 7 September 1940.

Rouis, he spent much more time in the French Soudan than in Mauritania. In Timbuktu, he oversaw a process common to all the West African médersas in the late 1940s: the transition from Franco-Muslim médersa to Franco-Arab school.¹⁰⁷ Nekli remained in Timbuktu throughout the 1950s and 1960s, where, while continuing to teach at the médersa, he became involved in supporting the Algerian war for independence. He served as a coordinator for both the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) and the GPRA (*Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne*) in their diplomatic and military efforts in West Africa.¹⁰⁸ After Algerian independence in 1962, he remained in West Africa but transitioned from teaching to a diplomatic career. He served as Algerian ambassador to Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso and was present at the creation of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1963. In 1969, he helped to organize the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, held in Algiers and meant to demonstrate Algeria's commitment to radical Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism. Nekli died in 1991, his legacy in education tied to his status as one of the foremost architects of independent Algeria's African diplomacy.¹⁰⁹

Other Algerian medérsiens also contributed to this “Saharan apogee” of the médersas. Two of them, Mostefa Ben Moussa and Mourad Teffahi, served as directors at the médersas of Boutilimit and Kiffa, respectively, from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. Ben Moussa arrived in Boutilimit in April 1938 to replace Ould Rouis; Teffahi came in 1940 to Kiffa. Both had graduated from the Superior Division of the Algiers médersa and both led their respective médersas, like Nekli in Timbuktu, into the 1940s and their transformation into secular Franco-

¹⁰⁷ Baba Mama, “La Médersa de Tombouctou,” in *Culture et civilisation islamiques: Le Mali* (Rabat: Publications de l'ISESCO, 1988), 146–148.

¹⁰⁸ ADLC 29QO/39, Activité FLN au Mali, 28 June 1962.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Malika Nekli and Khalil Nekli, 5 April 2016.

Arab schools. Ben Moussa, it seems, kept a low profile in Boutilimit, maintaining the reputation and operation of Mauritania's largest and most prominent médersa. Teffahi, charged with the direction of the Médersa of Kiffa, had the more difficult task of establishing the institution in a new and politically challenging space. Kiffa and the wider Assaba region was a center of Hamawiyya Sufi networks that opposed colonial rule more overtly in the 1930s and 1940s than many others.¹¹⁰ By the mid-1940s, however, the Kiffa médersa had a stable enrollment, including some Moors sent there from the *cercles* of Nioro and Kayes in the neighboring French Soudan.¹¹¹ Like his predecessor Mamadou Ba, Teffahi also contributed to colonial publications. His particular focus was Moorish poetry.¹¹² In 1953, he published a partial translation of Ahmad Lamine ech-Chinguiti's *Al-Wasit*, an encyclopedic compilation of Mauritanian history, geography, and culture written in Arabic in the early twentieth century.¹¹³ Teffahi's translation has become a cornerstone in scholarship about Mauritanian history.

The médersas of Boutilimit, Atar, Kiffa, and Timbuktu are connected directly with the figures of Ould Rouis, Nekli, Ben Moussa, and Teffahi. Other Algerians, such as Tebikha, played less dynamic roles in determining the course of Franco-Muslim education in the Sahara and Sahel in the 1930s and 1940s. Their status as Algerians, medérsiens, Arabophone and Francophone, scholars, and Muslims—in other words, as embodiments of a Franco-Muslim “double culture”—made them uniquely able to navigate the Saharan social environment and earn

¹¹⁰ Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change*, 86.

¹¹¹ ANRIM E2/44, Telegram from Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to Gouverneur du Soudan, 30 September 1942.

¹¹² For example, Mourad Teffahi, “Introduction à l'étude de la littérature maure,” *Notes africaines* 59 (July 1953), 87–88, and “La poésie populaire maure,” *Notes africaines* 60 (October 1953), 116–117.

¹¹³ Ahmed Lamine ech-Chinguiti, *El Wasît*, trans. Mourad Teffahi (Saint-Louis: Centre IFAN-Mauritanie, 1953). The Mauritanian medérsien and scholar Ahmed-Baba Miské would publish his own translation and commentary on the work in 1970.

the respect of both colonial officers and local people. Through their efforts, the *médersas* of Boutilimit and Atar in particular became core components of the colonial education system in Mauritania and training grounds for a new Mauritanian elite. Nekli's political activities, however, demonstrate that these Algerians were not simply agents or proxies of the colonial state. Rather, their work allowed them to work in new ways to achieve distinct individual and collective goals. Among groups the French administration considered fundamentally distinct from one another, these men developed affinities and relationships that shaped the course of local and regional politics, society, and culture.

Halting Expansions in Diourbel and Dakar

This "Saharan apogee," beginning in the mid-1930s, saw the creation of enduring new *médersas* in Atar, Timbedra, and Kiffa. These were not the only new *médersas* created during this period, however. Others, located south of the Sahara proper, closed quickly or never progressed past the planning stage. Two examples, both from Senegal, demonstrate the range of local, imperial, and global factors at play during this period with regards to the *médersas* in West Africa.

The short-lived *école franco-mouride* of Diourbel serves as the first example. Opened nearly simultaneously with the *médersa* in Atar, in 1932, the Franco-Murid school inhabited a very different social and political environment. For nearly two decades, Shaykh Amadu Bamba and his Murid followers had worked to carve out a *dar al-murid*, a space free of *kafir* colonial influence, in a region roughly mapped onto the former kingdom of Bawol.¹¹⁴ The Murids were

¹¹⁴ Cheikh Anta Babou, "Contesting Space, Shaping Places: Making Room for the Muridiyya in Colonial Senegal, 1912–45," *Journal of African History* 46:3 (405–426), 2005. See also Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, and James F. Searing, *"God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002).

largely successful: the colonial administration acquiesced to their efforts, allowing the holy city of Touba to have a special status, so long as groundnut production continued to meet French demand.¹¹⁵ Diourbel, approximately fifty kilometers southwest of Touba, was the site of the French regional administration and a place where joint authority reigned.

Education and schools were contested ground in the Murid effort to ensure the community's autonomy. Bamba emphasized the importance of *tarbiyya*—a Sufi approach to transforming the whole Muslim, mind, body, and soul—through physical labor as well as religious study.¹¹⁶ In later years, the Muridiyya would create a range of schools for adherents, institutionalizing the order's approach to education and drawing on international strands of Islamic modernist thought.¹¹⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s, however, the Murid community surrounding Diourbel and Touba engaged in a *refus de l'école*, a rejection of colonial schools in favor of small daaras that mostly escaped colonial surveillance.¹¹⁸ Given these patterns, it is unsurprising that Jules Brévié, Governor-General of AOF from 1930 to 1936, expressed excitement early in his term at the prospect of opening a Franco-Murid school, especially given that the “Murid chiefs” themselves made the request during a meeting with him.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Babou, “Contesting Space, Shaping Places”; Cheikh Guèye, *Touba: La capitale des mourides* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide: La confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal* (Paris: Harmattan, 1988).

¹¹⁶ Babou, “The al-Azhar School Network,” in Launay, ed., *Writing Boards and Blackboards*, 173–194.

¹¹⁷ Babou, “The al-Azhar School Network,” in Launay, ed., *Writing Boards and Blackboards*, 173–194.

¹¹⁸ Babou, “The al-Azhar School Network,” in Launay, ed., *Writing Boards and Blackboards*, 173–194; for an example from further afield, see Issa Hassan Khayar, *Le refus de l'école : contribution à l'étude des problèmes de l'éducation chez les Musulmans du Ouaddaï (Tchad)* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1976).

¹¹⁹ ANS O526 (31), GGAOF to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 18 June 1932.

Brévié described the school at Diourbel as an experimental, practical school, “in profound accord with the aspirations of the native society.”¹²⁰ This statement in itself marked a departure from the normal stance of French schools in Senegal and elsewhere, given the importance of the “civilizing mission” in colonial rhetoric and practice.¹²¹ Aligning colonial schools with local conditions was not a common practice. Brévié, who had in 1923 published a book that portrayed Islam as a malign foreign force in French Soudan, believed that African societies should develop in tandem with French civilization—which is to say, free from “external” Islamic influence.¹²² Irrespective of his take on the legitimacy of the Muridiyya, the Franco-Murid school would achieve the practical goal of extending French education among a resistant community. It could thus serve as a model of associationist colonialism for other groups elsewhere in West Africa.

The strategy of association began at the planning stages. The *commandant de cercle* of Bawol, a man named Chartier, negotiated the school’s structure with Amadu Bamba’s son and successor, Mouhamadou Moustapha M’Backé, the *grand serigne* of the Murids. One of his prominent disciples, Massurang Surang, served as the intermediary between the marabout and the administrator.¹²³ Such formal discussion between colonial officials and local authorities concerning schooling was extraordinary. More extraordinary still was the result: the Murid leadership determined every aspect of the school’s organization, from its location within

¹²⁰ ANS O526 (31), GGAOF to Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, 18 June 1932.

¹²¹ See, e.g., Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize* and Duke Bryant, *Education as Politics*.

¹²² Jules Brévié, *L’Islamisme contre ‘naturisme’ au Soudan français* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1923); see also Harrison, *France and Islam*, 144–163, and Peterson, *Islamization from Below*, 124–134.

¹²³ On Surang, see Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*, 89–90.

Diourbel to the dates of the summer break, which were moved to allow students to help their families in the groundnut harvest.¹²⁴

This Murid influence extended to otherwise standard practices in colonial schools, including the curriculum and the recruitment of students. The Franco-Murid curriculum included three components: elementary French instruction, Arabic study “analogous to that given in the *médersas*,” and agricultural training.¹²⁵ Agricultural training centers dotted French West and Central Africa, and often included basic instruction in French; including Islamic education as a component of the curriculum was unheard of outside of Diourbel.¹²⁶ Recruitment, an anxiety-provoking task for French administrators in Mauritania, was ceded in Diourbel to the Serigne, who filled the attendance rolls with approximately sixty students. In another departure from the usual practice in most colonial schools, the Diourbel school imposed no age limits on students. Elsewhere, strict rules delimited at what age students could or could not enroll in a colonial school. At the Franco-Murid School, students ranged in age from twelve to twenty, though most were between fourteen and seventeen years old.¹²⁷ The wide latitude given to the Murid leadership in the school’s organization is indicative both of a new French attention to the “practicality” of schools, adapted to local environments, and of the political importance of the Muridiyya in the Diourbel region.

¹²⁴ ANS O526 (31), Commandant de cercle du Baol to Gouverneur du Sénégal, 5 September 1932.

¹²⁵ ANS O526 (31), Rapport de l’Inspecteur Général de l’Enseignement, Ecole des Mourites à Diourbel, 29 September 1932.

¹²⁶ Claude Marchand, “Tentatives d’adaptation de l’enseignement aux réalités camerounaises: l’enseignement agricole, 1921–1970,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 8:3 (1974), 539–551.

¹²⁷ ANS O526 (31), Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l’Ecole Franco-Mouride, 6 January 1933.

On 20 November 1932, a festive ceremony, hosted by the local *commandant de cercle* and the grand serigne Mouhamadou M'backé, officially opened the Franco-Murid school. The school day was divided into morning and afternoon classes, with the fifty-five students split in two sections that alternated French and Arabic study. Morning and evening work in the school's fields bookended classroom study to avoid the sun and heat of the middle of the day. The professor Ibrahima Thioye received rave reviews for his performance and the rapid progress of his students in the French course. The instructor for the Arabic curriculum, a Murid notable chosen by the serigne named Mamadou Deme, conducted his courses in the "lively, noisy" manner of a Qur'anic school; a French inspector recommended that he be brought "to abandon, little by little, his overly mechanical techniques" in favor of the more modern methods deployed by Thioye, who had studied at the *École normale William Ponty* on Gorée Island.¹²⁸

As in the case of the *médersas*, the Arabic curriculum attracted the lion's share of criticism from French inspectors and administrators. The Arabic-Islamic classes lacked pedagogical value, they wrote; the traditional teaching methods based on recitation and repetition had no place in a modern school. Moreover, some of the texts, mostly those written by Amadu Bamba himself, were relevant only in a religious context that many administrators found difficult to accept. Reluctant to cede any authority to the Murids, the Inspector of Primary Education complained in a 1933 report that "the Franco-Murid School is, in large part, the School of the Grand Serigne much more so than a school of the French administration."¹²⁹ As such, the inspector concluded, the "interesting experiment" of adapting French schools to local conditions

¹²⁸ ANS O526 (31), Rapport sur le fonctionnement de l'Ecole Franco-Mouride, 6 January 1933.

¹²⁹ ANS O526 (31), Rapport d'inspection, Ecole Franco-Mouride de Diourbel, 10 February 1933.

could not be applied more generally to other contexts in AOF.¹³⁰ One year later, the inspector recommended that the school “ought to be oriented more fully towards practical agricultural education.”¹³¹

Diourbel’s Franco-Murid School did not become the model for an adapted, bicultural educational institution across French West Africa. Its experiment in shared authority resulted in a Murid influence over the school’s practices of order that colonial administrators in Bawol and Dakar found too profound to emulate elsewhere. No formal decree closed the school; perhaps the Murid Islamic component of the curriculum was dropped as the inspector had suggested.¹³² The form of association it represented perhaps best stands for a particularly Murid form of engagement with the colonial state.¹³³ The school’s fate—whether prompt closure or a longer-term diminution in stature—seems to be a case when the pendulum of domestication swung closer to the African, Muslim side, and further from French control, than ever before.

Nevertheless, its resonances with the *médersas* are intriguing. Amadu Bamba spent much of his Mauritanian exile between 1903 and 1907 in the Trarza, in the custody of Shaykh Sidiyya Baba. Though Bamba had previously spent time studying with Qadiri shaykhs in the Trarza, and although this period predated the establishment of the *médersa* in Boutilimit, Bamba’s approach to accommodation with the colonial administration changed through his contact with Sidiyya Baba.¹³⁴ Twenty-five years after his exile, and five years after his death, his son the serigne

¹³⁰ ANS O526 (31), Rapport d’inspection, Ecole Franco-Mouride de Diourbel, 10 February 1933.

¹³¹ ANS O526 (31), Rapport d’inspection sur l’Ecole Franco Mouride de Diourbel, 22 March 1934.

¹³² Diourbel’s main school is today named for Ibrahima Thioye, the Franco-Murid School’s French professor.

¹³³ On this Senegalese “social contract,” which maintains the Muridiyya’s special place in postcolonial Senegal as well, see Mamadou Diouf, ed., *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹³⁴ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 208–227.

Mouhamadou Moustapha M'backé carried on Bamba's legacy, in which the Franco-Murid School fits fairly comfortably. After his exile in Mauritania, Bamba endured many years of house arrest in Diourbel, making the city a particularly important one for the Murids. As one inspector noted in his critical report, the Franco-Murid school was an experiment in a very particular context, a path that could not be followed on a general level across all of AOF.¹³⁵

Only a few years later, though, a proposal for a similar school arose, this time in Dakar. This latter proposal is best understood, however, in a wider colonial context rather than a specifically local one. In 1937, the Mediterranean Committee (*Haut comité méditerranéen*) took up the question of creating a *médersa* in Dakar, to be attached to a Great Mosque built at French expense. In contrast to the *médersas* of Mauritania and the Franco-Murid School in Diourbel, all born out of negotiation between local Muslim communities and colonial administrators, the Dakar *médersa* idea came from the highest echelons of French colonialism: the Minister of Colonies, the Governor-General of AOF, and the prominent Orientalist Louis Massignon. Less a response to conditions in Dakar, the proposed *médersa* was a solution to questions of globe-spanning *politique musulmane*.

The election of the socialist Popular Front government in France in 1936 had a negligible impact on the *médersas*, for the most part, but the new political context created new forums for discussion of colonial politics. An alliance of left-wing politicians led by Léon Blum, the Popular Front pursued a progressive agenda in the colonies, supposedly reorienting baldly exploitative policies to more seemingly altruistic or benevolent forms.¹³⁶ The Mediterranean Committee,

¹³⁵ ANS O526 (31), Rapport d'inspection, Ecole Franco-Mouride de Diourbel, 10 February 1933

¹³⁶ On the Popular Front and the colonies, see Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front* (1999); William B. Cohen, "The Colonial Policy of the Popular Front," (1972); and Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State* (2005). For West Africa in particular, see Ghislaine Lydon, "The Unraveling of a Neglected Source: A Report on Women in Francophone West Africa in the 1930s," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 37:147 (1997), 555–584 and Nicole Bernard-Duquenot, *Le Sénégal et le Front populaire* (1985).

created in 1935 but of greater stature after Blum's election in 1936, was an instrument of that colonial pivot.¹³⁷ Led by the journalist and future historian of North Africa Charles-André Julien, the Committee advised the French government and various colonial administrations in the Maghrib (the French *départements* in Algeria and the protectorates in Tunisia and Morocco) on ways to improve the lot of native populations. Only very rarely did the Committee address West African affairs. As the debate over the Dakar médersa demonstrates, the Committee's nebulous purview could be expanded to "Muslim questions" in colonies beyond the Maghrib as well.

In March 1937, Marcel de Coppet, Governor-General of AOF, wrote to Marius Moutet, Minister of Colonies, having learned that a group of deputies from the National Assembly in Paris had created a committee to plan an Islamic center in Dakar. Led by the Saint-Louisien deputy Galandou Diouf, the group intended to build a mosque, with a médersa and a caravanserai attached.¹³⁸ De Coppet did not object in principle to the creation of this center, but he insisted that the colonial administration should, as part of its role as the "tutor" of African Muslims, exert full control over the center and its teaching.¹³⁹ According to de Coppet, this project's impact on the state of African Muslims could reverberate to the Spanish Sahara, Libya, and Ethiopia, proving to Muslims in those regions, under the control of other colonial powers, that France was the most beneficent European "Muslim power."¹⁴⁰ A similar, simultaneous

¹³⁷ William A. Hoisington, Jr., "The Mediterranean Committee and French North Africa," *The Historian* 53:2 (December 1991), 255–266.

¹³⁸ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 2 March 1937.

¹³⁹ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 27 April 1937.

¹⁴⁰ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 27 April 1937.

initiative by de Coppet deployed French administrators to celebrate Tabaski, as the *eid al-adha* holiday is known in West Africa, alongside Muslim communities across AOF.¹⁴¹

Debates over the Dakar médersa focused on the same questions as applied to the other médersas of French West Africa. A July 1937 note listed the central decisions to be made: will the médersa's teaching be equivalent to the other médersas in AOF, or should it resemble the Superior Division in Algiers? Should the professors be chosen from among the local *savants* of Mauritania, Senegal, and Soudan, or from the ranks of the Algerian medérsiens? (The note's author feared that Algerians could be "active propagandists" for pan-Islamist ideologies.) Should the médersa be under the supervision of the Education Office or the Political Affairs Office? Given AOF's lack of institutionalized Islam analogous to Algeria's *culte officiel*, but not wanting to further the "Islamization of West Africa," what positions should be reserved for the médersa's graduates? The note's author recommended creating a committee of Orientalists to take up these debates, naming several scholars associated with the Algerian médersas and other North African institutions.¹⁴²

Two months later, another note proposed answers to those questions that in large part replicated the structures of Algerian médersas. Professors would come from North Africa but be assisted by local scholars; students would be qualified for posts as professors and legal authorities. Building such a center in Dakar would focus the attention of West African Muslims on the colonial city, diminishing the threat of pan-Islamism from the Maghrib and Egypt. Its goal would be "the gradual elevation of the intellectual and social level of *islam noir*."¹⁴³ In this vision of a Dakar médersa, the practical French goal of domesticating African Muslims within

¹⁴¹ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, Notes on Tabaski from Lomé, Bouaké, Dakar, and Porto Novo, 21–24 February 1937.

¹⁴² ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, Note sur la construction d'une médersa à Dakar, 16 July 1937.

¹⁴³ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, Note sur la création d'une médersa à Dakar, 15 September 1937.

colonial bureaucracies was tied explicitly to the paternalism of the civilizing mission, the slow introduction of French ideas via colonial institutions, and to the geopolitical fear of pan-Islamism.

The Mediterranean Committee took up the question of the Médersa of Dakar on 26 November 1937. As might be expected from a group composed of European specialists of North Africa, the Committee emphasized the strategic value of the médersa against the perceived pan-Islamic threat. Its chief value, according to a report on the meeting, would be “the isolation of West African Islam from Eastern Islam and its xenophobic tendencies.”¹⁴⁴ The médersa would also provide African youth with a Western education and parry the creation of a similar “establishment of Muslim higher education” in the Spanish colony of Rio de Oro. Echoing a persistent critique of the Algerian médersas, certain committee members, including Louis Massignon, voiced a concern that graduating students would find themselves unemployable, caught between those with more practical degrees from purely French schools and the *talibés* trained by prominent marabouts as local religious authorities.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the committee lent its official approval to the Dakar project, both the médersa and the larger Islamic center (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5).

¹⁴⁴ ANF F/60/199, Secrétaire Général du Haut-Comité Méditerranéen, Sous-Commission des questions musulmanes, 26 November 1937.

¹⁴⁵ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, Motion adopté par le Sous-Commission des Affaires musulmanes, 8 October 1937.



Figure 4.4 Exterior image of the planned Institut Islamique de Dakar, c. 1938 (ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807).



Figure 4.5. Interior image of the planned Institut Islamique de Dakar, c. 1938 (ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807).

Planning for the mosque complex and the médersa continued into 1938. On 20 February of that year, a formal groundbreaking ceremony took place, gathering together civil, military, diplomatic, and local authorities. De Coppet, the Governor-General who organized the event,

was particularly pleased that Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya Baba, the son of Sidiyya Baba and a prominent shaykh of the Qadiriyya order in his own right, took part in the ceremony.¹⁴⁶ His presence lent credibility to the project among his followers, who stretched from Dakar south to Gambia and Portuguese Guinea, and northward to the western Sahara. The mosque and its surrounding institutions would be a site worthy of the colonial capital, a place to demonstrate the close relationship between West Africa's Muslims and their French governors. Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya's presence signaled continuity in the mutually beneficial relationship between the Boutilimit shaykhs and the French administration, such that de Coppet compared him to another favored marabout, the Tijani shaykh Seydou Nourou Tall.¹⁴⁷

In a letter to Marius Moutet, the Minister of Colonies, de Coppet enumerated the order of construction: first the mosque, then the caravanserai (to welcome traveling marabouts). Following that, a Muslim Tribunal would be added to replace the "decrepit *mahakmat*" currently in use, and finally the *médersa*. The *médersa* posed thorny questions for the administration, but de Coppet was convinced that it "had its rational place in our local *politique musulmane*."¹⁴⁸ He pointed to the recent success at the *Médersa* of Atar in attracting reticent Saharans, especially those prone to Spanish sympathies, to the French cause. In Dakar, the *médersa* would slowly but inexorably transform Islamic education by training large numbers of teachers in small Qur'anic schools, and by offering French-language training to the city's Muslims.¹⁴⁹ This line of thinking revealed another continuity from the early twentieth century expansion of the *médersas* to AOF,

¹⁴⁶ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 28 February 1938.

¹⁴⁷ Seesemann and Soares, "Being as Good Muslims as Frenchmen"; Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, discusses the earlier generation of marabouts favored by the colonial administration. Seydou Nourou Tall was the grandson of Hajj Umar Tall, whose jihad roiled nineteenth-century West Africa.

¹⁴⁸ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 28 February 1938.

¹⁴⁹ ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 28 February 1938.

namely that French oversight of Islamic education could reform what was understood to be the fundamentally flawed education in the daaras that dotted Dakar's neighborhoods and villages farther afield.

De Coppet's arguments were persuasive at least to the Mediterranean Committee, which continued to lend its support to the idea.¹⁵⁰ Planning continued into 1938: in late May, Ahmed Benhamouda, an Algerian who had taught and courted controversy in the médersas of Saint-Louis and Timbuktu, was proposed as a possible director for the médersa, and rejected because of the post's political sensitivity.¹⁵¹ In August, the Governor-General complained to the Minister of Colonies about the rising cost of construction on the mosque, to say nothing of the caravanserai, the tribunal, or the médersa.¹⁵² For all the ink spilled, in Dakar and in Paris, on the proposal for a Dakar médersa, the idea faded. As the Popular Front government lost its political power, and especially after the outbreak of the Second World War, colonial priorities changed. Dakar's Great Mosque, which resembles the Maghribi-style building in French illustrations from the 1930s, opened only in 1964, after independence. The dream of a Senegalese médersa remained a powerful one in the minds of some French administrators throughout the early twentieth century—but it remained unrealized.

Conclusion

One element in a comparison between the cases considered above—Dakar, Diourbel, Atar, Timbuktu, Boutilimit, Kiffa—is that the better established médersas had an Algerian leader at the helm. This suggests the importance of their “double culture” in navigating the complexities

¹⁵⁰ ANF 20000046/4, Procès-verbal du Haut Comité Méditerranéen, 3 March 1938.

¹⁵¹ ANOM FM EE/II/3839/5, Note pour la direction du personnel et de la comptabilité, 31 May 1938.

¹⁵² ANOM FM COL 1AFF-POL/2807, GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 24 August 1938.

of these socio-cultural environments. Another element is racial: in keeping with the idea of *islam noir*, black populations by and large were denied access to the *médersas*, whereas more “white” African populations were able to pursue studies there. That the Algerian professors were also classified as white in both French and West African racial terms granted them legitimacy in the eyes of their students and their administrators.

Even these many cases do not cover the total number of proposed *médersas* in AOF during the period of the “Saharan apogee.” Over the course of the 1930s, *médersas* were proposed for several towns in the French Soudan, including Mopti and Goundam.¹⁵³ The most consistently discussed site was Menaka, in the eastern part of the colony; the proposal to open a *médersa* there was alternately endorsed and dismissed by various colonial authorities throughout the decade.¹⁵⁴ In the colony of Niger, to the east, administrators suggested opening a *médersa* in Niamey or Zinder.¹⁵⁵ All of these sites, with the exception of Mopti, match the profile of Timbuktu: urban centers frequented by Tuareg nomads. Mopti more closely resembles Djenné than Timbuktu in its ethnic and economic profile. In any case, these proposals were not explicated in any detail by their proponents in the administration. Lacking too is any insight from local populations who would not necessarily have been especially interested in a *médersa*, especially given the lukewarm response to the *Médersa* of Timbuktu. It is notable that these proposals were concentrated in the French Soudan, where the French were especially keen on domesticating the Tuareg population to prevent violent uprisings.¹⁵⁶ This is not to say that

¹⁵³ ANS O94 (31), GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, Enseignement musulman dans les pays de l’A.O.F., 10 April 1939 (Mopti); see also CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Projet de Médersah de Mopti, 23 September 1938; ANS O22 (31), Rapport a.s. programmes de l’éducation de l’A.O.F., 21 November 1932 (Goundam).

¹⁵⁴ ANS O94 (31), GGAOF to Ministre des Colonies, 10 April 1939; ANS O530 (31), Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Soudan Français to GGAOF, 12 November 1936.

¹⁵⁵ ANS O22 (31), Rapport a.s. programmes de l’éducation de l’A.O.F., 21 November 1932.

Tuareg leaders were entirely opposed to French education in this period, only that the *médersa* was not a particularly attractive model for those who sought either Islamic education or French credentials.¹⁵⁷ Despite some preliminary studies, none of these proposals came to fruition.

In the late 1940s, as the transition from Franco-Muslim to Franco-Arab education spread across AOF, a final stage in the expansion of the West African *médersas* showed the limits of the model. In 1947, the Governor-General in Dakar surveyed administrators across the confederation, asking if a *médersa* would be a useful institution for Muslim communities in a given area. Responses ranged from tentatively positive, from the more heavily Islamized colonies of Soudan and Guinea, to emphatically negative, from colonies like Côte d'Ivoire and Benin that lacked large, organized Muslim populations.¹⁵⁸ During this same period, the Muslim community of Saint-Louis wrote to Vincent Auriol, president of France under the short-lived Fourth Republic, demanding the expansion of official Arabic language education in Senegal.¹⁵⁹ In the immediate post-World War Two era, the relationships between African Muslims and French colonizers were in flux, and the shifting terms of institutional engagement with the *médersa* reflected that unease.

After the *médersa*'s faltering introduction to West Africa, the period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s can be characterized as a "Saharan apogee," when the institution took root in Mauritania and seemed viable in a much wider range of the Sahara and Sahel. Two factors in particular can explain this seemingly unlikely outcome. First, the Boutilimit example illustrates

¹⁵⁶ Hall, *A History of Race*, 276–315.

¹⁵⁷ Mohamed Ali Ataher Insar, "La scolarisation moderne comme stratégie de résistance," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 57 (1990), 91–98.

¹⁵⁸ See, e.g., CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Gouverneur de la Côte d'Ivoire to GGAOF, 5 June 1947.

¹⁵⁹ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Ibrahima M'Bodj pour la collectivité musulmane de Saint-Louis to Président de la République Française, February 1947.

how local traditions of Islamic learning—in this case, those from the mahadra—became integrated into the médersa’s curriculum and other institutional practices. Unlike the 1910s, when the Algerian médersa model was imposed on West African Muslim communities, the Boutilimit case reveals how local traditions became intertwined with the Franco-Algerian antecedent to produce an institution uniquely adapted to the demands of the Trarza elite.

Second, the Algerians who taught in the Mauritanian médersas became trusted intermediary figures through their specific combination of characteristics. As medérsiens themselves, they understood the particular purpose of the médersa in a colonized society. Their association with the French government in Algeria made them trusted affiliates of colonial officers in AOF. At the same time, as Muslims, they could engage with Mauritians in a way that non-Muslim employees of the colonial administration could not. Their Franco-Muslim education, and bilingual French and Arabic training, enabled an understanding of their position that in turn enabled them to guide the médersas’ adaptation. Through their efforts, the médersas became multi-local institutions even within Mauritania, as the varying conditions in Boutilimit and Atar suggest.

Finally, the Mauritanian cases and those from elsewhere in AOF—whether Timbuktu or Mopti, Diourbel or Dakar—show the enduring and central role of race in Franco-Muslim education in this period. Both the French administration and Saharan and Sahelian populations divided their social worlds into white and black, *bidan* and *sudan*. The Algerian cohort of teachers was successfully integrated into Saharan society in part because they were seen as white. Access to the médersas was limited, in theory if not always in practice, to the sons of elite *baydhan* leaders. The Franco-Muslim educational system maintained, throughout all its “multi-local” adaptations, an emphasis on educating white groups. The presence of *haratīn* and *bellah*

students on the *médersas*' attendance rolls testifies to the porousness of these racial categories, the difficulty of recruiting the local elite, and the coincidental confluence of European and West African racial thinking in this particular geographic and temporal context. The terms of inclusion and exclusion—by race, religion, status, even gender—would continue to be debated throughout the “Saharan apogee” and after.

Chapter 5: The Médersa's Institutional Afterlives, 1940s–1950s

The 1940s and 1950s saw major upheavals in northwest Africa. The Second World War (1939–1945), the Algerian liberation war (1954–1962), and the end of formal French empire in West Africa (1960) transformed political and social life across the region. Among the consequences of these events was the end of the médersa. As colonial institutions, their status changed—as before, according to multi-local conditions—and by the early 1950s the médersas ceased to function. While the médersas themselves closed, however, Franco-Muslim education and institutions survived in new forms.

This chapter recounts the processes through which the médersas closed during the late colonial period and accounts for the broad, deep impact they had on the institutional and intellectual landscape of northwest Africa in the mid-twentieth century. It is divided into four sections. The first two sections describe the transformation of the médersas of Algiers and Boutilimit into new forms of an old institution. The third and fourth sections chronicle the expansion—even in this late period—of the Franco-Muslim model in two unexpected directions: towards central Africa, specifically Chad and Cameroon, and towards the colonial metropole. While this institutional approach occludes the personal histories of medérsiens who guided these transformations, these institutional profiles demonstrate the enduring impact of the médersa across northwest Africa even after formal independence and the final closure of the médersas.

Decolonization and African independence were processes whose outcomes were far from preordained.¹ In both politics and daily life, multiple paths presented themselves to colonized Africans and to colonial officials; by the early 1960s, most of those paths had been closed off, by

¹ Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

a range of circumstances, and African societies were transformed.² The old landscape of power shook as new political actors and movements contested the terms of citizenship, belonging, and authority. This was true both in Algeria, wracked by a bloody civil war, and in West Africa, where events were less overtly violent. Extricating themselves from imperial rule entailed fundamental changes to all decolonizing societies.

In this period of great change, the *médersas* were likewise affected. The pillars of their institutional structure—their practices of order and the colonial facts justifying their presence—shook too, but not all were toppled. The common institution of the *médersa* offers an opportunity to assess the changes in the landscape of power across northwest Africa, and in the newly expanded range stretching to France and Chad. These regions are joined together even more rarely than the Maghrib and West Africa in the historiography. The multi-local approach adopted here continues to illuminate a whole range of continuities, changes, and connections heretofore ignored in Africanist scholarship.

As was the case in earlier periods, education was an important battleground for ideologies and the meaning of institutions. The year 1947 was a watershed period for education in the colonies. In an effort to reinforce colonial control, the French administration assimilated most colonial schools to metropolitan forms and greatly expanded its effort to bring young Africans into the French orbit.³ This effort, an about-face from earlier policies designed to restrict access to education to elites, spanned northwest Africa (and indeed elsewhere in the empire too, like

² Cooper, *Citizenship*; Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995); Mike McGovern, *Unmasking the State: Making Guinea Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

³ Harry Gamble, “La crise de l’enseignement en Afrique occidentale française (1944–1950),” *Histoire de l’éducation* 128 (2010), 129–162; for a firsthand account see Jean Capelle, *L’éducation en Afrique noire à la veille des Indépendances* (Paris: Karthala, 1990). For Algeria: Antoine Léon, *Colonisation, enseignement et éducation : étude historique et comparative* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991), 225–235.

Madagascar, engulfed in a violent uprising during that same year). It achieved only limited success, as many students and families continued to engage in a *refus de l'école*, a boycott of colonial schools in favor of other educational options.⁴ As detailed below, the post-World War Two moment saw a dramatic expansion in independent schooling, including modernized Islamic schooling, in Algeria and in West Africa.⁵ This was in some ways a challenge to the *médersas* but in others an embrace of their practices. In this maelstrom, the *médersas* emerged transformed but remained, as before, important fixtures in the educational landscape—with a crucial role to play in the renegotiation of “Muslim policy” as well.

Algiers

The *médersas*' denouement progressed slowly and irregularly across northwest Africa during these decades. There was no single moment comparable to the decree of 30 September 1850, no decisive end to their operation. In Algeria, the closest date would be 10 July 1951, 101 years after their creation, when a decree transformed the three Algerian *médersas* into Franco-Muslim high schools (*lycées d'enseignement franco-musulman*). Yet this event marked a sort of continuation of longstanding trends as much as it did a rupture. As elsewhere, their decline proceeded according to local logics as much as imperial imperatives.

Colonial rule, in Algeria as elsewhere, was always violent, but this period saw an escalation in overt violence that came to dominate Algerian life. Operation Torch, the American and British invasion of Vichy North Africa, brought military action to Algiers, Oran, and

⁴ Issa Hassan Khayar, *Le refus de l'école : contribution à l'étude des problèmes de l'éducation chez les Musulmans du Ouaddaï (Tchad)* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1976).

⁵ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*; Charlotte Courreye, “L'école musulmane algérienne de Ibn Bâdis dans les années 1930, de l'alphabétisation de tous comme enjeu politique,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 136 (November 2014), 203–222; Étienne Gérard, “Les *médersas* : un élément de mutation des sociétés ouest-africaines,” *Politique étrangère* 62:4 (hiver 1997–1998), 613–627.

Casablanca in November 1942 and resulted in an Allied occupation of the Maghrib. On 8 May 1945, the same day the Nazi surrender ended the Second World War in Europe, thousands of Algerian civilians were killed by French soldiers in Setif and Guelma, two towns near Constantine in eastern Algeria. From that point until the outbreak of the liberation war in November 1954, French colonial authority in Algeria became increasingly tenuous and longstanding policies shifted to address the new, more restive situation. War in Indochina and unrest in Morocco, Tunisia, West and Central Africa, and Madagascar, along with extra-imperial developments like the independence of India in 1947, all contributed to a sense on the part of Algerians and French officials both that a new era had dawned.⁶ Education and “Muslim policy” were part and parcel of these changes.

Overt challenges to the *médersas*' role in Algeria began even before the war. Chief among these was Abdelhamid Ben Badis's Association of Algerian 'Ulama (Fr. *Association des oulémas d'Algérie*, Ar. *jam'iyyat al-'ulama' al-jaza'iriyya*), founded in 1931. Composed of learned men, including many schoolteachers, the association became a locus of Muslim cultural resistance to French rule. One strategy deployed by the Association was the creation of independent schools, called *medersas libres*, that propagated a message summed up in the motto “Algeria is my country, Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language.”⁷ Initially, Ben Badis and the Association were not explicitly pro-independence; their opposition to the regime of *culte officiel* and French influence over religious institutions, however, led them to that position.⁸ Their primary concern, at least initially, was the status of Arabic rather than of Islam or Algeria.⁹

⁶ Cooper, *Citizenship*; Shepard, *Invention*; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ Courreya, “L'école musulmane algérienne”; James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60–96.

In this new environment, the administration's official stance on the médersas remained unchanged. *Eddalil (The Evidence)*, a propaganda bulletin produced by the Department of Muslim Affairs intended to serve as a "monthly revue of the ideas and the facts of Algerian Islam," published several positive stories about the Algerian médersas in the early 1940s.¹⁰ One celebrated the médersas for having successfully created an elite of "precious intermediaries" who served France in Algeria, Morocco, French West Africa, and the Hijaz.¹¹ Their "double culture," the article continued, enabled them to affirm for their fellow Algerians "the fraternity of two civilizations in solidarity."¹² Another article, recounting a visit by the Vichy Governor-General Jean-Marie Abrial to the Algiers médersa in January 1941, affirmed that the "double culture" allowed medérsiens to serve as a "hyphen" (*trait d'union*) linking the French to Algerian Muslims. It was a role that the medérsiens "had happily played since the creation of the médersas," and one that prepared them to "cement the grandeur of the Empire" in their future endeavors.¹³ These stories, produced by the colonial administration to promote French *politique musulmane* among Algerian Muslims, echo older documents describing the value of the médersa project for colonial concerns. The emphasis on the "double culture" was newer than the terminology of the "hyphen" and the "precious intermediaries," but all reinforced the seemingly secure position of the médersas in the colonial system, one they had occupied since the reforms of 1894 and the new buildings constructed in the 1910s.

⁸ See, e.g., ANOM FM 81F/766, Association des Oulamas d'Algérie, *Memoire sur la séparation du culte et de l'état, présenté à l'Assemblée Algérienne par l'Association des Oulamas d'Algérie*, n.d. (c. 1947).

⁹ Courreye, "L'école musulmane algérienne"; Fanny Colonna, "Training the National Elites in Colonial Algeria, 1920–1954," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 33:2 (124) (2008), 285–295.

¹⁰ ANOM ALG GGA 15H/19, Sous-Directeur des Affaires Musulmanes, Note sur *Eddalil*, 25 January 1941.

¹¹ ANOM ALG GGA 15H/19, "Les Médersas," draft article for *Eddalil*, n.d. (c. 1940–1941).

¹² ANOM ALG GGA 15H/19, "Les Médersas," draft article for *Eddalil*, n.d. (c. 1940–1941).

¹³ ANOM ALG GGA 15H/19, "L'Ère des réformes," *Eddalil*, 15 February 1941, 12.

The Vichy government, in power in Algeria between the capitulation to Germany in 1940 and Operation Torch in 1942, remained invested in the *médersas*.¹⁴ Certainly, the schools continued to operate, even as some students and younger professors were called up for military service. Some professors, accustomed to working with the colonial government, collaborated with the Vichy government as well. The shaykh Ahmed Ibnou Zekri, professor at the *Médersa* of Algiers and scion of a prominent scholarly Kabyle lineage, attended meetings of the Vichy National Council in May 1941.¹⁵ He was one of four Algerian Muslims to sit on this council, a purely consultative assembly numbering approximately five hundred politicians and other prominent men. During one session, he presented Maréchal Pétain with a French translation of the Qur'an, "handsomely bound in red leather...and illuminated with delicate miniatures by Mohammed Racim," the premier Algerian painter of the twentieth century.¹⁶ Ibnou Zekri's presence on this council and acquaintance with Pétain suggests not a broad collaboration between *medérsiens* and the Vichy government, but rather the recognition of their importance in the realm of Muslim Affairs in Algeria even in a rapidly changing political context. As political discussions opened in Algeria in the 1940s and 1950s, the *medérsiens* made a range of commitments.

Enrollments at the *Médersa* of Algiers, at least, remained roughly constant over the course of the Second World War, even increasing from sixty-two in 1941–1942 to to sixty-six in

¹⁴ On Vichy rule in the colonies, see Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940–1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ ANOM ALG GGA 15H/19, "M. Ibnou Zekri a participé au Conseil National," draft article for *Eddalil*, n.d. (1941).

¹⁶ CADN Maroc 3MA/900/81, "Échos et Nouvelles," *Bulletins des Études Arabes (Intermédiaire des arabisants)*, 1ère année, no. 4 (September–October 1941), 128.

1943–1944 to seventy-five in 1945–1946.¹⁷ Even amid the upheaval of the war, the Provisional Government of the French Republic—the interim Free French government between the Third and Fourth Republics—found time to push through some significant reforms to the Algerian *médersas* on 30 November 1944. (The very next day, French troops massacred *tirailleurs sénégalais* protesting unequal pay and poor treatment at Thiaroye, outside Dakar, in a coincidence that neatly summarizes the conflicting and increasingly desperate actions of French colonial officials in a rapidly disintegrating empire.) The reforms lengthened the standard course of study at the three *médersas* of Algiers, Constantine, and Tlemcen to six years, and introduced new subdivisions and specializations within the course of study in the latter half of the program. In the fourth year, *medérsiens* would be divided into a traditional section and a modern section, the latter directed toward preparing students for the *baccalauréat*, the all-important university entrance examination, matching the program of lycées in both France and French colonies. Students who passed the final exam in their sixth year at the *médersa* were to be awarded a new diploma, specified as a “diploma of secondary studies of the *médersas*” (*diplôme d’études secondaires des médersas*).¹⁸ In essence, this renaming made the *médersas* equivalent to high schools, demoting them from their long-held status as institutions of higher education.

In the same decree, the Superior Division at Algiers was renamed the School of Advanced Islamic Studies (*École Supérieure d’Études islamiques*) and formally attached to the University of Algiers. It siphoned students into three sections: one traditional (aimed at training workers in the Islamic legal system), another pedagogic (for the *mouderrès*, who taught Arabic in

¹⁷ LAR 26, Registres d’appel journalier 1941–1942; LAR 27, Registres d’appel journalier 1945–1946; LAR 78, Examens de fin d’année, 1939–1944.

¹⁸ ANOM ALG GGA 1S/1, Décret portant réorganisation des *Médersas* algériennes, 30 November 1944.

mosques or in French schools), and a third administrative (for interpreters).¹⁹ It retained its status in higher education and, despite the bureaucratically vague names of the three sections, an explicit bilingual and bicultural orientation.²⁰ While forging one connection to mainstream French educational institutions, the new organization retained the *médersas*' character as a system apart, designed to support continued colonial control over Islamic instruction and "Muslim affairs."

Another 1944 decree instituted a new credential for professors, a *certificat d'aptitude à l'enseignement des matières musulmanes dans les médersas algériennes*, with separate requirements for specializing in either Arabic language and literature or Islamic legal and religious sciences.²¹ For the first time since 1850, an explicit preference for French citizens was written into this guiding document, as a way to discourage any applicant with a critical attitude toward French rule. This move came amid changes to the personal status of Algerians within France and the empire: in March 1944, the *indigénat* was finally repealed, undoing formally if not in practice the legally-defined inferiority of colonized subjects. It would not be until May 1946 that all Algerians would be granted citizenship in the French Union, although even that reinforced inequalities for Algerians and other colonized people vis-à-vis metropolitan French.²² It is worth recalling that Algerian luminaries who taught at the Algerian *médersas* in an earlier period—Mohammed Bencheneb and Abdelkader Medjaoui among them—never took French citizenship, although they were part of the tiny elite who could have accessed that rare privilege.

¹⁹ Alexandre Gerin, "Création, originalité et résilience des *médersas* «officielles» et de l'enseignement biculturel (1850–1958)," in Michel Levallois and Philippe Régner, *Les Saint-Simoniens dans l'Algérie du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Riveneuve éditions, 2016), 331.

²⁰ ANOM ALG GGA 1S/1, Décret portant réorganisation des *Médersas* algériennes, 30 November 1944

²¹ ANOM ALG GGA 1S/1, Décret instituant un "Certificat d'aptitude à l'enseignement des matières musulmanes dans les *Médersas* algériennes," 30 November 1944.

²² On these changes to citizenship laws, see McDougall, *A History of Algeria*, 182–195, and McDougall, "The Secular State's Islamic Empire." Another valuable study of the vagaries of French citizenship in colonial Algeria is Stein, *Saharan Jews*.

Instituting a preference, if not a requirement, for *médersa* professors who held French citizenship indicates an explicit pivot in the colonial administration's understanding of the potential political role of *médersa* professors, and of the *médersas* themselves, in the broader Algerian Muslim community.²³

Nevertheless, these new regulations did not change the ultimate goal of the *médersas*, nor their core Franco-Muslim nature. Unchanged too was their reputation among the small Algerian bourgeoisie, which continued to regard them with some suspicion or disdain. As a 1949 report noted, “the sons of *caïds*, of functionaries, even those of *médersa* professors turn resolutely towards French secondary education,” rather than choosing to attend the *médersa*.²⁴ This had been the case for at least several decades, when prospective intermediaries chose the *École normale* in Bouzareah over the *médersas*, in part due to the clearer employment prospects upon graduation.²⁵

In addition to these longer-standing trends, the postwar environment saw a major expansion in anti-colonial activity, especially among students, and especially in elite schools. This was the case in the *médersa*-like Berber College in Azrou, in Morocco; *normaliens* from Bouzareah were early leaders in these movements in Algeria.²⁶ *Medérsiens* were also involved in these movements from their outset, even if their training opposed them in some ways to the work of prominent nationalists like Toufik al-Madani and Ben Badis.²⁷

²³ Cooper, *Citizenship*, 29.

²⁴ ANOM FM 81F/1723, Note, Le Réforme des *Médersas*, 26 February 1949.

²⁵ See Colonna, *Instituteurs*, 88–97.

²⁶ Mohamed Benhlal, *Le collège d'Azrou : Une élite berbère civile et militaire au Maroc (1927–1959)* (Paris/Aix-en-Provence: Karthala/IREMAN, 2005); Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*; Guy Pervillé, *Les étudiants algériens de l'université française, 1880–1962* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1984). See, for a similar case from Tunisia, Sraïeb, *Le Collège Sadiki*.

This new and powerful wave of nationalism changed colonial education policy in drastic ways. Yves Chataigneau, the Governor-General from 1944 to 1948, initiated a major expansion of elementary and secondary education for the Algerian Muslim majority. Intended to contribute to Algerian development and integration into the French Union, the project included an expanded place for Arabic within European institutions.²⁸ In the new schema, the “double culture” of France and Algeria, of “Orient and Occident,” took on new importance as a symbol of idealized trans-Mediterranean unity embodied in *Algérie française*.²⁹

At the same time, the old institutions of French rule began to crumble. One such example was the regime of the *culte officiel*. It was no longer possible to insist on a French version of Islam, at least overtly, in Algeria. It was only in February 1955 that the terminology was officially abandoned. On his second day in office, Jacques Soustelle, who would be the final Governor-General of Algeria, wrote to the Préfets of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, the military commanders of the southern territories, and all their respective subordinates, ordering them to cease using the once common terms *culte officiel*, *mosquée officielle*, and *agent officiel du culte*. “Even placed in quotation marks,” he wrote, these phrases “were inadequate and could be poorly interpreted.”³⁰ While the religious agents could be renamed “agents benefiting from a state salary,” as Soustelle suggested, the *culte officiel* was irredeemable and had to be abandoned.

²⁷ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*; Clement Henry Moore, *Combat et solidarité estudiantins : L'UGEMA (1955–1962)* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2010), especially the transcribed interview with Ali Abdellaoui, 337–359; Alexandre Gerin, “Des médersas coloniales aux lycées franco-musulmans (1944–1958),” mémoire de master 2e année, Université Paris IV Sorbonne, 2011, 98–99. My interview with Ali Abdellaoui (9 December 2014) touched on many of the same issues.

²⁸ Gouvernement Général de l'Algérie, *L'essor de l'Algérie* (Paris: Imprimerie E. Desfossés-Néogravure, 1947), especially Yves Chataigneau, “Introduction,” 7–8, and Saâdeddine Bencheneb, “Réorganisation des Médersas,” 33–34; see also Gerin, “Création, originalité et résilience,” 327–328, and Antoine Léon, *Colonisation et éducation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), 223.

²⁹ Emile Janier, “Les médersas algériennes,” CHEAM thèse, May 1948 (provided to me by Charles Janier); ANF 20000002/21, George Weiler, “Les médersas d'Algérie,” CHEAM thèse, December 1941.

³⁰ ANOM 16H/43, GGA to Préfets Alger, Oran, and Constantine, 2 February 1955.

What had once been a guiding principle of French rule in Algeria, dating back to the creation of the *médersas* a century before, had become untenable in the new political environment.

In this new context, the ideological and strategic ground the *médersas* occupied shifted. The decree of 10 July 1951, which transformed the *médersas* in Algiers, Constantine, and Tlemcen into the new category of *lycée franco-musulman*, nevertheless was an effort to maintain older institutional ideals despite changing institutional practices. Although the *médersas* were demoted, as it were, to the level of the *lycée*, and although the institution was reoriented to preparation for the baccalauréat, in other ways the transformation was mostly cosmetic. The *médersas*' faculty and other employees were transferred immediately to the Franco-Muslim *lycées* without any loss of status or seniority. New hires were required to have the new, more stringent qualifications of the 1944 decree. The Islamic curriculum was, at least initially, unchanged.³¹ Students who had until 1951 been awarded a “diploma of studies at the *médersa*” were after 1951 awarded a “diploma of studies at the Franco-Muslim *lycée*.”³² And in the early years after this decree, the *lycées* occupied the same grand Neo-Mauresque buildings built for the *médersas* in the 1910s. These were, for the most part, distinctions without major differences.

One major new element that developed in this period was the opening, for the first time, of Franco-Muslim education to girls. In 1953, as the new Franco-Muslim *lycée* for boys opened in Ben-Aknoun, the old *médersa* was transformed into a *lycée franco-musulmane de jeunes filles*.³³ A similar “*Médersa Aïcha*” for girls opened in Tlemcen in 1952.³⁴ An experiment,

³¹ ANOM FM 81F/1723, Recteur de l'Académie d'Alger to Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale, Projet de réorganisation des *médersas* algériennes, 24 January 1950.

³² ANOM FM 81F/1723, Décret portant règlement d'administration publique sur l'organisation des *lycées* d'enseignement franco-musulman, 10 July 1951.

³³ Gerin, “Des *Médersas* coloniales,” 85–86.

designed to prove the administration's commitment to extending mass education to new populations of Algerians, while "allowing young Muslim women to acquire the 'double culture' and thus to raise themselves to the same level of instruction as their husbands."³⁵ Although the daughters of more prominent and wealthy families preferred to study in the European schools of Algiers, by 1961 over 200 students were enrolled. The project would not endure past independence in 1962, and was never as prominent as the *médersas* or the Franco-Muslim lycées for boys, but in its time the school was an important expansion of the Franco-Muslim educational realm.³⁶

Two aspects of the *médersas* did change in their transformation into Franco-Muslim lycées, beyond the reorientation of the European curriculum to the baccalauréat exam. One was their geographical location; another was their guiding rhetoric. Both of these changes were evident in the address, in April 1954, by the Governor General Roger Léonard at the opening of the new Franco-Muslim lycée in Algiers. That speech marked the final official and explicit celebration of Franco-Muslim education in Algeria.

In late 1953, the lycée moved from the old *médersa* in the casbah, where it sat on a street renamed for Mohammed Ben Cheneb, one of the *médersa*'s most famous figures. Its new site was in Ben Aknoun, a suburb high in the hills southwest of Algiers, near Bouzareah and its celebrated *École Normale*. It was surrounded by new constructions in an educational district—another lycée with a purely French orientation and a new university campus. In this period, as

³⁴ Gerin, "Des *Médersas* coloniales," 85–86.

³⁵ Délégation Générale, *L'organisation de l'enseignement de la langue arabe en Algérie* (Algiers: Imprimerie Officielle, 1961), 15, cited in Gerin, "Des *Médersas* coloniales," 85.

³⁶ See also ANF 20000046/77, "Note sur le projet de création, à Alger, d'un lycée d'enseignement franco-musulman de jeunes filles," CHEAM thèse, January 1953; and CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/365, AFP Spécial Outre Mer no. 1692, "Pour l'amélioration du sort de la jeune fille musulmane," 25 March 1952.

before, Algiers served as a laboratory for French urban planners and architects.³⁷ New buildings and complexes, under the influence of the modernist Le Corbusier, had sprouted across the city since the 1930s (though Le Corbusier's plan to raze the casbah never came to fruition).³⁸ Like the 1910 médersa designed by Henri Petit, the new lycée was a work of prominent French architects, in this case the team of Marcel Lathuilière and Nicolas Di Martino. They were also responsible for a series of municipal buildings in Algiers and other Algerian cities and, after Algerian independence, for others in Marseille, Montpellier, Paris, and, somewhat curiously, Libya. In the new design, gone were the cupolas and inscriptions of Petit's 1910 médersa; the only nods to local forms were some Maghribi motifs in latticework framing an interior courtyard (see Figure 5.1). A similar structure, by a different architect, Léon Girard, was built to house the Franco-Muslim lycée in Constantine.³⁹ According to an article in the *Dépêche Quotidienne d'Algérie*, perhaps putting words in the mouths of the medérsiens, this design had been chosen in accordance with the wishes of the students who wanted their school building to reflect "their desire for evolution and integration in modern society."⁴⁰ It was a state-of-the-art building, "healthy and pleasant," and able to accommodate 315 students in its dormitories—a major increase over the capacity of the old médersa. Whether or not the medérsiens (or lycéens) had actually explicitly requested such a building, the new lycée was intended to demonstrate the

³⁷ See Zeynep Çelik, Julia Clancy-Smith, and Frances Terpak, eds., *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City through Text and Image* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009). Algiers was not the only site of French colonial socio-spatial experimentation. See Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Wright, *The Politics of Design*, for examples from Morocco, Madagascar, and Indochina.

³⁸ Çelik, *Urban Forms*.

³⁹ An article in *Chantiers: Revue Illustrée de la Construction en Afrique du Nord* (nouvelle série no. 20, July–August–September 1955), includes the new lycées of Algiers and Constantine, but no mention of a similar structure in Tlemcen.

⁴⁰ ANOM FM 81F/1723, *Dépêche Quotidienne d'Algérie*, "La nouvelle Médersa d'Alger, occupée depuis un mois, sera bientôt inaugurée," 2 December 1953.

place of Franco-Muslim education in modern French Algeria—much as the 1910 *médessa* had been made a symbol of French mastery of Algerian Islam in an earlier period.



Figure 5.1. The Lycée d'Enseignement Franco-Musulman, Ben Aknoun, Algiers, now known as the Lycée Amara Rachid. Photo by author, December 2014.

On 26 April 1954, the Governor-General Roger Léonard spoke at the official inauguration of the lycée in Ben Aknoun. He praised the architects for the building's "pure Mediterranean" qualities. Acknowledging the melancholy that some might have felt in moving on from the older *médessa*, he emphasized the entwined respect for progress and tradition that the new lycée represented. Rudyard Kipling was wrong, he went on, when he wrote that "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."⁴¹ Citing luminaries as diverse as Aristotle, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and Taha Hussein, Léonard presented the *médessa* and the

⁴¹ This line comes from Kipling's poem "The Ballad of East and West," published in 1889.

new lycée as the fertile ground where European and Islamic civilizations came together in respect and reciprocity. Famous medérsiens—Mohammed Bencheneb, Kaddour Ben Ghabrit, and Ahmed Benhamouda (a cantankerous professor who taught in Saint-Louis and Timbuktu) among them—exemplified this melding of progress and tradition, and of France and Islam. Following their example, Léonard concluded, the new students of the Franco-Muslim lycée would create anew the mutually beneficial relationship between France and Algeria.⁴² The medérsiens had once been “precious agents” of the *culte officiel* and symbols of French mastery of Islam; in the new era of the Franco-Muslim lycée, students became agents of the “double culture,” powerful symbols of a new sort of colonial relationship.

The same transformation occurred in Constantine and in Tlemcen, but with less pomp and fanfare. In all three cases, the experiment of the Franco-Muslim lycée would not last long: by 1958 the three lycées would lose their Franco-Muslim status and be absorbed into the larger pool of secondary schools. As late as 1961, the French education administration debated introducing “Franco-Muslim sections” into lycées across Algeria.⁴³ As a way to attract students, the idea had worked in the past, but by that point in the liberation war it was untenable.⁴⁴

This period saw extreme violence upend Algerian life in the years before independence was finally achieved on 5 July 1962. Old institutions crumbled, among them the three médersas. And yet, for a select section of Algerian society, the médersas remained an important touchstone. After the decree of 10 July 1951, students and teachers still referred to the Franco-Muslim lycées

⁴² ANOM FM 81F/1723, Discours prononcé par M. Roger Léonard, Gouverneur Général de l’Algérie, à l’inauguration du Lycée franco-musulman de Ben-Aknoun, 26 April 1954.

⁴³ Gerin, “Création, originalité, et résilience.”

⁴⁴ Nasirah Zumayralin, *al-Talim al-Islami fi al-Jaza’ir fi zill al-ihtilal al-faransi, 1830m.–1962m* (Algiers: Dar al-Khalduniyah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi’, 2013); Léon, *Colonisation*.

as the *médersas*.⁴⁵ Indeed, this appellation continued into the twenty-first century, as the *Association des anciens médérsiens*, composed now almost exclusively of those who attended the Franco-Muslim lycée, continues to meet periodically in Algiers.⁴⁶ The group's origins date back to the colonial period, when several associations were created to support the community of *medérsiens*. (When the *Amicale Générale des Etudiants des Médersas* was created in Algiers in March 1937, both Abderrahmane Nekli and Mourad Teffahi, each soon to depart for Mauritania, served on the association's leadership council.⁴⁷) When the *médersas* were transformed into Franco-Muslim lycées, so too did the alumni association in Algiers, which required members to have spent at least two years at either the *Médersa* or the Franco-Muslim lycée. The association's statutes promoted the "double culture" in the Algiers region, but in its meetings "any religious or political discussion" was "strictly forbidden."⁴⁸ Boualem Ould Rouis served on this association's council from 1952 to 1959, along with many other prominent *medérsiens*, during which time he taught at the Lycée in Ben-Aknoun.

Through these associations, the legacy of the *médersas* and the "double culture" persisted, in some small way at least, through the social, cultural, political, and institutional upheavals in Algeria from independence through the latter half of the twentieth century. Among these upheavals was the Arabization of Algerian education in the 1960s and 1970s, a project that

⁴⁵ Taïeb Chérif, *Mémoires d'un Médersien (1954–1962)* (Algiers: Éditions Dahlab, 2015).

⁴⁶ During my research in Algeria, the association was led by Mourad Ait Belkacem, a graduate of the Lycée franco-musulman, who currently practices dentistry in the El Biar neighborhood. The association meets in his waiting room or in a café nearby to reminisce.

⁴⁷ AWA 1Z133/2593, Président de l'Amicale Générale des Etudiants des Médersas to Préfet du département d'Alger, 12 March 1937.

⁴⁸ AWA 1Z75/4526/183, Association des Anciens Elèves de l'Enseignement franco-musulmane, n.d. (c. 1952). Similar organizations existed in Constantine and Tlemcen.

effaced Francophone intellectuals, including a large percentage of the medérsiens.⁴⁹ The “dark decade” of the Algerian civil war (1991–2002) resulted in the assassinations of several surviving medérsiens as well.⁵⁰ As a result of this violence and of the simple passage of time, the community of Algerian medérsiens is today diminished in stature. The efforts of these associations and of the medérsiens’ families have, however, maintained a place for these figures in Algerian collective memory.

Boutilimit

Although the cases of Algiers and Boutilimit differed in many essential ways, not least of which was the degree of colonial governance, those two médersas shared somewhat similar paths in this period. This is an indication not that the two médersas were directly connected in any administrative sense, but rather that they were subject to similar processes, new forms of domestication, as both colonies moved into new phases of the colonial relationship with France. In both Algeria and Mauritania the médersas were reoriented in similar ways, just as the French began to promote a reinterpreted vision of the “double culture.” As in Algeria, where the *medersas libres* began offering “modern” Islamic education outside of colonial influence, in West Africa similarly independent medersas began to spring up (though this trend was more a factor in French Soudan and Senegal than in sparsely populated Mauritania).⁵¹ Given the range of factors involved in the evolution of the official médersas in this late colonial period, the convergences between Algiers and Boutilimit are striking.

⁴⁹ On Arabization and other trends in Algerian education post-independence, see Mustapha Haddab, *Dimensions du champ éducatif algérien: Analyses et évaluations* (Algiers: Arak Éditions, 2014), and Fawzi Abdulrazak, “Arabization in Algeria,” *MELA Notes* 26 (Spring 1982), 22–43.

⁵⁰ Interview with Hassen Aberkane, 2 February 2016.

⁵¹ On independent medersas in French Soudan, see Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 54–84.

One parallel development in both Mauritania and Algeria was the belated opening, during this period, of Franco-Muslim education to girls. In February 1947, an *école de filles de chefs*, or School for the Daughters of Chiefs, opened in Boutilimit alongside the older *médersa*. Its explicit mission was to give “the daughters of chiefs a French education with all due respect to the traditions and customs of the Moors.”⁵² Recruitment was limited to only the most “influential” chiefs of the region; that it opened at all was due to the pressure of Shaykh Sidiyya Baba’s family, who still exerted significant influence over the administration in the Trarza region and beyond.⁵³ The name of the school struck some administrators as problematic—in French it echoed too closely the School for Sons of Chiefs, an abandoned older institution—but they were convinced of its utility by Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya, Shaykh Sidiyya’s third son and heir to his religious and political roles.⁵⁴ As the Governor of Mauritania, Georges Poirier, wrote soon after its opening, the efforts of Abdallahi assured him that a girls’ school could succeed in Mauritania, and that through it the task of “domestication [becomes] facilitated.”⁵⁵ This effort was the closest that any school came to being a *médersa* open to girls. Given the important role of Moor women in transmitting Islamic knowledge in Moorish society, it is not particularly surprising that this effort took place in Mauritania.⁵⁶ Given its belated opening, however, the school did not make a major impact on the educational system outside the Boutilimit region. For

⁵² CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/365, Arrêté créant une école de filles de chefs, 8 March 1947.

⁵³ Capelle, *L’éducation en Afrique noire*, 81.

⁵⁴ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Directeur Général des Affaires Politiques, Administratives, et Sociales, Note au sujet de l’Ecole de filles de Boutilimit, 20 May 1947.

⁵⁵ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/385, Gouverneur de la Mauritanie to GGAOF, 2 April 1947.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Britta Frede, “Following in the Steps of ‘Ā’isha: Hassāniyya-Speaking Tijānī Women as Spiritual Guides (*Muqaddamāt*) and Teaching Islamic Scholars (*Limrābutāt*) in Mauritania,” *Islamic Africa* 5:2 (Winter 2014), 225–273.

a brief period, though, Moor functionaries and soldiers were obliged to enroll their daughters in the school.⁵⁷

In November of the same year, 1947, most of the Mauritanian *médersas* were transformed into secular regional schools. This reform was part of an attempt to address a broader “crisis” in the colonial school system of AOF, through which official schools came to more closely resemble their metropolitan French counterparts.⁵⁸ In Atar, Kiffa, and Timbédra, the programs were modified to match those of schools of the same status across AOF, and the Arabic curriculum in particular was cut dramatically.⁵⁹ Perhaps the *médersas* lost some of their political efficacy or ideological importance after the end of the Second World War. It seems likely that as the charismatic Algerian professors moved on to new posts in Algeria or elsewhere, the *médersas* they led in Mauritania lost some of their social capital and educational momentum. A 1957 report on education in Mauritania noted only one *médersa*, in Boutilimit, still in operation at that time, among a number of secular primary schools concentrated in the more populous southwestern parts of the territory.⁶⁰ And yet, as in Algeria, continuity in the use of the name ‘*médersa*’ masked a range of institutional and ideological changes underpinning the school.

In March 1953, the Governor of Mauritania proposed a new Islamic Institute of Boutilimit. He was Pierre Messmer (1916–2007), a Gaullist war hero and a future Prime Minister

⁵⁷ ANF 20000046/81, J. Hornac, “Enseignement franco-arabe ou enseignement franco-musulman en Afrique noire?” CHEAM thèse, December 1953, 7.

⁵⁸ Gamble, “La crise de l’enseignement.” For details on the impact of these reforms in Mauritania, see de Chassey, *Mauritanie*, 180–184. An account from the head of colonial education in AOF at the time, without specific mention of Franco-Muslim education, is Capelle, *L’éducation en Afrique noire*.

⁵⁹ de Chassey, 181–182. De Chassey cites a 1953 report lamenting the poor results of the Mauritanian *médersas* in supplying technocrats and intermediaries to the colonial administration.

⁶⁰ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/367, Note sur l’enseignement en Mauritanie, 5 December 1957. See also ANF 20000046/81, Hornac, “Enseignement franco-arabe,” 5–6, for details on primary schooling in Mauritania.

of France from 1972 and 1974, who would be elected a member of the Académie Française in 1999.⁶¹ Without direct reference to the médersa there, the proposal makes clear that this institute grew from the same institutional taproot. Confronted with the “penetration in AOF of ‘modernist’ religious doctrines taught in the Arab universities of the Middle East,” the administration sought to combat these forces with a new way of teaching West African Muslims on its own terms.⁶² This was, in some senses, a return to the language of domestication that characterized French *politique musulmane* in the early twentieth century, echoing the calls for médersas and “official marabouts” in Futa Jallon, Saint-Louis, and elsewhere.

Despite the differences and following racial logics dividing Mauritania from the rest of French West Africa in colonial policy, Mauritania was chosen to host this new institute because of its reputation across the region for Islamic study. This reputation, which of course predated the French conquest, was also used to justify the creation of médersas in the previous decades. Boutilimit was the logical site for the institute for the same reason it was chosen forty years earlier for Mauritania’s first médersa: the ongoing patronage of the Ahel Shaykh Sidiyya. In his proposal, Messmer recounted that he had recently met with Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya in Saint-Louis, where the shaykh was passing through en route to a *ziyara* among his followers in Senegal. Abdallahi, the current *khalifa*, or leader, of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, had according to Messmer “immediately shown himself to be very favorable, or even enthusiastic, about this project and had not hidden from me his desire to directly collaborate with us.”⁶³ Abdallahi had taken over the management of his father’s religious and administrative affairs in 1927, following

⁶¹ Pierre Messmer, *Ma part de France, entretiens avec Philippe de Saint Robert* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2003); François Audigier, François Cochet, Bernard Lachaise, and Maurice Vaisse, eds., *Pierre Messmer. Au croisement du militaire, du colonial et du politique* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2012).

⁶² CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Gouverneur de Mauritanie to GGFOM, 27 March 1953.

⁶³ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Gouverneur de Mauritanie to GGFOM, 27 March 1953.

the death of his father and older brother.⁶⁴ Becoming involved in this new French venture would bolster his family's status and, not insignificantly, earn them a large sum of francs from the government—an arrangement echoing Sidiyya Baba's investment in the Boutilimit médersa at its opening in 1914.

The institute was nominally independent and under Abdallahi's control when it opened in June 1953, three months after Messmer's proposal. (A reader in the Governor-General's office in Dakar noted, simply, "no, impossible" next to Messmer's contention that the institute be considered independent.⁶⁵) Abdallahi was tasked with hiring his own staff, organizing the teaching program, and recruiting ten students from territories in AOF other than Mauritania. By mid-December 1953, thirty-two students were enrolled at the institute, from regions suggesting the importance of Qadiriyya affiliation to the recruitment process. Twenty-eight hailed from Boutilimit or the surrounding area, two came from Portuguese Guinea (today Guinea-Bissau), one from the Casamance region of southern Senegal, and one from the Wolof heartlands in central Senegal.⁶⁶ Abdallahi would spread word of the institute among his adepts across West Africa in the hopes of attracting them to study in Boutilimit; in late 1953 went on a recruiting tour of French Soudan and Côte d'Ivoire with the sponsorship of the colonial administration.⁶⁷ Indeed, according to a report from early 1954, enrollment at the institute had grown to 45 students, including new arrivals from French Guinea and British-colonized Gambia.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 192.

⁶⁵ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Gouverneur de Mauritanie to GGFOM, 27 March 1953.

⁶⁶ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Liste des élèves inscrits à l'Institut de Boutilimit, 14 December 1953.

⁶⁷ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Commandant de cercle du Trarza to Gouverneur de Mauritanie, 15 December 1953.

⁶⁸ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Compte rendu de tournée du Capt. St. Gratien, 25 January 1954.

The effort to foster Boutilimit as a center of West African Islamic learning spanned colonial borders and reached across vast distances. In January 1955, Sir Bryan Sharwood-Smith, Governor General of Northern Nigeria, received a report promoting the Boutilimit Institute at his office in Kaduna. Recalling the profound intellectual heritage of *bilad shinqit* and describing Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya as an “enlightened” scholar, the letter portrays the institute as “an enterprise that corresponds to the profound aspirations of African Islam” while earning the confidence of the French colonial administration throughout West Africa.⁶⁹ The effort to recruit from Nigeria was not successful: a 1957 report on the institute lists very few students from outside the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone where the Shaykh Sidiyya’s influence in the Qadiriyya order had been strongest (see Figure 5.2). Mauritania was by far the largest supplier of students, and the Trarza region chief first the administrative subdivisions (see Figure 5.3).⁷⁰ Over half the students came from Mauritania, and the majority of them were from the Trarza *cercle*.

Colony of origin	Number of students
Mauritania	177
Senegal	70
Gambia	23
Portuguese Guinea	18
Niger	8
French Guinea	5
French Soudan	3
Côte d’Ivoire	1
Total	305

Figure 5.2. Students at the Boutilimit Institute by colony of origin, 1957.

⁶⁹ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Envoi de rapport au Gouverneur de la Nigéria du Nord, 16 January 1955.

⁷⁰ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Liste des élèves, Institut de Boutilimit, 1957.

Cercle of origin	Number of students
Trarza	143
Brakna	11
Hodh	8
Inchiri	7
Gorgol	4
Tagant	2
Assaba	1
Adrar	1
Total	177

Figure 5.3. Mauritanian students at the Boutilimit Institute by cercle of origin, 1957.

These statistics suggest that the influence of Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya was limited to the centers where the Qadiriyya order was strongest. They indicate that the idea of an Islamic Institute in Boutilimit did not necessarily carry very far even within the AOF confederation. Indeed, an October 1955 letter from the Governor of Dahomey (today Benin) rejected a proposal by the Governor-General of AOF to send some of his subjects to Boutilimit: he wrote that young Dahomean Muslims were not tempted to travel to Boutilimit, or to any other “Muslim university.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, the number of students—305 in 1957—dwarfed the enrollment at the Médersa of Boutilimit. These enrollment numbers also suggest another important distinction between the médersa and the institute: whereas black West Africans were discouraged from attending the médersa, they were embraced, even targeted, as desirable students for the institute.

This population of West Africans desirous of advanced Islamic study abroad prompted a great deal of anxiety on the part of administrators across AOF. In October 1954, Ismaïla Donde,

⁷¹ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Gouverneur de Dahomey to GGAOF, Etudes au centre islamique de Boutilimit, 11 October 1955. On the particular case of Islam in Dahomey, see Tiffany Kathleen Gleason, “Coastal Islam: Religion and Identity among Minority Muslims in the French Colonial City of Porto-Novo, 1889–1939,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2014.

from Fatick in Senegal, sought the administration's approval to study in Egypt; Aliou Sarr, from the same region, sought to study at the Zaytuna in Tunis.⁷² Both were redirected to Boutilimit, with government scholarships, by the local administrator. At the same time, Boubakar Diallo, the President of the Association of Chiefs in distant Niger, intervened to redirect an unnamed "young Peul" away from al-Azhar and toward Boutilimit; he promised to do the same for other young Nigeriens who sought to study either in Egypt or Nigeria.⁷³ These requests all passed through the office of Muslim Affairs in Dakar. This procedure was part of the administration's plan for the Institute. Nominally independent, and to some degree endowed with a "universal character" to appeal to a wide range of West African Muslims, its explicit purpose was to "defeat the propaganda" encouraging young Muslims to study in Tunisia and Egypt. Keeping them within the confines of AOF would allow for "greater ease of control and less risk of contamination," ideological or otherwise.⁷⁴ As these petitions and their ensuing redirection demonstrate, a "multi-local" framework, which seemed to succeed two decades earlier as the *médersa* expanded across Mauritania, fit awkwardly with the new Islamic institute. Across West Africa, and even within Mauritania, relatively few Muslims wanted to study at Boutilimit.

These multi-local considerations extended to the curriculum at the institute as well. For example, the qadi of Timbuktu provided an extensive critique of the institute's teaching practices following his visit to Boutilimit in September 1954. His concerns can be grouped into three categories. First, he disputed the method of teaching multiple subjects at the same time as going against Islamic tradition. Given that Muslim scholars had traditionally learned materials by heart, students could not now be expected to study seven or eight subjects simultaneously. Second, he

⁷² CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Demande de bourse à Boutilimit, 22 October and 25 October 1954.

⁷³ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Chef du bureau des affaires politiques et administratives du Territoire du Niger to Chef du Bureau des Affaires musulmanes à Dakar, 18 November 1954.

⁷⁴ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Compte rendu de tournée du Capt. St. Gratien, 25 January 1954.

urged the adoption of more texts and subjects that would counter Wahhabi influence in the region. In particular, he argued, logic (*mantiq*) and grammar (*'ilm al-qawā'id*) would “arm students to criticize Wahhabist ideas and all adversaries of traditional Malikism.”⁷⁵ Third, he encouraged recruiting a more diverse teaching staff. He suggested hiring both a black African professor—he named the well-known Qadiri shaykh Aboubakar Sakho, of Thiès in Senegal, as one good choice—and a representative from the Tajakant clan, given their importance among the population of *zwaya*, or “maraboutic,” Moors.⁷⁶ The institute’s three professors—Mohammed Ali Ould Ahel al-Wadud [transcribed *el Ouadoud*], Mohammed Yahya Ould Mohammed Ali, and Ishaq Ould Mohammed Ould Shaykh Sidiyya—were all also employed as professors at the Médersa of Boutilimit, so expanding the teaching staff was an urgent concern. This was especially true in the institute’s early years before the final closure of the médersa. It is worth noting that Mustafa Ben Moussa, the Algerian director of the Boutilimit médersa in the early 1950s, was not involved in the institute in any official capacity.

Another consideration essential to the colonial administration was the issue of including French language training. At the médersa, French was a core component of the curriculum. At the institute, intended to serve a different constituency and a different political purpose, French was less important. Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya counseled against including it in the official program of study, to avoid “frightening away” already skeptical students and professors.⁷⁷ A compromise was reached: the Moor student Mohammed Mokhtar Ould Mohammed Fadhel, studying for the baccalauréat in Saint-Louis, could provide cursory French instruction at the

⁷⁵ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Critique par le cadī de Tombouctou au programme actuel de l’Université de Boutilimit, 27 September 1954.

⁷⁶ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Critique par le cadī de Tombouctou au programme actuel de l’Université de Boutilimit, 27 September 1954.

⁷⁷ CADN Dakar/AOF 183PO/1/386, Compte rendu de tournée du Capt. St. Gratien, 25 January 1954.

institute without raising alarm among the desired student population. Given the centrality of French instruction to the *médessa*'s mission, it is remarkable that the colonial administration acquiesced to Abdallahi's recommendation so quickly.

The result speaks to the political imperative of the institute—to spread French influence among West African Muslims in a much more clandestine manner than before—as well as to the institutional differences. Described as analogous to the “Islamic universities” of North Africa, the appearance of Islamic orthodoxy was more important at the institute than in other French or French-sponsored institutions in Mauritania. As described by the qadi of Timbuktu, the institute's purpose was primarily to combat the spread of Wahhabism from the Middle East, already present in West Africa through figures like Shaykh Hamallah and his Hamawiyya order.⁷⁸ This echoed the earlier colonial-era concerns about Islamic “xenophobic modernism,” dating from the early twentieth century. The institute was, in its early years at least, part of the ongoing effort by the French administration to shape West African Islamic practice, refracted through the actions of their allies.

When Mauritania gained independence from France on 28 November 1960, the Boutilimit Institute survived the transition, albeit with a new meaning. On 24 May 1961, the new National Assembly adopted a law creating a National Institute for Advanced Islamic Studies (*Institut National des Hautes Études Islamiques*) in Boutilimit. This action essentially nationalized the Boutilimit Institute, transforming it from a French colonial institution into a Mauritanian national one. Placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Youth, with oversight from the Ministry of Justice, the National Institute was intended to aid in the “development and diffusion of Muslim and Arab culture” in Mauritania, and to contribute to the

⁷⁸ Robert Launay and Benjamin Soares, “The Formation of an ‘Islamic Sphere’ in French Colonial West Africa,” *Economy and Society* 28 (1999), 497–519.

training of researchers, teachers, and magistrates (hence the involvement of the Ministry of Justice).⁷⁹ In this latter goal, the institute resembled the *médersas* and the colonial-era Boutilimit Institute. In the former, the official French involvement was excised in favor of an overtly Arab orientation. Given that at independence, Mauritania's educated elite was tiny—there were only one hundred Mauritanian schoolteachers in 1955, and just over one thousand in 1965—the Institute's role in teacher training was especially important after 1960.⁸⁰

An undated French intelligence report from the early postcolonial period makes clear that among the continuities in this period was a clandestine French influence at the Boutilimit institute. No longer a colonial power, French influence remained present. Before independence, to support the supposedly private institution, the administration funneled approximately 30 million francs C.F.A. per year to Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya. After independence in 1960, the amount of money dropped but did not fully disappear, despite the “recriminations of numerous deputies who considered it a special favor to the Ahel Shaykh Sidiyya.”⁸¹ Officially, the amount dedicated to the Boutilimit Institute fell to eight million francs C.F.A.; political expediency dictated that the rest of the money be distributed “secretively” [*de manière occulte*] in other parts of the budget, bringing the real total to approximately 25 million francs C.F.A.⁸² The *médersa* had been an official colonial institution; the Institute that grew out of it was private

⁷⁹ CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Loi créant un institut national des hautes études islamiques, 25 May 1961.

⁸⁰ Clement H. Moore, “One-Partyism in Mauritania,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3:3 (October 1965), 409–410.

⁸¹ CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Note sur les projets mauritaniens de création d’un “Institut National des Hautes Etudes Islamiques” à Boutilimit et sur la place que le gouvernement de Nouakchott entend réserver aux études islamiques, n.d. (1961 or 1962).

⁸² CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Note sur les projets mauritaniens de création d’un “Institut National des Hautes Etudes Islamiques” à Boutilimit et sur la place que le gouvernement de Nouakchott entend réserver aux études islamiques, n.d. (1961 or 1962).

until independence, when it was nationalized and made official once again. Throughout these changes, French influence and control remained vital to its ongoing operation.⁸³

The Boutilimit Institute represents in several ways the continuities between the Franco-Muslim education of the colonial period and the new national educational system of independent Mauritania. In Mauritania's new constitution, Arabic and French shared official status as the languages of state: Arabic was the "national language" and French the "official language."⁸⁴ Primary school students were required to study both languages; those who completed full courses of study in both received a *certificat d'études franco-arabes*, a title echoing that of the *médersa* diploma awarded in an earlier period. As before, North African teachers were recruited to pass on their expertise to Mauritanian students—although in the early 1960s, Tunisians were preferred to Algerians.⁸⁵ The nationalization of the institute sidelined Abdallahi Ould Shaykh Sidiyya—part of a broader loss of prestige suffered by the family as the center of power in independent Mauritania shifted from Boutilimit to Nouakchott—and annulled the efforts to recruit students from elsewhere in West Africa.⁸⁶ In the newly independent country, the old social and racial order came to dominate the institution once again.⁸⁷

Indeed, the Institute's unique position as an established higher educational institution in newly independent Mauritania put it at the center of debates over the role of Arabic and French

⁸³ In contrast, Hélène Grandhomme argues that after 1958, it is "presumptuous to speak of a French Muslim policy concerning Senegal." See Hélène Grandhomme, "La politique musulmane de la France au Sénégal (1936–1964)," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 38:2 (2004), 262.

⁸⁴ Cited in CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Note sur les projets mauritaniens de création d'un "Institut National des Hautes Etudes Islamiques" à Boutilimit et sur la place que le gouvernement de Nouakchott entend réserver aux études islamiques, n.d. (1961 or 1962).

⁸⁵ CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Note sur les projets mauritaniens de création d'un "Institut National des Hautes Etudes Islamiques" à Boutilimit et sur la place que le gouvernement de Nouakchott entend réserver aux études islamiques, n.d. (1961 or 1962).

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 193.

⁸⁷ de Chassey, *Mauritanie*, 323–325.

in the new nation.⁸⁸ A continuation from colonial patterns of education—whereby black populations embraced French “modern” education and bidan Arab populations favored Arabic educational traditions—sparked conflict in the new politics of Mauritania. Under Mokhtar Ould Daddah, the first president and a graduate of the Médersa of Boutilimit, Mauritania nominally embraced its position as a “bridge” or *trait d’union* between Arab North Africa and black sub-Saharan Africa, but in national institutions and politics Arabization carried the day.⁸⁹ The Institute was roiled by strikes over Arabization and other disputes from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s and closed, at least briefly, in 1965.⁹⁰

These debates over language, culture, and education mirrored similar arguments in Algeria and elsewhere in the newly liberated, post-colonial world. Though Algeria and Mauritania, and their respective *médersas*, differed in significant ways, their Franco-Muslim institutions underwent similar transformations during this period. As education became more prominent in late colonial discourse, Franco-Muslim education was belatedly and half-heartedly opened to young women. The *médersas* were assimilated in both places to other institutional models, mostly to secondary schools. The Boutilimit *médersa*, the oldest and largest in Mauritania, sprouted the Boutilimit Institute as an offshoot. As Mauritania’s first institution of higher education, it had an explicitly religious mission unique among the *médersas*, which were otherwise secularized during this late colonial period. Given its unique place in Mauritania—indeed, in French West Africa and the independent countries it became after 1960—the

⁸⁸ CADN Nouakchott 488PO/B/112, Radio Mauritanie, Emissions du 16 Mai 1961, 16 May 1961.

⁸⁹ See Mokhtar Ould Daddah, *La Mauritanie contre vents et marées* (Paris: Karthala, 2003), 65–92; de Chassey, *Mauritanie*, 201–440; Philippe Marchesin, *Tribus, ethnies et pouvoir en Mauritanie* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), 163–225; Désiré-Vuillemin, *Histoire de la Mauritanie*, 559–632.

⁹⁰ Moore, “One-Partyism,” 417–418.

Boutilimit Institute was central to debates over bilingualism, religion and secularism, and the role of education in colonial and independent Mauritania.

Abéché

These debates, specifically related to Franco-Muslim education, extended to new regions even in this transitional period. Just as administrators in AOF fretted about West Africans traveling to North Africa's mosque-universities, similar concerns recurred for administrators in French territories further east. As in Boutilimit, where the Institute was created to attract students away from al-Azhar and Zaytuna, a new institution appeared in Chad during this period with much the same goal of keeping African Muslims under French influence. In keeping with the now century-old tradition, Franco-Muslim education was deployed to control the movement and development of Muslims in the French empire, even in the dramatically different political and colonial context of central Africa.

The Wadai region of eastern Chad seems at first glance to be a remote corner of the French empire. It was about as far from the colonial centers of power—Dakar, Brazzaville, Algiers—as possible. Yet it was also an important cultural crossroads and, as such, the focus of significant imperial attention in the first half of the twentieth century. Though the French formally controlled Wadai, and the rest of Chad, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an intra-imperial contest among the French, British, Italian, and Ottoman empires for influence in the desert, grassland, and forest zones of central Africa.⁹¹ As recounted in Chapter 3, the question of where to send the three sons of the Sultan Dudmurrah after his capitulation to the French army in 1909 prompted a voluminous debate linking Algiers, Brazzaville, Cairo, and

⁹¹ This contest is recounted in Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa*, and in Issa Hasan Khayar, *Tchad, regards sur les élites ouaddaïennes* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984). A contemporary account is Gilberte Djian, *Le Tchad et sa conquête (1900–1914)* (Paris: 1916, reprinted by L'Harmattan, 1996).

Dakar, which resulted in their arrival at the Médersa of Saint-Louis in 1913. This was but one example of the far-flung regions joined together by issues in Wadai.

Wadai and its capital, Abéché, were important links in the trans-Saharan trade route linking Benghazi to areas as far south as the Ubangi and Shari rivers (what became the French colony of Oubangui-Chari and what is today the Central African Republic) and even the Belgian Congo (today the Democratic Republic of the Congo).⁹² The Wadai sultanate dated to the early seventeenth century; Islam began to spread in the region approximately a century earlier and was widely practiced there by the time of the French conquest.⁹³ Bordering Dar Fur, the region of what is today Sudan, residents of Wadai also felt the repercussions of events in the British empire, such as the Mahdist uprising of the 1880s and 1890s, which resulted in the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in Sudan. The Sanusiyya order, rooted in Libya but stretching into the southern Sahara, constituted another threat to French hegemony in Wadai and elsewhere in central Africa.⁹⁴ Indeed, Islam and the perceived threat of Pan-Islamism structured French rule in Chad for much of the first half of the twentieth century.⁹⁵

In the Second World War, Chad gained prominence in the French colonial imagination through its role in supporting the Free French forces in the Sahara, specifically in the celebrated 1942 victory at Bir Hakeim, in Libya.⁹⁶ Félix Éboué, who was the first black man promoted to

⁹² Dennis D. Cordell, *Dar al-Kuti and the Last Years of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 19–22.

⁹³ Khayar, *Le refus de l'école*, 36–50.

⁹⁴ Triaud, *La Légende noire de la Sanûsiyya*, especially vol. 1, 523–549 and vol. 2, 597–609.

⁹⁵ René Lemarchand, “Images and Identities: Chad in the Colonial Imagination,” *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 15 (1992), 220–234. See also ANF 19960480/55, E. Besombes, “Le Tchad, Centre d’observation sur le monde musulman,” CHEAM thèse, undated. Besombes argues that because Chad was surrounded by the Libyan Fezzan, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and northern Nigeria, it was a place to watch for patterns in the development of Islam in black Africa.

high office within the colonial administration, Governor of Chad from 1938 to 1940, and Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa (Fr. *Afrique Equatoriale Française*, or AEF) from 1941 to 1944, was instrumental in organizing this military action. Unlike Mauritania, easily reduced to the “hyphen” between the Arab Maghrib and “black Africa” in the minds of colonial officers, Chad defied simple categorization in its place at the intersection of so many different geographical and ideological spaces. Nevertheless, to some colonial administrators, Chad reproduced some familiar divisions: an Arab, Muslim, Saharan north versus a black, African, tropical south; a *Tchad utile* in the cotton-growing south and “useless” Chad needing a *mise en valeur* in the desert north.⁹⁷

Within Chad and even within the north-south division of the territory, Wadai was, for most French officials, “a totally separate entity,” with different factors at play in its administration.⁹⁸ These factors were, primarily, the persistence of powerful indigenous political institutions and a “tendency to look to the East,” to neighboring Sudan, nearby Egypt, and the more distant Hijaz.⁹⁹ Wadai’s political history developed differently from the rest of Chad, and much of the rest of French Africa, in the mid-twentieth century. After deposing the Sultan, Dudmurrah, in 1909, the French installed a successor, Acyl (‘Acil), who ruled until 1912 and who was known by locals, according to the French administrator Roland Caillat, as “the drunkard.” After his reign, the French adopted direct rule, which local populations rejected; in

⁹⁶ Lemarchand, “Images and Identities.”

⁹⁷ René Lemarchand, “Chad: The Misadventures of the North-South Dialectic,” *African Studies Review* 29:3 (September 1986), 28–29. Pierre Messmer makes this comparison in *Ma part de France*, 88.

⁹⁸ ANF 20000046/56, Roland Caillat, “Contribution à l’Étude du Ouaddaï,” CHEAM thèse, February 1950, 6. See also Bernard Lanne, *Histoire politique du Tchad de 1945 à 1958. Administration, partis, élections* (Paris: Karthala, 1998), 49–61.

⁹⁹ ANF 20000046/56, Caillat, “Contribution,” 9.

1935 the French allowed the sultanate to be restored.¹⁰⁰ The new sultan, Ourada [Urada], was one of the three “princes of Wadai” sent to Saint-Louis in the 1910s. According to Caillat, Ourada’s tenure as sultan was a successful one for the French, “in large part thanks to his previous training,” which included several years as an administrative clerk in AOF and in Fort-Lamy (today N’Djamena, capital of both colonial and independent Chad).¹⁰¹ At his death, in April 1945, he was replaced as sultan by Ali Silek, a son of Dudmurrah, who ruled until 1960 and who proved frustrating to the French administration in part because he had not received a French education and could barely speak French.¹⁰² For the most part, however, Ali Silek proved receptive to French directives.¹⁰³

In Wadai, as in much of Mauritania, colonized populations successfully resisted the French abolition of their political institutions, or at least forced a certain degree of adaptation to local norms. This insistence on retaining political structures—the sultan as well as lower-level figures—also forced an adaptation of the education system. The traditional Wadai elite was poorly inclined to send their sons to Chad’s secondary schools, located in Fort-Lamy and Bongor, both along the western border with Cameroon.¹⁰⁴ To attract students to French schools, and to train them as future intermediaries and friendly elites, administrators turned to familiar models: first, the inclusion of Arabic in the existing schools, and later, a Franco-Arab school specifically designed for the sons of chiefs.

¹⁰⁰ ANF 20000046/56, Caillat, “Contribution,” 13.

¹⁰¹ ANF 20000046/56, Caillat, “Contribution,” 13. See also Khayar, *Regards*, 137–138.

¹⁰² ANF 20000046/56, Caillat, “Contribution,” 14. See also SHD 6H/140, Pierre Gentil, *Les treize préfectures de la république du Tchad*, (Rome: Tipografia operaia romana and République du Tchad, Ministère de l’information et du tourisme, 1962), 40; and ANF 20000046/57, Jean Latruffe, “Les Sultanats du Tchad,” CHEAM thèse, May 1949, 8–9.

¹⁰³ Khayar, *Regards*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Khayar, *Regards*, 22–23.

In June 1947, the head of the Education Service for Chad wrote a panicked letter from Fort-Lamy to his superior, the Education Inspector for AEF, in distant Brazzaville. He reported the arrival in Abéché of an unnamed Tunisian scholar who appeared to be on an “information-gathering and propagandistic mission.” This posed, in his mind, a serious challenge to the superiority of French schooling in Wadai, and required a “rapid, if not immediate, solution.”¹⁰⁵ He requested the urgent disbursement of funds to hire an Arabic teacher to teach in the French school at Abéché, and proposed a Frenchman from Algeria named César Millet. This would be a stopgap measure, pending the construction of a full “Franco-Arab” school, but would serve the immediate purpose of appealing to young people in the city who sought greater proficiency in Arabic.

Three years later, in 1950, the administrator Caillat reported on a new program in Wadai designed to create a similar effect. “Fakis” (Ar. *faqīh*, legal scholars), who would have been called marabouts by administrators in West Africa, were hired to teach in the French schools, both the *école régionale* in Abéché and in the village schools around the region. It was to be hoped, Caillat wrote, that soon “reputable graduates of al-Azhar will join their efforts to ours,” perhaps even attracting some students from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.¹⁰⁶ This too was intended as a short-term measure until the long-awaited and much-discussed opening of the Franco-Arab school, which would then train scholars who could replace the potentially suspicious Azhari graduates.

By 1952, the Franco-Arab *collège* had finally opened in Abéché, attracting students from across Wadai. Its director was Michel de Miras, a Frenchman about whom little information is

¹⁰⁵ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/158, Chef du Service de l’Enseignement du Tchad au Inspecteur Général de l’Enseignement, 20 June 1947.

¹⁰⁶ ANF 20000046/56, Caillat, “Contribution,” 22.

available.¹⁰⁷ The political arrangements in the region—French indirect rule through the intermediary of the sultan—meant that the French followed a model developed elsewhere. This influence was not explicit, but the development of the school reflects fairly precisely the history of the *médersa* of Boutilimit in particular. The Sultan ‘Ali Silek gave his essential support. Indeed, he went so far as to lend a building on his palace estate to the school, and had arranged for some of his favorite advisors (“his *fuqaha*’,” in the French account) to teach there.¹⁰⁸ He was also personally responsible for the recruitment of some 160 students at the *médersa*’s opening. In the report sent from Abéché to Brazzaville on this occasion, the regional administrator called the school the *médersa* of Abéché. This sort of collaboration between administrators and Muslim leaders resembled the “accommodation” model pioneered by Shaykh Sidiyya Baba at the opening of the *Médersa* of Boutilimit in 1914, four decades earlier and thousands of kilometers away. The regional administrator, a certain Ceccaldi, wrote that given the circumstances of the *médersa*’s opening, the administration must “in no way give the impression of having ‘capitulated’ to the maneuverings of the Abéché faqihs.”¹⁰⁹ The process of accommodation, he suggests, was more complicated than otherwise recounted.

Some of these complications involved a local shaykh, Mohammed Illech (also transliterated Oulleich or Ouléch). One of a number of Wadaian Muslims who had traveled to Egypt and studied at al-Azhar, the shaykh returned to Abéché, opened a Qur’anic school, and requested official recognition from the local colonial office. In this he resembled Muslim scholars across West Africa who returned from Egypt and sought official status for their

¹⁰⁷ De Miras authored a “Précis de l’Histoire du Ouaddaï,” undated and unpublished.

¹⁰⁸ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Administrateur en Chef de la Région du Ouaddaï, Extrait du rapport mensuel, n.d. (1952). Recall that in Boutilimit, Shaykh Sidiyya Baba initially lent space in his “casbah” for the *médersa*’s classes and recruited professors from among his disciples.

¹⁰⁹ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Administrateur en Chef de la Région du Ouaddaï, Extrait du rapport mensuel, n.d. (1952).

schools.¹¹⁰ Fearful of his training in “xenophobic propaganda” in Egypt, the administration wanted to restrict the shaykh’s teaching, but his popularity—his school counted 250 students—made closing the school difficult.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, by the time the Franco-Muslim school officially opened, colonial Islamophobia won out, and the shaykh’s institution [Fr. *mahad el almi*, Ar. *ma’ahad al-‘ilmi*] was closed, though the specific reasoning for the closure remains unclear. The French celebration of that fact also turned out to be premature. This maneuvering—on the part of both the colonial administration and local Islamic scholars—precipitated something of a crisis. The Franco-Muslim school, also known as the Médersa of Abéché, was opened in a rush to accommodate students and demonstrate the administration’s commitment to education in the region.¹¹²

Only three short years later, the situation had changed dramatically. Ignace Colombani (1908–1988), governor of Chad, chronicled the development of the colony’s education system in a report to the Minister of Overseas France (as the Minister of Colonies had been rechristened) in June 1955. In Wadai, by this time, the médersa (as he called it) had grown to encompass much of the region’s educational landscape. Under the leadership of de Miras, the médersa, also known as the *collège franco-arabe*, had merged with the *école régionale* in Abéché. Combined, the schools counted six hundred students in six primary and secondary classes. In terms of the curriculum, seventy-five percent of the material studied was in French and twenty-five percent was in

¹¹⁰ See Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 54–84.

¹¹¹ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Note, Collège franco-musulman d’Abéché, n.d. (1951); see also Khayar, *Regards*, 126–127.

¹¹² Khayar, *Regards*, 140–141.

Arabic. This was due to the sultan ‘Ali Silek, whose persistent efforts had, Colombani reported, convinced the “*faqaha*” of Abéché to embrace the French school.¹¹³

More remarkably, Colombani described the recent absorption into the *médersa* of the resurrected *ma’ahad al-‘ilmi*, under the direction of the shaykh Illech’s successor, Adoum Barka. The report gives no sense of the shaykh’s motivation for this move, though perhaps he saw it as a way to continue offering his teachings. The colonial administrators involved—Colombani, de Miras, and the chief administrator in Wadai—all agreed that integrating the *ma’ahad* was a good strategic move, though it was not without its dangers. With the new arrangement, the administration would be able to watch over, and indeed more or less control, the sort of teaching that went on in the classes offered by the shaykhs. (The integration of the two schools would result in the creation of a new Arabic cycle, inverting the proportions of the standard curriculum: seventy-five percent Arabic and twenty-five percent French.) This oversight was possible due to de Miras’s fluency in Arabic; Colombani feared that other, less competent officers could unwittingly oversee the transformation of the new section into a hotbed of anti-French sentiment. But because, as Colombani recounted, the *ma’ahad* existed anyway, and because it represented such a small proportion of the total student population (250 students compared to 600 in the more firmly French program), it was better to integrate the schools and assure closer French oversight. Furthermore, because Adoum Barka’s reputation stretched as far as Khartoum, official sponsorship of his teaching would increase French prestige among the local population and slow if not stop the stream of Wadaians who sought Islamic studies in Sudan and Egypt.¹¹⁴ Colombani was so sure of the strategic value of this move that he proposed creating a similar Franco-Arab *médersa* in the Kanem region of western Chad, to stem the tide of students from that region

¹¹³ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Gouverneur du Tchad to Ministre de la France Outre-Mer, 24 June 1955.

¹¹⁴ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Gouverneur du Tchad to Ministre de la France Outre-Mer, 24 June 1955.

seeking training either in the Middle East or in northern Nigeria.¹¹⁵ Another Franco-Muslim school was proposed, and may have opened, in Largeau (now Faya-Largeau), capital of the far northern Saharan region of Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti.¹¹⁶

The Médersa of Abéché is remarkable most basically because it emerged at the very end of the colonial period, after the transformation of the original médersas of Algeria and their offshoots in Mauritania, French Soudan, and Senegal. In a social context roughly comparable to Mauritania, albeit one that followed a distinct development both before and under colonial rule, similar processes led to an institution that resembled these distant forebears in Boutilimit and Atar. However, in this remote corner of the empire, where colonial control and expertise were both in short supply, the local Muslim community was able to exert a great deal of control over the médersa's development. The wholesale integration of an existing Islamic educational institution into an official French school was unheard of in either Algeria or AOF, yet in 1955 Adoum Barka and de Miras agreed to do so in Abéché.

This move, it seems, cemented the médersa's preeminent place in the institutional landscape of mid-twentieth century Chad. New classes were added in 1956; with over eight hundred students by 1959, the médersa of Abéché enrolled nearly half of the students enrolled in all of the French schools in Chad.¹¹⁷ After Chadian independence, achieved on 11 August 1960, enrollments fell, but the médersa remained one of the most prestigious and important schools in the new country.¹¹⁸ Though little information is available to suggest what happened to the

¹¹⁵ ANOM AEF GGAEF 5D/269, Gouverneur du Tchad to Ministre de la France Outre-Mer, 24 June 1955, 24.

¹¹⁶ ANF 19960480/54, Labourée, "L'école franco-musulmane de Largeau," CHEAM thèse, n.d.

¹¹⁷ SHD 6H/140, Centre militaire d'information et de spécialisation pour l'outre-mer, Notice à l'usage des officiers appelés à servir au Tchad, 1962, 52.

¹¹⁸ SHD 6H/140, Gentil, *Les treize préfectures*, 44.

médersa's students either before or after independence, the school contributed to the growth of a new social class, functionaries, who upended many of the region's social structures.¹¹⁹ One example is a graduate, Zakaria Fadoul Khidir, who eventually studied in Europe and became a professor at the University of N'Djamena.¹²⁰ It also remains unclear to what extent the médersa actually did stem the tide of Wadaians who studied in Kano or Khartoum or Cairo.

The Abéché example was, however, representative of a late efflorescence of the Franco-Muslim ideal in central Africa. At the Centre de Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane, where colonial administrators wrote theses exploring different theoretical and practical questions of *politique musulmane* in their assigned regions, the question of Franco-Muslim education prompted several studies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These studies raised one particular question indicative of the state of education in West and Central Africa in the late colonial period: should the French sponsor Franco-Muslim or Franco-Arabic schools? The distinction—between schools including some religious instruction and secular bilingual schools—became critical to these debates. Responses differed based on specific local conditions: the “multi-local” strategy became more explicitly stated. As before, in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone and elsewhere, race became a central factor in this debate.

One of the regions where this question of Franco-Muslim or Franco-Arabic education came to the fore was northern Cameroon. Cameroon's colonial history is different from the rest of French West and Equatorial Africa; indeed, it was not formally a part of AEF or AOF. Following the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, Cameroon was claimed as a German colony, known as Kamerun. The German defeat in the First World War resulted in the division of the

¹¹⁹ See Khayar, *Le refus de l'école*, 80–83, and Khayar, *Regards*, 190.

¹²⁰ Zakaria Fadoul Khidir, *Loin de moi-même* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 43–57, especially 56–57.

territory into two mandates, British and French, under the authority of the League of Nations, in 1922. French Cameroun comprised most of the territory of what is today independent Cameroon; the linguistic divide between Francophone and Anglophone territories continues to structure politics in the region. In part due to this fractured history, Cameroon also saw a particularly intense evangelization effort by European, especially Scandinavian, missionaries.¹²¹ Geographically diverse, the territory includes both tropical forests and Sahelian grasslands; in this latter section, in the far north between Nigeria and Chad, Fula and Arab Muslims formed an important part of the population.¹²²

As Robert Coquereaux, a CHEAM student and administrator in N’Gaoundéré, in the Adamawa region of north-central Cameroon, acknowledged in his study of hyphenated French education in the territory, each segment of these northern Cameroonian societies had a point of view on the question. Where they agreed was that it was an experiment worth carefully considering and attempting.¹²³ Among them, somewhat surprisingly, was a leading Catholic missionary, Monseigneur Plumey, who had “very seriously considered creating a Franco-Arabic school” in the region.¹²⁴ The director of this school, located in Fort-Foureau (today Kousséri, across the Logone River from N’Djamena in Chad), was a certain Père Zeltner. According to an interview with a regional administrator, Zeltner and his missionary colleagues sought to provide

¹²¹ See Jean Paul Messina and Jaap van Slageren, *Histoire du christianisme au Cameroun* (Paris/Yaoundé: Karthala/Editions Clé, 2005). An interesting work, which does not address education per se but rather the Norwegian-Cameroonian connection, is Tomas Sundnes Drønen and Jean Koulagna, *La voie de l’islam et la voie de Christ* (Meiganga, Cameroon: ILTM, 2002).

¹²² Some references for Cameroonian history in this period include Hamadou Adama, *L’islam au Cameroun: Entre tradition et modernité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004) and Enoh Meyomesse, *Histoire du Cameroun de 1940 à nos jours*, tome 1 (Yaoundé: Éditions du Kamerun, 2014).

¹²³ ANF 20000046/56, Roger Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe ou école franco-musulmane dans le nord du Cameroun?” CHEAM thèse, February 1950, 4.

¹²⁴ ANF 20000046/56, Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe,” 4.

a fully secular education in French and Arabic, their desired result a “careful twinning” (*jumelage soigné*) of the two cultural traditions.¹²⁵ The missionaries would leave religious education to local “malloums” and their Qur’anic schools. This “rather surprising laicism,” Coquereaux predicted, could arouse the suspicion of Muslim authorities, who, the missionaries optimistically believed, would soon be replaced by graduates of the Franco-Arabic school.¹²⁶

Another surprising element in Coquereaux’s thesis is his attention to examples from outside “black Africa,” including North African precedents beginning with the medieval Maghribi *madrāsas*. The Algerian *médersas* are the clearest reference point (although Coquereaux never worked as an administrator in Algeria). Kaddour ben Ghabrit, the *medérsien* who directed the Paris Mosque after its construction in 1926, had called for the inclusion of Islamic religious instruction in official schools across Algeria; the question of whether or not to replicate the system in Cameroon is posed on Coquereaux’s first page.¹²⁷ He also includes Morocco and Tunisia in his analysis of institutional precedents, although those protectorates, under different administrative conditions, never had the same *médersa*-style Franco-Muslim education as Algeria or AOF. Remarkably, he also references French schooling in Cambodia and Laos, where colonial schooling officially aimed to supplement, but not fully replace, traditional Buddhist training. These schools eventually granted elementary education diplomas, to which Coquereaux added the wry comment that “our Qur’anic schools in northern Cameroon are very far from being able to do as much.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ ANF 20000046/56, Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe,” 44–45.

¹²⁶ ANF 20000046/56, Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe,” 45.

¹²⁷ ANF 20000046/56, Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe,” 1.

¹²⁸ ANF 20000046/56, Coquereaux, “Ecole franco-arabe,” 42.

For Coquereaux, the debate over Franco-Muslim or Franco-Arabic schooling boiled down to a question of race. In this conclusion he agreed with other CHEAM-affiliated administrators such as Jean Hornac, who submitted a thesis entitled “Franco-Arabic Education or Franco-Muslim Education in Black Africa?” in 1953.¹²⁹ Populations that already spoke Arabic should be educated in Franco-Arabic schools, because perfecting their knowledge of literary Arabic was a major “lure” to attract them to enroll. For black Muslims who spoke other languages, Franco-Muslim schools were a better option, so long as Arabic was de-emphasized; greater fluency in the language would open them up to the “xenophobic” influence of North African and Middle Eastern Muslims. In these Franco-Muslim schools, instruction would be provided by local authorities—the “malloums,” “fakihs,” or “marabouts,” depending on the locale—in African languages. This was as a way to prove the French commitment to religious freedom, and serve to shore up France’s status as a “Muslim power” in the minds of its subjects. As an additional benefit, these black Muslim populations would be insulated from the “doctrines” of Arabophone Muslims. Franco-Arabic schools would thus operate from Mauritania across to northern French Soudan, northern Niger, and northern Chad. Everywhere to the south would turn to Franco-Muslim schools and curricula. This idealized division neatly matched the racial border in the French imagination between “black Africa” and “white” northern Africa.

There was nothing particularly new about this concern, or this solution to it. The decision to employ local Muslim authorities resembled Mariani’s plan for creating an official corps of karamokos and marabouts in Guinea and Senegal in the 1910s. The policy vis-à-vis Arabic language training for black populations could have come from Jules Salenc and his colleagues who banned the use of Arabic in the Islamic courts of Saint-Louis in 1911 and minimized

¹²⁹ ANF 20000046/81, J. Hornac, “Enseignement franco-arabe ou enseignement franco-musulman en Afrique Noire?” CHEAM thèse, December 1953.

instruction in Arabic at the Saint-Louis *médersa* in the same period. Since its first articulation in relation to Franco-Muslim education in the early twentieth century, the effort to control *islam noir* remained central to French policy and practice in West and Central Africa. Hornac, the CHEAM student, concluded his study with the following: “Muslim education constitutes one measure among many destined to renovate *islam noir* without the Mediterranean imprint...and finally to remove all its foreign influences.”¹³⁰ Of course, this French “renovation” hardly removed all foreign influences to Islamic practice in black Muslim communities. Despite this obvious fact, colonial administrators resolutely continued to advocate this approach to Muslim policy across AOF and AEF. From the 1910s to the 1950s, *islam noir* remained a guiding principle in French Muslim policy. From Saint-Louis to Abéché, *médersas* institutionalized this racial logic in an effort to shape the generations to come.

It is not clear from these theses if any Franco-Arabic or Franco-Muslim schools ever opened in northern Cameroon or anywhere else in French Africa in the 1950s—with the important exception of the *Médersa* of Abéché. Coquereaux’s examination of the question was one of the few documents from this period on the subject of Franco-Muslim schooling to include explicit reference to the Algerian *médersas*. The corpus of correspondence organizing the *Médersa* of Abéché, for example, belied a deep attention to affairs in Khartoum and Cairo but little to the major precedents for such a school in Algeria. Indeed, even the more directly comparable Mauritanian case went unreferenced. Of the four cases described in this chapter—Algiers, Boutilimit, and Abéché above—only one made explicit attempts to unify the whole of the empire’s Muslim population in a single institutional framework, a unified whole (albeit with racial divisions). For the first time in the century-long history of Franco-Muslim schooling, that effort occurred in metropolitan France.

¹³⁰ ANF 20000046/81, Hornac, “Enseignement franco-arabe,” 11.

Metropolitan France

One of the remarkable aspects of the history of the *médersas* is that so much of their development and official organization came from the colonies: the capitals of Algiers and Dakar, and smaller places too, rather than Paris. Although they were funded by the colonial government, they grew without major input from the Ministry of Colonies or any other branches of the French government (with the 1894 Combes reforms, debated in the French Senate, standing out as an exception). Nevertheless, the *medérsiens* and their networks did extend to metropolitan French soil, especially after the turn of the twentieth century.

The most significant site of the *médersa*'s influence in France was in Paris, the imperial capital, at the Paris Mosque. Founded in 1926, the Mosque provided a place of worship for the capital's Muslim population.¹³¹ Largely composed of colonial soldiers and migrant workers, the mosque's worshippers stood out in the staid Fifth Arrondissement, where the Sorbonne and other preeminent intellectual institutions sat nearby. In addition to its role as a religious center, the Mosque hosted a Muslim Institute (Fr. *institut musulman*), so named well before its counterpart in Boutilimit. Tasked with the "rapprochement between France and Islam and the maintenance of French prestige in the whole of the Muslim world," the Paris Mosque and the Muslim Institute had a powerful symbolic role, planting the idea of France as a "Muslim power" in the heart of Paris.¹³²

The Institute was placed under the authority of an organization, the *Société des Habous et Lieux Saints de l'Islam*, founded in 1917 in Algiers (and still in operation today, though now headquartered in Paris). Originally intended to help Maghribi Muslims perform the *hajj*, in part

¹³¹ Naomi Davidson, *Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); McDougall, "The Secular State's Islamic Empire."

¹³² ADLC 29QO/12, Projet d'organisation d'un institut d'études franco-islamiques à Paris, January 1955.

through the organization of hostels in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the Society's purview expanded to Muslim affairs in France with the creation of the Paris Mosque and Muslim Institute.¹³³ The organization's membership was made up of Maghribi notables, of whom a large number were Algerian, of whom a significant proportion were medérsiens. Its first leader was Si Kaddour ben Ghabrit (1868–1954), a native of Sidi Bel Abbès in western Algeria and graduate of the Médersa of Tlemcen who had previously worked for the Moroccan sultan in Tangier and for the French mission in the Hijaz.¹³⁴ He gained fame late in his tenure at the Mosque for his actions during the Second World War, when he purportedly arranged false papers for dozens, even hundreds, of Jews, disguising them as Muslims.¹³⁵

Ben Ghabrit's death in 1954 sparked a succession contest among the Muslim elite of the "double culture." Among the candidates to replace him were Saadeddine Bencheneb, former professor at the Algiers médersa and son of Mohammed Bencheneb; Mohammed Saïd Ibnou Zekri, then director of the Franco-Muslim lycée in Ben Aknoun; Mohammed Mammeri, a medérsien, counselor to the Moroccan sultan, and uncle of the famed Algerian writer Mouloud Mammeri; and Menouar Kellal, a graduate of the Algiers médersa and a high-ranking judicial interpreter at Relizane (an agricultural center between Algiers and Oran).¹³⁶ Even Ahmed Benhamouda, having served 18 years as an Arabic professor in Paris after teaching at the

¹³³ Naomi Davidson, "La mosquée de Paris. Construire l'islam français et l'islam en France, 1926–1947," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 125 (July 2009), 197–215.

¹³⁴ Jalila Sbaï, "Trajectoire d'un homme et d'une idée : Si Kaddour Ben Ghabrit et l'Islam de France, 1892–1926," *Hespéris Tamuda* 39:1 (2001), 45–58.

¹³⁵ For an account of this episode, see Ethan Katz, "Did the Paris Mosque Save Jews? A Mystery and Its Memory," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 102:2 (Spring 2012), 256–287. Ben Ghabrit was featured in a 2011 feature film, *Les hommes libres* (dir. Ismaël Ferroukhi).

¹³⁶ Files on these candidates are preserved in ADLC 29QO/12. Notably, their files began to be compiled in the early 1950s, years before ben Ghabrit's death. See also ADLC 29QO/13, Note au sujet de l'Institut musulman, 26 September 1955.

médersas of Saint-Louis and Timbuktu, applied for the position.¹³⁷ After an extended wait—three years—the position finally went to Hamza Boubakeur, a professor who taught both at the Faculty of Law and at a French lycée in Algiers. His appointment serves as evidence that the medérsiens were not a hegemonic force, either in the *Société des Habous* or in the broader Muslim elite milieu: Boubakeur, born in Géryville (today El Bayadh) on the northern fringes of the Sahara, was educated not in the médersas but by the White Fathers.¹³⁸ Ultimately this may have secured him the position. At least one intelligence report noted that Boubakeur “did not disdain contacts with Catholic or Protestant clergy,” which served as evidence of his political position—opting to maintain a close relationship between Algeria and France, although he himself was “uprooted” (*déraciné*) from his origins in the rural pre-Sahara.¹³⁹ It is worth noting that only North African Arab and Kabyle scholars were considered for the position leading the Muslim Institute. Although West Africans were appointed to positions in the Société des Habous, their names never appeared among the candidates to succeed ben Ghabrit.

The political question was an important one: the Algerian War had erupted in 1954. The outbreak of the war coincided with a seemingly overly ambitious, even naive, project at the Muslim Institute. In 1955, French politicians in the Ministry of the Interior were so bold as to plan for an expansion to the Institute that would “strive to transfer” the intellectual center of the Muslim world “from Cairo to Paris.”¹⁴⁰ It would be called the Institute for Franco-Islamic Studies, and would allow Muslims “of all nationalities” to acquire “the double culture” necessary

¹³⁷ ADLC 29QO/12, GGA to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 28 October 1955.

¹³⁸ ADLC 29QO/12, Notice individuelle, BOUBAKEUR ben Hamza, 12 August 1955.

¹³⁹ ADLC 29QO/12, Notice individuelle, BOUBAKEUR ben Hamza, 12 August 1955.

¹⁴⁰ ADLC 29QO/12, Projet d’organisation d’un institut d’études franco-islamiques à Paris, January 1955.

to “participate...in the current debate at the heart of Islam between tradition and modernity.”¹⁴¹ Though it was not a *médersa* as such, this imagined Institute nevertheless shared the essential goal of creating a bi-cultural class of Muslims who were both steeped in Islamic traditions and enamored of French culture. The notion of creating such a school in Paris itself indicated how the French expanded their desired sphere of influence from their northwest African colonies to the whole of the “Muslim world.”¹⁴² This expansion also coincided, more or less directly, with an ongoing renegotiation of the terms of citizenship and belonging in France, or more accurately the French Union, especially for Africans and Muslims.¹⁴³

It seems implausible, even ridiculous, that any European institution could dislodge the centuries of Islamic learning and tradition in Cairo (or Timbuktu, or Fes, or Damascus, or any number of other centers). This implausibility was especially acute in the 1950s, as colonized populations both Muslim and non-Muslim gained momentum in their struggles against colonial rule, bolstered by the independence of India in 1947. Early in 1956, just after planning began for the institute, Tunisia and Morocco would also gain independence from France. And yet the French developed a detailed plan to implement this project and bring the Institute of Franco-Islamic Studies into being. In February 1955, a document prepared by the Secretariat-General of the French government outlined the purpose and structure of this Institute in the heart of Paris.¹⁴⁴ This note exemplifies the convoluted logic at work on the part of the French government to

¹⁴¹ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet d'organisation d'un institut d'études franco-islamiques à Paris*, January 1955.

¹⁴² On the idea of the “Muslim world” in this period, see Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). Aydin, notably, does not treat African Muslims as part of the “Muslim world” in his analysis.

¹⁴³ Cooper, *Citizenship*, 148.

¹⁴⁴ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

maintain its perceived elite status in the Islamic world. It also belies a familiar mix of ignorance and willful blindness to political and cultural realities of the time.

First and foremost, the expansion of Islam in “black Africa” motivated the creation of this Institute. A worrying number of students—cited at one hundred and ten from AOF and two hundred from Chad alone—currently studied at al-Azhar in Cairo. In French Soudan, four graduates of al-Azhar had returned to open a private Islamic school, also called a medersa, in Bamako; their enrollment of four hundred students rivaled the student population at Bamako’s French lycée.¹⁴⁵ Similar trends were apparent in North Africa, especially in Morocco, where the Istiqlal Party (which would lead Morocco to independence the next year) spurred a growth in Islamic schooling. These developments, the authors noted, were “impossible to slow” and would lead to the dangerous “organization of an education system outside of us” (*en dehors de nous*).¹⁴⁶ The old desire for the canalization of African Islam thus continued to guide French policy.

The different legal systems under which France’s various African territories were subsumed posed a problem. Before their independence in 1956, in the Moroccan and Tunisian protectorates, it had been easy to make certain forms of Islamic teaching part of the colonial education system.¹⁴⁷ In AOF and AEF, where French public law dominated, an “Alsatian” model had to be deployed to evade the exigencies of official *laïcité*. Alsace, which had changed hands between France and Germany several times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had a particular legal code with key differences from the rest of France, especially with regard to the separation of church and state. Through this sort of maneuvering, certain forms of Islamic

¹⁴⁵ ADLC 29QO/12, Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques, 4 February 1955. On the growth of independent Islamic schools in French Soudan see Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, especially 85–130.

¹⁴⁶ ADLC 29QO/12, Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques, 4 February 1955.

¹⁴⁷ See Pierre Vermeren, *Ecole, élite et pouvoir au Maroc et en Tunisie au XXe siècle* (Rabat: Alizés, 2002); Benhlal, *Le collège d’Azrou*.

education were incorporated and others excluded from official education.¹⁴⁸ Similar contortion allowed other religious instruction—Christian missionaries and Jewish organizations such as the *Alliance israélite universelle*—to operate with varying degrees of official status. This mottled system of education and law in northwest Africa resembled the situation in the Levantine mandates of Lebanon and Syria, although in those places Franco-Muslim education was never organized by the French state.¹⁴⁹ This status quo had allowed new, private Islamic schools to arise and to thrive. In some cases—the authors of the proposal cited Boutilimit as an example—these revivals took place in Sufi brotherhoods, “*sur le plan confrérique*.”¹⁵⁰ On the whole, whether Sufi or orthodox, this development promised to foster an educated group of Muslims who were fully outside the French sphere of influence. This situation was, as before, unacceptable to French authorities.

In order to maintain its status as a “Muslim power,” therefore, France needed to create a “Muslim university” that was “at least equal in quality to al-Azhar” and “able to offer...a more modern education” than the dilapidated Zaytuna of Tunis and Qarawiyyin of Fes.¹⁵¹ This French Islamic university would have the two familiar goals of fostering the “double culture” in future Muslim leaders and transforming Islamic education through the incorporation of modern

¹⁴⁸ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

¹⁴⁹ See Julia Hauser, Christine B. Lindner, and Esther Möller, eds., *Entangled Education: Foreign and Local Schools in Ottoman Syria and Mandate Lebanon, 19th–20th centuries* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2016). Soon after the establishment of the protectorates in the late 1910s, some Franco-Arab schools were organized and some Algerians were sent as teachers, though they likely trained at the *École normale* in Bouzareah rather than at the *médersas*. See CADN Beyrouth ISL/600/197. A similar system also existed in Palestine under the British mandate. See Nicholas E. Roberts, *Islam under the Palestine Mandate: Colonialism and the Supreme Muslim Council* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

¹⁵⁰ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵¹ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955. The Zaytuna, at least, was far from run-down: it was a matter of consistent concern to administrators in Algeria that so many young men studied there rather than in French institutions in Algeria.

educational techniques and practices. To achieve these goals, the French would have to rely on the power, prestige, and “incomparable influence” of the University of Paris, which “alone...can hope to rival the religious prestige” of al-Azhar.¹⁵²

A specific plan was drawn up to accomplish this task. Concerned with the “psychological shock” and “uprooting” (Fr. *déracinement*) that would await young men, fresh from the “bush schools” (Fr. *medersas en brousse*) of northwest Africa, the architects of this proposal believed that a new institution, a sort of halfway house where students could acclimate to their new environment, was necessary.¹⁵³ This new institution grew into the site of a newly imagined year-long preparatory course, where students would improve their French and unqualified or undeserving “tolbas” (a derogatory term, in French, for elementary-level students of Islamic studies) would be rooted out.

The French authorities imagined placing this institution in two places deemed sufficiently intermediary between Paris and the African bush: Provence or Algeria.¹⁵⁴ The preferred Provençal location was Aix-en-Provence (in an ironic coincidence, the same town where the French colonial archives are held today). Aix was chosen because of its proximity to Marseille, the most important urban center in southern France and home to a large number of North and West African workers. France’s main port on the Mediterranean, it would be easy for professors and students to travel to Marseille and from there to Aix. Similarly, it would be easy to find a site to build a spacious and comfortable campus. Despite these practical advantages, Aix presented the “certain inconvenience” that it was outside the *dar al-Islam* or, in French, *terre d’islam*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² ADLC 29QO/12, Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵³ ADLC 29QO/12, Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵⁴ ADLC 29QO/12, Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques, 4 February 1955.

The local university also lacked any specialists in Islamic law on its renowned law faculty, but it was the first disadvantage that posed the biggest problem, one of perception.

Algiers, the chosen site south of the Mediterranean, likewise presented a mix of advantages and disadvantages. Like Aix, Algiers was well integrated into French transportation networks, had a pleasant climate, and plenty of land for a new campus. Students could benefit from the proximity of the University of Algiers, by that point one of the largest French universities, and the more distant scholarly centers of Fes and Tunis. (It was a consistent contradiction in French analyses of Maghribi Muslim affairs that Fes and especially Tunis were seen as both decaying backwaters and important scholarly centers.) The French planners also begrudgingly and understatedly acknowledged a political problem: by that point, in early 1955, in Algiers “political struggles are rather active [and] North African students could find themselves encouraged, more so than in Aix, to participate.”¹⁵⁶ This situation, the authors went on, would eventually prove disadvantageous for black African students as well. In hindsight, this attitude seems remarkably indifferent to the ongoing liberation struggle in Algeria, which had broken out into overt violence only months before. The proposal for such a Muslim Institute demonstrates how committed the French were, even as late as the mid-1950s, to continuing the colonial status quo when it came to relationships between the French state and northwest African Muslims. The *médersa* was a model that had proven its success; this sort of institution could continue to benefit the French state even in the changeable political context.

Mirroring the model adopted a decade prior in the Superior Division of the *Médersa* of Algiers in 1944, the Institute of Franco-Islamic Studies in Paris and Aix or Algiers was designed with two programs, a “classical” course of study and a “modern” counterpart. The main

¹⁵⁵ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵⁶ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d'études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

difference between these two options was the place of African languages. The classical course was to include a “symbolic hour” every week of a so-called “foreign” African language. This would serve two purposes. First, it would eliminate the perception that French was uniquely obligatory for the students. Second, it would help the displaced West African students lose their “inferiority complex” with regards to their native languages. In justifying the latter reason, the French planners cited the founder of *négritude*, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, who supposedly had recently argued that his native Wolof had all the “suppleness” of classical Greek.¹⁵⁷ (This anecdote was erroneous: Senghor’s native language was Serer.) The modern course had a greater emphasis on French, and did not include any training in African languages. Both courses were to last four years, the first in Aix or Algiers and latter three in Paris. The classical course would award a specific diploma that would grant students the official title of *alem* (Ar. *‘alim*, scholar) and could lead to further study at the Sorbonne in a special program for Muslim students of the “double culture.” The modern course was oriented more directly toward the baccalauréat, with a path for the most gifted students to take to a doctoral degree.¹⁵⁸

These reforms to the Institut Musulman were, for the most part, wishful thinking on the part of the administrators who dreamed them up. No new branch was opened in Aix or in Algiers during this period, and later reports on the Institute itself reveal only modest changes in Paris.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the proposal—like that for a Guinean *médersa* in the 1910s, or for the expansion of the Mauritanian *médersa* system in the 1930s—reveals the tensions behind a multi-local approach to Franco-Muslim education. In this case, the Muslim Institute was designed to serve a

¹⁵⁷ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵⁸ ADLC 29QO/12, *Projet de note sur un établissement d’études supérieures islamiques*, 4 February 1955.

¹⁵⁹ ADLC 29QO/13, *Note au sujet de l’Institut Musulman*, 26 September 1955; ADLC 29QO/12, *Rapport Général, Institut Musulman*, 1959.

Muslim community more broadly defined than any of the *médersas* that preceded it in Algeria or AOF. On one level, the planning documents reveal that the French hoped to educate young Muslims from northwest Africa—which is to say, from the colonies—though anticipated, unresolved tensions between North and West African students resulted in some degree of concern. In other words, the Muslim Institute of Paris was meant to cater to both “black Islam” and “white Islam,” but struggled to accommodate both even in the planning stages.

On another level, though, by intending to rival Cairo as an intellectual center, the Muslim Institute had a global outlook. Even during Kaddour ben Ghabrit’s tenure, the Institute undertook activities outside the French empire, in Zanzibar, Yemen, and Libya, among others, and maintained official if surprising relationships with organizations as far flung as an Islamic Religious and Literary Association in Karbala, Iraq, and the Walt Disney Company in Burbank, California.¹⁶⁰ References in the proposal to a comparable institution under consideration in Pakistan and to the possibility of seeking funding from the newly created United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), headquartered in Paris, illustrate the broad geographical and geopolitical aspirations behind the proposed expansion of the Muslim Institute. This idea only made sense in a colonial context in which France maintained control, in some form or another, over northwest Africa and its vast Muslim populations for a long time to come. In the years of violence that followed, however, that control would become less direct and, in the era of African independence, less overtly colonial.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ ADLC 29QO/13, Note au sujet de l’Institut Musulman, 26 September 1955; ADLC 29QO/12, Rapport Général, Institut Musulman, 1959.

¹⁶¹ See Cooper, *Citizenship*.

Conclusion

The chronology of the developments charted here, in the four disparate locales of Algiers, Boutilimit, Abéché, and Paris, fits more or less neatly in the time frame between 1947 and 1955. This period between the 1947 education reforms and the 1956 *loi cadre* could be characterized as a last gasp of traditional colonial rule, before historical and political developments foreclosed the possibility of remaining in such a status quo. By 1958, when Guinea broke away from the French Union, and certainly by 1960, when the remaining West African colonies became independent, the well-tread logical paths in which official Franco-Muslim education made obvious administrative sense were mostly abandoned. The same was true for other practices of order, in education and other realms, such as the *culte officiel*. New relationships defined in terms of citizenship and belonging to a commonwealth or federation were the focus of political debate in France and in West Africa, while in Algeria the liberation war raged on.¹⁶² In this new context, the “double culture” of the medérsiens lost much of its previous meaning, in that Muslim institutions were no longer—officially, at least—important sites of state power. In a system where all Africans could vote—as implemented by the *loi cadre* of 1956—possessing the “double culture” was no longer a sign of authority and access to power.

What these examples drawn from across French Africa and from France itself do demonstrate is the ongoing importance of the rhetoric of France as a “Muslim power” even in the final stages of colonial rule, at least up until the mid-1950s. As with discussions of citizenship, the meanings of this term were mutable and multiple. In some senses, they were local: in Algeria, the Franco-Muslim lycées were clear heirs to the médersas and remained resolutely oriented to the context of French Algeria. In others, they became broadly regional, as in Chad,

¹⁶² Cooper, *Citizenship*.

where the *médersa*'s creation was meant to stanch the flow of students from Wadai to Khartoum and Cairo. This was likewise the case in Boutilimit, although there the widening of the *médersa*'s audience from southern Mauritania to all of West Africa resulted in some degree of lost prestige from which the Muslim Institute could not recover. In Paris, the Muslim Institute reflected the fast-changing colonial situation. Conceived as a way to more deeply inculcate northwest African Muslims with French values, the institution took on a larger, global meaning, one which imagined Paris as the new capital of the Muslim world. The urgency behind these four cases, ranging from local to global in scale, was consistent. France must, these administrators and policymakers all agreed, retain its particular, and powerful, role among European nations as one uniquely suited to governing Muslims. Achieving this goal meant a return to earlier colonial discourses and strategies.

In particular, it meant that the *médersa* model of Franco-Muslim education retained its importance even as the *médersas* themselves closed in the 1940s and 1950s. The use of the term *médersa* for the Abéché school, technically a Franco-Muslim *collège*, is but one overt example of the institution's legacy across northwest Africa. The institution's structure and its practices of order reappeared in the supposedly new Muslim Institutes in Boutilimit and Paris, and in other institutions. More diffusely, the intertwined religious and racial designations for northwest African Muslims, especially *islam noir*, continued to shape policies and practices in these new iterations of the *médersa* model. The *medérsiens* went on to new roles as the landscape of power reverberated with the political changes wrought by independence. So too, these examples show, did the *médersa* itself.

Conclusion

Decolonization and African independence resulted in the transformation of the ten médersas in multiple directions. That momentous era was a watershed period in African history, as decades or even centuries of colonial rule ended and Africans across the continent reclaimed rights to self-rule that had long been denied to them. During this period, the tensions between present and past, modernity and tradition, were intense. The medérsiens, intermediary figures par excellence and schooled within these tensions, participated actively and in multiple ways in the redefinition of independent African life. This was true across northwest Africa, both where the médersa was firmly implanted and where its impact was less deeply felt. Even after the formal closure of the médersas, medérsiens played diverse roles in politics and public life across northwest Africa into the late twentieth century. Indeed, Franco-Muslim education continues to occupy an important space in northwest African societies to this day.

Although colonial officials like Jules Salenc and Paul Marty derided the Saint-Louis médersa as ineffective, several decades after its closure the few medérsiens it produced continued to shape Senegalese society. For example, on the night of 31 December 1957, Ibrahima Kane died in his home in the Medina neighborhood of Dakar.¹ He had been the chief qadi of the official Muslim Tribunal in Dakar. Ten months later, on 31 October 1958, his successor was named. He was Chems-Eddine Diagne, and he served in the post until the Muslim Tribunals were dissolved two years hence, at Senegalese independence.² Both of these men, the final two to hold the post of official qadi in the colonial period, had attended the Saint-Louis

¹ AMD 1D/25, Le Cadi-Suppléant du Tribunal Musulman de Dakar to Délégué du Chef du Territoire du Sénégal, 3 January 1958.

² AMD 1D/25, Arrêté nommant M. Chems Eddine Diagne cadi du Tribunal Musulman de Dakar, 31 October 1958.

médersa in the 1910s. At the same time, a new organization had begun to shape Islamic practice in Senegal: the *Union Culturelle Musulmane*, the first major Islamic reformist movement based in that colony. Its founder, Cheikh Touré, was too young to have attended the Saint-Louis médersa, but his education had nonetheless taken place in its milieu. Born to a prominent scholarly lineage, he went to Saint-Louis for studies in the mid-1940s. There he encountered Mokhtar Ould Hamidoun, the Mauritanian scholar and former professor at the Médersa of Atar then employed at the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire; Touré later credited Ould Hamidoun with introducing him to the work of the Egyptian reformist Mohammed Abduh. Touré later enrolled at the Boutilimit Islamic Institute and soon thereafter he was sent to study at the Médersa of Algiers, just before its transformation into a lycée. In Algeria he encountered the reformist schools founded by Abdelhamid Ben Badis and, upon his return to Senegal in 1953, began to set up a similar school system there. He remained an active leader in Senegalese Muslim life into the 1980s.³

Algerian medérsiens also continued to shape trans-Saharan relationships in the mid-twentieth century. One of the Algerians who taught in Mauritania, Abderrahmane Nekli, remained in West Africa following the médersas' closure and taught in the Lycée Askia Mohammed in Bamako. Following his distinguished career in Atar, Nekli had moved on to Timbuktu before arriving in Bamako. In this trajectory he differed from the other Algerians who had taught in the West African médersas. While the others returned to teach in Algeria, primarily in the three médersas there, Nekli remained in West Africa. He was not, however, disengaged from Algerian politics. Active in the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) and the National Liberation Front (FLN), Nekli coordinated Algerian diplomatic and military

³ Roman Loimeier, "Cheikh Touré, un musulman sénégalais dans le siècle : du réformisme à l'islamisme," in Ousmane Kane and Jean-Louis Triaud, eds., *Islam et islamismes au sud du Sahara* (Aix-en-Provence: IREMAM and Paris: Karthala, 1998), 155–168.

activities in French Soudan, before 1960, and in newly independent Mali. After Algerian independence in 1962, he remained in West Africa as an emissary to both Mali and Niger. He may have attended the famous Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955; he certainly was imbued with the “spirit of Bandung” and the idea of Third World solidarity. By the mid-1960s he had returned to Algeria and embarked on a career in diplomacy, specializing in African affairs. He was the Algerian ambassador to several West African countries, including Niger and Burkina Faso, throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He served as an Algerian delegate at the creation of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa in 1963, and helped to organize the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, hosted by Algeria in 1969. At his death in 1991, Nekli was lauded as a preeminent diplomat, scholar, and pan-Africanist by officials in Algeria and across the continent.⁴

One of Nekli’s colleagues in Algeria’s African diplomacy was Ali Abdellaoui (b. 1933). A native of Mostaganem in western Algeria, Abdellaoui studied at the Médersa of Tlemcen beginning in 1947, then went on to the Superior Division in Algiers and, after graduation, a position as a monitor at the Médersa of Constantine. In Constantine, he became involved in student politics, rising through the ranks of different groups until he became the general secretary of the *Union Générale des Etudiants Musulmans Algériens* (UGEMA). Eventually he joined the central committee of the FLN.⁵ In the mid-1960s, he served alongside Nekli as Algerian ambassador to several West African countries. His postings included Burkina Faso, Niger, and Côte d’Ivoire.⁶ He later served in Poland and China, and as an information minister in Algiers into the 1990s. In an interview, Abdellaoui argued that the medérsiens, trained to intermediate

⁴ Interview with Malika Nekli and Khelil Nekli, 31 March 2016.

⁵ Cheurfi, *La classe politique algérienne*, 20; see also Moore, *Combat et solidarité estudiantins*, 337–359.

⁶ ADLC 29QO/39, Télégramme, Abdellaoui nommé ambassadeur en Haute-Volta, 13 March 1965.

among so many varying positions (French and Islamic; Francophone and Arabophone; elite and poor), were also intermediaries among the *mujahiddin* of the liberation war, coordinating between leaders and foot soldiers.⁷ Playing this role prepared many of those who survived the war to go on to careers in diplomacy.

The most important Algerian diplomat of the late twentieth century, Lakhdar Brahimi (b. 1934), fits this description. Born near Médéa, he studied at the Médersa of Algiers in the final years before its transformation into the Franco-Muslim lycée. Like Abdellaoui, he was a founding member of the UGEMA; he quit his studies in Paris to become the FLN's chief diplomat, active in Indonesia (during the Bandung Conference), Egypt, and elsewhere.⁸ From 1971 to 1979 he was Algerian ambassador to the United Kingdom. At some point in his tenure there he received a visit from his former professor, Ould Rouis, with whom he "passed a long evening speaking of the medérsiens, professors and students, as well as the difficulties of education in independent Algeria."⁹ He was Algeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 1990s and has since contributed to sensitive United Nations missions, in Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, and most recently, Syria.

The tie between médersa educations and diplomatic careers post-independence was not limited to Algerians. Mokhtar Ould Daddah, a graduate of the Médersa of Boutilimit, became the first president of Mauritania at independence in 1960. Most of his cabinet was likewise made up of medérsiens, mostly from Boutilimit, and most of whom had worked in the colonial

⁷ Interview with Ali Abdellaoui, 9 December 2014.

⁸ Cheurfi, *La classe politique algérienne*, 138–139.

⁹ Mohamed Chafik Mesbah, "C'est la Révolution algérienne qui a porté les diplomates algériens, ce ne sont pas les diplomates algériens qui ont porté la Révolution algérienne. Entretien avec Lakhdar Brahimi," *Le Soir d'Algérie*, 30 June 2007, <http://www.lesoirdalgerie.com/articles/2007/06/30/article.php?sid=55646&cid=30>.

administration as interpreters.¹⁰ One of Ould Daddah's fiercest rivals in independent Mauritanian politics, Ahmed Baba Miské (1935–2016), studied at the Médersa of Atar. Like Nekli, Miské was involved in Third Worldist politics, attending the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers and other similar events around the world.¹¹ Miské also supported the Polisario Front, which advocated for the independence of the Western Sahara from Morocco. This position, at odds with Ould Daddah, got Miské into hot water at times. In an indication of the small size of Mauritania's governing elite, Miské was both imprisoned as a political dissident and named Mauritanian ambassador to the United States and the United Nations during the 1960s and 1970s. His brother, Ahmed Bazaid Miské, was less radical—also a graduate of the Atar médersa, he served as Ould Daddah's Minister of Defense.¹² A final example of the Mauritanian medérsiens' role in diplomacy is Mohammed Saïd Ould Hamody (1942–2015), another graduate of the médersa of Atar, who succeeded Miské as ambassador to the United States and United Nations from the 1980s to the 2000s. Ould Hamody was remarkable because his family was of the haratīn origin; he nevertheless ascended, in part due to his médersa education, to the pinnacle of Mauritanian politics and society.¹³

Ould Hamody and Miské, with their dual political and intellectual contributions, exemplify a position held by several prominent figures from the last generation of medérsiens in West Africa as in Algeria. Mostefa Lacheraf (1917–2007), graduate of the Algiers médersa and

¹⁰ Interview with Mohammed Saïd Ould Hamody, 23 May 2015; Interview with Mohamed Ould Sidi Ould Khelil, 11 April 2016.

¹¹ Ahmed Baba Miské, *Lettre ouverte aux élites du Tiers-monde* (Paris: Sycomore, 1981). Miské also published a study of *al-Wasit*, the same Mauritanian chronicle translated decades earlier by the Algerian professor Mourad Teffahi: *Al Wasit. Tableau de la Mauritanie au début du XX^e siècle* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1970).

¹² Interview with Ahmed Baba Miské, 24 May 2015.

¹³ His works, especially the *Bibliographie générale de la Mauritanie* (Nouakchott: Centre Culture Français de Nouakchott, 1995) and *Mauritanie, 1445–1975* are standard references for all scholars of the region.

son of a médersa professor, was one of them. A key figure in the FLN, he was involved in one of the most high-profile incidents of the Algerian war: in 1956 he was arrested along with Ahmed Ben Bella and other FLN leaders when their airplane, traveling from Rabat to Tunis, was forced to land in Algeria. Incarcerated in France until 1961, after independence Lacheraf was also a diplomat, specializing in Algerian relations with Latin America, and in the mid-1970s he served as Minister of Education under Houari Boumediène. He also was a main author of the “National Charter” of 1976. He became better known, later in life, as an intellectual, penning numerous studies of Algerian nationalism, the cultural violence of colonialism, and “decolonized” histories of the Maghrib.¹⁴ At his death in 2007, Lacheraf was one of Algeria’s foremost intellectual figures.

Malek Bennabi (1905–1973), perhaps more than any other medersien, encapsulates the complex heritage of the médersas after independence. Born in Constantine to a family from Tébessa in far eastern Algeria, Bennabi was educated at the Médersa of Constantine and worked in the Islamic court system before moving to France for further studies.¹⁵ He spent the period of the Second World War in France, and was briefly imprisoned for his collaboration with the Vichy regime (he had worked as a technical assistant in the occupied town of Dreux). In the late 1940s, he began publishing scholarship, in both French and Arabic, on questions of Islamic civilization and modernity, which took him to Cairo in the late 1950s and, after Algerian independence, back to Algeria. There he taught at the University of Algiers from 1963 until his

¹⁴ See, e.g., Mostefa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie : nation et société* (Paris: François Maspero, 1976); his autobiography, *Des noms et des lieux. Mémoires d'une Algérie oubliée* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 1998). See also Omar Lardjane, *Mostefa Lacheraf. Un itinéraire, une œuvre, une référence* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2004).

¹⁵ Bennabi discusses his early life in detail in his memoirs: *Mémoires d'un témoin du siècle* (Algiers: Éditions nationales algériennes, 1965). One interesting anecdote is that after beginning his médersa studies and adopting a European-style suit, he attracted curiosity back home in Tébessa: in his choice of pants, he resembled Abderrahmane Nekli, who was known for his peculiar European costume upon his arrival in Atar. See Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens*, 83.

death a decade later, organizing philosophical seminars. These seminars laid the groundwork for a particularly Algerian Islamism, informed by the colonial past and older strands of the Algerian history. Some have argued that Bennabi's thought developed into the Islamist ideology of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), which sparked the "Dark Decade" of the 1990s in Algeria.¹⁶ Since the conclusion of that conflict, Bennabi has been a controversial figure in Algeria; his vision of a modernist Islamism in conversation with the West has been opportunistically rehabilitated at times, and buried at others.¹⁷

Bennabi was a complex figure, emblematic of the schisms of the late twentieth century between Islam and the West, tradition and modernity, the colonial and postcolonial conditions. These tensions are felt around the world but are particularly acute in former colonies. The medérsiens, intermediary figures *par excellence*, sat at the center of these debates in northwest Africa.¹⁸ The vicissitudes of postcolonial history have tipped the scales against the medérsiens and others who bridged these divides. Arabization and nationalism in Algeria and Mauritania—to say nothing of other countries less central to this dissertation—tended to marginalize bi-cultural education and regarded figures with such training as suspicious.¹⁹

Many of the surviving medérsiens, aside from the prominent examples discussed above, shrank from public view. In Algeria, they were often targeted during the civil war of the 1990s—

¹⁶ Sebastian J. Walsh, "Killing Post-Almohad Man: Malek Bennabi, Algerian Islamism and the Search for a Liberal Governance," *Journal of North African Studies* 12:2 (June 2007), 235–254.

¹⁷ Jamel El Hamri, *Malek Bennabi : une vie au service d'une pensée* (Paris: Éditions al-Bouraq, 2016); and Allan Christelow, "An Islamic Humanist in the 20th Century: Malik Bennabi," *Maghreb Review* 17:1–2 (1992), 69–83. Other than Christelow, few have written on Bennabi in English.

¹⁸ Aïssa Kadri, ed., *Parcours d'intellectuels maghrébins : scolarité, formation, socialisation et positionnements* (Paris: Karthala/Institut Maghreb-Europe, 1999); Omar Lardjane, ed., *Elites et société dans le monde arabe : Les cas de l'Algérie et l'Égypte. Actes du colloque scientifique, Timimoun* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2007), especially Lardjane, "Les Médersiens : destinées d'une élite de l'intermédiation coloniale," 317–338.

¹⁹ For Algeria, see Mustapha Madi, "L'élite arabisante et l'arabisation. De la stratégie linguistique à la marginalisation par la langue," in Lardjane, ed., *Elites et société*, 339–351.

many were threatened and even assassinated. In Algiers, Abderrahmane Nekli's family home and his extensive library were burned during this period.²⁰ Today, the living memory of the *médersas* is fading, and few *medérsiens* remain. Even in the brief time that I have studied these schools and their graduates, some of my interlocutors—Mohammed Saïd Ould Hamody and Ahmed Baba Miské most notably—have passed away. Their erasure continues in historical scholarship and public memory, which turns its attention elsewhere and often replicates the nationalist suspicion of bi-cultural figures trained in colonial schools.

Now, as the *medérsiens* fade from living memory, Franco-Muslim institutions seem to be expanding. Across francophone northwest Africa, bi-cultural Islamic schools proliferate. Because of the colonial linguistic legacy, many of these schools are in fact Franco-Muslim schools, offering training to young students in both Arabic and French (and increasingly in English as well). Some of these schools—often called *médersas*—date back to the late colonial period, to the 1930s and 1940s, to the efforts of Abdelhamid ben Badis and others to provide alternatives to the colonial education system while still transmitting Islamic knowledge. From independence, the Algerian state has exerted extensive control over education, and the Arabization of institutions in the 1960s and 1970s carries over into the present. As such, independent *medersas* are now relatively rare in Algeria and elsewhere in the Maghrib.

In West Africa, on the contrary, such schools are common. Originally the purview of shaykhs returned from studies at al-Azhar, these *médersas* now draw on other sources of Islamic knowledge as well.²¹ In Senegal, the Muridiyya Sufi order has organized a network of so-called al-Azhar schools that teach Murid values through modern techniques, designed to help students succeed in the contemporary world, by introducing technical training and English language

²⁰ Interview with Hassen Aberkane, 2 February 2016; interview with Malika Nekli and Khelil Nekli, 6 April 2016.

²¹ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 209–293.

classes, for instance.²² Following Murid diaspora networks, there are al-Azhar schools operating now in Europe and New York City. Since the 1980s in particular, similar institutions with other religious affiliations have opened across West Africa, in places where colonial *médersas* were absent. They span linguistic and political borders, and are generally recognized as a viable alternative to poorly funded and organized public education.²³ Some of these schools also represent new geopolitical and Islamic orientations. For example, the Turkish Gülen Movement runs a great number of schools across Africa and the rest of the world, offering secular curricula designed to encourage a Sufi-oriented piety. Despite high enrollments, these schools are often the focus of diplomatic tensions between Turkey and its African partners.²⁴ One hundred years ago, Franco-Muslim or Franco-Arab schooling was offered only to a small group of students in the official *médersas*. Today, such programs are widespread and widely understood to be worthwhile institutions, their students prepared to succeed in the modern world.

An institution bearing a remarkable resemblance to the *médersas* has appeared in recent years in Morocco. The Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams was founded in 2015 in Rabat. Its teachings are firmly Islamic, not Franco-Muslim, but in other ways the Institute echoes the purpose of the *médersas*. Designed to combat Islamic extremism, the Institute proffers “moderate” and “tolerant” teachings of “Moroccan Islam” to imams-in-training and awards a diploma for successful studies.²⁵ Many of the Institute’s students are Moroccan, but the Institute has a larger target audience that stretches across northwest Africa: students have also come from

²² Babou, “The al-Azhar School Network.”

²³ Gérard, “Les *médersas*.”

²⁴ For example, “Turkish President Targets Cleric’s Schools on Africa Visit,” *Voice of America*, 22 January 2017. <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkish-president-targets-cleris-schools-on-africa-visit/3686909.html>.

²⁵ The category of “Moroccan Islam” was invented during the colonial period but is explicitly cited by the Moroccan government in justifying this Institute. See Burke, *The Ethnographic State*.

Tunisia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. In an ironic inversion of the old order, even French imams have come to Rabat for training.²⁶ In 2017, the Institute expanded due to the great demand, according to Moroccan officials.²⁷ This Institute has been lauded by European and American powers as a powerful tool to combat Islamic extremist movements such as the Islamic State, which recruit heavily from northwest Africa and from African Muslim immigrant communities in Europe. It is too soon to say if this Institute has achieved its goals, although it seems to be successfully bolstering Morocco's geopolitical reputation as a bulwark against extremism and as a regional power in northwest Africa.²⁸ In its effort to reach a range of West African Muslims, the Mohammed VI Institute resembles the colonial-era Boutilimit Institute; in its explicit goal to shape an official form of Islam, it recalls the *culte officiel* that so defined Algerian Muslim life for so long. Though such an attitude is never made explicit, the Institute's work also echoes the perennial French colonial goal to renovate and control "dangerous" Islamic movements, especially those traversing the Sahara. This institute's ideological and practical resemblance to the *médersas* demonstrates the extent of the *médersa*'s domestication by northwest African Muslims, and the enduring relevance of such institutions in the region.

It has been easy for scholars to dismiss the *médersas* as a colonial curiosity, a failed effort on the part of French colonial administrators to foster loyal cadres of Muslim intermediaries. This conclusion is enabled by the "Saharan divide" that concentrates scholarly attention on either

²⁶ Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Culture and Communication, "HM the King Inaugurates Extension Project of Mohammed VI Institute for Imams Training," 20 October 2017. <http://www.maroc.ma/en/royal-activities/hm-king-inaugurates-extension-project-mohammed-vi-institute-imams-training>.

²⁷ Morocco World News, "To meet Global Demand, King Mohammed VI Opens Extension Wing of Imam Training School," 21 October 2017. <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2017/10/231768/to-meet-global-demand-king-mohammed-vi-opens-extension-wing-of-imam-training-school>.

²⁸ Ann Marie Wainscott, *Bureaucratizing Islam: Morocco and the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 207–236.

side of the desert while ignoring the historical reality that the *médersas*, like so much else, operated across the Sahara and connected individuals and societies in dynamic ways. This dissertation's wider view, spanning the desert, allows for a clearer understanding of the *médersa's* role in northwest African Muslim life under colonial rule. The *médersa's* longevity and its geographical breadth each attest to the institution's importance.

In Algeria, the three *médersas* operated continuously for one hundred and one years, from 1850 to 1951. In West Africa, they persisted years later, even expanding their reach in the waning years of the French empire. Spanning the French Second Republic to the Fifth and colonial ideologies ranging from Napoleon III's Arabophilia to the civilizing mission to the French Union, the *médersas* prove the ongoing importance of Franco-Muslim education to the colonial project in northwest Africa. Its terms were at times hotly debated, but the figure of the *medérsien* found ideological and practical relevance in a wide range of colonial contexts. The *médersas* thus complicate historians' understandings of the relationship between France, especially French secularism, and Islam—its religious practices, its legal codes, its institutions and networks and traditions of learning—in the past and in the present.

The *médersa's* reach, spanning the Sahara, demonstrates the importance of historical research that is both locally grounded and attentive to larger-scale processes and connections. Institutional history that draws on both concrete practices and ideological stances is particularly well-suited to this method of inquiry. In the case of the *médersa*, the process I call domestication can only be understood through this multi-local approach. In each of its sites, the *médersa* was subject to a negotiation between local Muslim populations and imperial operatives. As this dissertation demonstrates, domesticating the *médersa* entailed its incorporation of local traditions of Islamic learning, from the *madrasas* of the Maghrib to the *mahadra* of Mauritania, as well as

the introduction of modern, European institutional structures and teaching methods. This process of domestication extended to different practices of order, most notably the selection of students and the codification of the curriculum. In turn, the médersas produced a clearly defined and influential group, the medérsiens, who played a variety of significant roles in northwest African Muslim societies—not simply those envisioned by colonial authorities.

The ongoing importance of Franco-Muslim education, across northwest Africa and from the mid-nineteenth century into the present, indicates that the colonial history of the médersa is more complicated than the present historiography suggests. An institution intended as an instrument of colonial control was transformed into an institution that also served local interests. The domestication of the médersa is evidence of the complex historical forces at work within its walls and a testament to the creativity and resilience of northwest African Muslim communities.

Appendix A

Recommendations for Médersa Reform in the Combes *Rapport* (1894), 323–325.

En conséquence des explications qui précèdent, la Commission émet le vœu :

1° Que les médersas soient réorganisées sur les bases proposées par le recteur d'Alger et approuvées par le Gouverneur général ;

2° Qu'elles continuent à fonctionner comme écoles spéciales et préparatoires aux fonctions publiques musulmanes, mais qu'elles soient rendues accessibles, quant à leur enseignement, à tous les jeunes indigènes qui en feront la demande, sous réserve de conditions d'aptitude à déterminer ;

3° Que le programme d'études embrasse, pour la partie musulmane, des cours de théologie musulmane, de droit musulman, de littérature arabe et d'histoire musulmane, et, pour la partie française, des cours de littérature française, d'histoire et de géographie, d'arithmétique, de droit français élémentaire, de législation algérienne, d'éléments de sciences physiques et naturelles et d'hygiène;

4° Que la durée des études y soit de six ans, et qu'elle soit divisée en deux périodes, la première de quatre années, aboutissant à un examen obligatoire pour les fonctions musulmanes d'ordre inférieur; la seconde de deux années, ayant également pour terme un examen obligatoire pour les fonctions musulmanes d'ordre supérieur;

5° Qu'aucun candidat ne puisse être nommé aux fonctions publiques musulmanes de la justice et du culte, s'il n'est porteur d'un diplôme d'études délivré par les médersas;

6° Que la nomination à ces fonctions soit faite désormais par le Gouverneur général de l'Algérie, sur la proposition du recteur pour les fonctions du culte, et sur la proposition des chefs de la Cour d'appel d'Alger pour les fonctions de la justice;

7° Que le taux des bourses dans les médersas soit fixé uniformément à 300 francs;

8° Que nul ne puisse être admis dans les médersas en qualité de boursier ou, ce qui sera la même chose, d'élève régulier, s'il n'est muni d'un certificat d'études primaires supérieures, et, en qualité d'élève libre, s'il n'est reconnu, à la suite d'un examen, capable de suivre utilement les cours;

9° Qu'il soit créé par département algérien, en vue du certificat dont il est question au paragraphe précédent, une école primaire supérieure spéciale aux indigènes, où seront admis avec des bourses les jeunes indigènes les mieux notes parmi ceux qui auront obtenu le certificat d'études primaires;

10° Que, sans vouloir anticiper sur des réformes à prévoir dans l'organisation des services musulmans du culte et de la justice, le personnel de ces services soit augmenté et que les traitements en soient améliorés, pour la justice, par la nomination de cadis à la tête des mahakmas annexes, et, pour le culte, par la création de muphtis et d'imans en nombre suffisant pour les besoins du culte.

Appendix B

Works requested for the library of the Médersa of Boutilimit, 5 May 1937, ANRIM E2/44.

French titles as listed in document	Details and inclusion in Hall and Stewart, "Core Curriculum."
<p>I. CORAN (COMMENTAIRES)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commentaire d'Ibn Atiya 2. Commentaire d'El Ouahidi 3. Commentaire d'El Kaouachi 4. Commentaire d'Abi Haïana dit Baher El Mouhit 	<p>I. Qur'anic commentary/tafsir</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ibn 'Atiyyah, not in Core Curriculum. 2. al-Wāhidī, not in Core Curriculum 3. ? 4. Abu Hayyān al-Gharnāī, <i>al-Bahr al-Muhīt</i>, not in Core Curriculum.
<p>II. TRADITION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taohid-Auteur : Abi Omara Ibn Abd-El Berri 2. Aridet El Ahouadi, sur Jami Termidi 3. Ikmalou El Mōlimi Ala Kitabi Moslem 4. Kitab El Mostadrak 5. El Azizi Ala El Jami es-saghier 6. El Kabass Ala Moottāa Malék Ibn Anass 7. Mirkatou Soôd Ila Benani Abû Daoud 8. Ouassilatou El Moslim Fi Tahdibi Sahihi Moslem, d'Ibn Jozāi Malick 	<p>II. Traditions of the Prophet</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ibn al-Barrī, in Core Curriculum, 154. 2. al-Tirmidhī hadith collection, not in Core Curriculum. 3. ? 4. al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī, <i>al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahīhayn</i>, not in Core Curriculum. 5. al-Suyūtī, <i>al-Jāmi' al-saghīr</i>? Not in Core Curriculum. 6. Mālik b. Anas, <i>Kitāb al-Muwatta'</i>, in Core Curriculum, 165.¹ 7. Abū Dā'ūd, ? Not in Core Curriculum. 8. Ibn Juzayy, ? Not in Core Curriculum.²
<p>III. DROIT</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Daoudih de Khalil ala Mokhtassar Ibn El Hadjeb 2. Kitabou El Maouaziati 3. Kitabou El Atbia 4. Kitab ibn Younouss 5. Jaouahir Ibn Chââs 6. Ouathaïq Ibn el Attar 7. El Baïan d'Ibn Roched 8. Kitab El Mâzéri 	<p>III. Law/Fiqh</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Khalīl ibn Ishāq, <i>al-Tawdīh</i>, not in Core Curriculum. 2. ? 3. ? 4. ? 5. Ibn Shas, <i>al-Jawahir</i>, not in Core Curriculum. 6. Ibn al-'Attar, <i>Watha'iq</i> (?) 7. Ibn Rushd, al-Jadd, <i>Kitāb 'l-bayān wa 'l-tahsīl li-mā fi 'l-Mustakhraja</i>, not in Core Curriculum. 8. al-Maziri, commentary on the Mudawwana,

¹ See Ivor Wilks, "The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan," in Jack Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 168, on the importance of this work in the Dyula tradition of Islamic learning.

² Another work by the same author is listed in "Core Curriculum," under Qur'anic revelation and abrogation, 155.

<p>9. El Qualchani Ala Rissala</p> <p>10. Makaddimat Ibn Roched</p> <p>11. Dhakhira d'El Karafi</p>	<p>not in Core Curriculum.</p> <p>9. Ahmad b. Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Qalashānī, <i>Tahrīr al-maqāla fī sharh al-risāla</i>, in Core Curriculum, 166.</p> <p>10. Ibn Rushd, al-Jadd, <i>al-Muqaddimāt...al-Mudawwana</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p> <p>11. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, <i>al-Dhakhīra</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p>
<p>IV. THEOLOGIE</p> <p>1. Nour El Moubin Fikaouâdi Akaïd dīn d'Ibn Jozāï El Maliki</p>	<p>IV. Theology</p> <p>1. Ibn Juzayy, <i>al-Nūr al-mubīn</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p>
<p>V. HISTOIRE</p> <p>1. Maghani Moussa Ibn Okba</p> <p>2. Aiouinen El Athar d'Ibn Seydi-Nass</p>	<p>V. History</p> <p>1. Mūsā ibn ‘Uqba, <i>Kitāb al-Maghāzī</i>, not in Core Curriculum</p> <p>2. Ibn Sayyid al-Nas, ‘<i>Uyūn al-Athar</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p>
<p>VI. GRAMMAIRE</p> <p>1. El Moussaid Ala Tesshil</p> <p>2. Damamini -- ---</p> <p>3. Chareh El Kafīé d'Ibn Malik</p> <p>4. Chareh Kitab Sībeouīhi de Sīrafi</p>	<p>VI. Grammar</p> <p>1. Ibn ‘Aqīl: <i>al-Masā'id ‘alā al-tashīl al-fawā'id</i>, in Core Curriculum, 158.</p> <p>2. Muhammad b. Abī Bakr b. ‘Umar al-Damāmīnī al-Iskandarī, <i>Sharh tahsīl Ibn Mālik</i>, in Core Curriculum, 158.</p> <p>3. Ibn Mālik, <i>al-Kāfiya al-shāfiya</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p> <p>4. al-Sīrāfī, commentary on Sībawayhi’s <i>Kitāb</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p>
<p>VII. LITTERATURE</p> <p>1. Sihah El Johari</p> <p>2. Gloses d'Ibn Berri sur le précédent</p> <p>3. El Mizhar de Seyouti</p> <p>4. Lissan El Arab.</p>	<p>VIII. Literature (including dictionaries)</p> <p>1. Ismā’īl b. Hammād al-Jawhari, <i>al-Sihāh</i>, in Core Curriculum, 156.</p> <p>2. Ibn Barrī, <i>hawāshī</i> on <i>al-Sihāh</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p> <p>3. al-Suyūfī, <i>al-Muzhir fī ‘ulūm al-lugha</i>, not in Core Curriculum</p> <p>4. Ibn Manzūr, <i>Lisān al-‘Arab</i>, not in Core Curriculum.</p>

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