

CI

Introduction

CI.P1

Algiers, May 1881. On the Place du Gouvernement, the heart of the city that connects the harbour to the heights of the Casbah, kiosks sell the local newspapers: *La Vigie algérienne*, *L'Akhbar*, or *Le Petit colon algérien*. Some of the best illustrations have been cut out of the papers and left to dry in the sun, on what look like clothes lines, for passers-by to gawk at. A shoal of raggamuffin street children, the *yaouleds* (from *ya awlad!*, 'hey kids!'), shout out the day's headlines in between shoe-polishing jobs. Down in the harbour just below, boats offload passengers from Marseille, along with a few packs of newspapers from the metropole. In the cafés under the arcades, European men drink cheap anisette and comment on the story of the day: the French army's success in neighbouring Tunisia, where the conquest that will lead to the establishment of the French protectorate has just begun.¹

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As the invasion of Tunisia unfolds, the city of Algiers is bustling with people flocking in from the countryside, 'eager for news concerning these events.'² Their movements are watched and their packages systematically searched: the head of the Algiers police, Étienne Delignac, has been tasked with a 'special surveillance [...] as to what Algerian Muslims might say or do on the occasion of events happening at the Tunisian border'.³ The police scour packages looking for prints and private letters in Arabic—two trunks full of scripture, brought back by a Moroccan traveller returning from Mecca, are seized by anxious policemen who cannot read their contents.⁴ In the *cafés maures*, where Muslim men meet to drink coffee and chatter, in the

¹ On illustrations and visual culture in Algiers, see Omar Carlier, 'Émergence de la culture moderne de l'image dans l'Algérie musulmane contemporaine (Alger, 1880–1980)', in Carlier (ed.), *Images du Maghreb, Images au Maghreb (XIX–XXe siècles)* (Paris, 2010), 11–40. On the *yaouled* and their marginal position in Algerian colonial society, see Christelle Teraud, 'Les *yaouleds*: entre marginalisation sociale et sédition politique', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irrégulière"*, 10 (2008), 59–74. For a romanticized description of Algiers cafés in the late nineteenth century, see Louis Bertrand's retrospective panorama of arriving in Algiers in 1891: *Alger* (Paris, 1938).

² 'Rapport spécial du commissariat central de police d'Alger', 2 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

³ Ibid., 26 April 1881.

⁴ Ibid., 23 May 1881.

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bath-houses, in the *fondouks* where merchants barter and sleep, all the ‘places where Muslims gather’, the police watch over potential subversive activity.⁵ In the house of a certain Mustaphaould el Malitim, Muslim notables and holy men assemble to read the newspapers and comment on the latest news away from prying ears. Crowds form in the streets around a blind man nicknamed Adoul, who sings the praise of former heroes of Islam, and announces the imminent defeat of the Christians at the hands of the Turkish boats that are already rushing, he promises, towards Tunis. The *meddah*, or public bard, singing in an elegant variant of the Algerian dialect of Arabic, is promptly arrested.⁶ He is not the only singer detained by the police: a family of Italian ambulant musicians, resentful that their home nation is losing out on its own claim to colonize Tunisia, is deported back to the region of Naples, though what seditious music they had played is not recorded.⁷ News is read, news is spoken, news is sung, and though Tunis is some 500 kilometres away, Algiers is buzzing.

CI.P3 Delignac’s police reports allow us a peek into a rich world of news, both print and manuscript, written and oral, serious and rowdy, public and private, in formal Arabic, Algerian dialect, Italian, and French. News is exchanged through newspapers, conversations in cafés or other meeting-places, and professional singers. The final ingredient is Delignac himself, part of that great apparatus of news circulation that is the surveillance state, with its endless chain of reports on the most minute details.

CI.P4 This book describes the circulation of news in Algeria under French rule from 1881 to 1940. This was the period of maximum French power in North Africa—a period of intense technological revolution, global high imperialism, and the Third Republic, a regime that granted settlers in Algeria considerable civil liberties while denying them to the majority of Algerians. In a society divided between its native majority and a substantial settler minority, I focus my attention on the thing that by its very nature is meant to circulate—news. By looking at how accounts of recent events generated conflict as they moved between different social groups, I suggest that circulation and polarization were two aspects of the same phenomenon. Under colonialism, Algerians became more connected and more divided at the same time.

⁵ Ibid., 27 April 1881.

⁶ Traditionally paid by men of power to extol their virtues (the verb *maddaha* literally means ‘to praise’), equivalents of the *meddah* existed for languages other than Arabic. In Berber-speaking areas, *amusnaw* (plural *imusnawen*) were wandering wise men who spread their lore and news.

⁷ ‘Rapport spécial du commissariat central de police d’Alger’, 1 May 1881.

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What's News?

CI.P5

As the brief sketch above suggests, news can circulate in a bewildering variety of forms in the same place. Yet it is all too common to conflate news with a particular medium. Many people, for instance, confuse news with newspapers. But news is, in the words of Robert Darnton, 'stories about what happened': any report of an event regardless of the medium.⁸ To be more specific, news has a temporal aspect: as the English word suggests, 'news' is new information. This temporal aspect overlaps with an emotional one: news is a kind of report that is not merely new but interesting to the audience, as in the expression 'that's news to me!' Moreover, news is not just any 'story': it is a report that is understood to be factual by its audience. As a genre, news is understood to be distinct from fiction, regardless of whether the content is accurate or not.⁹ To summarize, news is a report of a recent event deemed to be interesting and factual.

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The use of the English word 'news' is my own, as people in Algeria used a variety of words in French, Arabic, and other languages to describe the news, none of which are a perfect translation for the English 'news'. Sometimes, their concepts of news overlapped with the one outlined above. For instance, the French *nouvelle* is a close calque of the English 'news', but there were other words in French with no exact equivalent such as *actualité*. The common word in Arabic was *akhbar*, which could be better translated as 'report' and which has no particular temporal quality.¹⁰ What was considered to be interesting, factual, or recent differed widely between different audiences, and it is precisely the overlaps and distinctions between different conceptions of news that this study will probe. As the American sociologist Michael Schudson has pointed out, news is a 'historically situated category rather than a universal and timeless feature of human societies'.¹¹ Does that mean that the news can change? Or, if we refer to both the singing of a blind man and the headlines of newspapers as 'news', does that mean that there can be multiple forms of news at the same time? In summary, what is the relationship between news, time, and the historian?

⁸ Robert Darnton, 'An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review*, 105:1 (2000), 1.

⁹ Michael Schudson, *Sociology of News* (New York, 2011), xvi. Jason Hill and Vanessa Schwartz, *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News* (London, 2015), 4–5.

¹⁰ These terms will be explained further in subsequent chapters: for *akhbar*, see Chapter 3. *Actualité* has a more specific meaning than the English 'news' and usually refers to visual forms of news: see Chapter 4.

¹¹ Schudson, *Power of News*, 38.

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CI.P7 Media theorists and historians usually answer these questions only in very limited ways, as ‘news’ is primarily used in a modern context to refer to a particular development—the development of the ‘news industry’ in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century.¹² Scholarship on news is thus too often both Eurocentric and presentist, and histories of ‘the news’ are often actually histories of journalism that read our current news practices backwards.¹³ Yet the experience of receiving and sharing exciting accounts of events is not characteristic of the modern era and of this specific industry. Taking the standards of the contemporary commercialized news industry for granted does not help us critically understand what the news is.

CI.P8 By contrast, a number of historians have looked at the circulation of information from a broader perspective. Early modernists in particular have shown that only looking at printed material excludes a whole world of gossip, rumour, manuscript, and song, all of which intersected to form a single ecosystem.¹⁴ This study draws upon the methodology of these works, which have frequently made use of state surveillance archives to better understand how information moved through society. In turns, this suggests that our contemporary division between surveillance and media needs to be broken down, as these are two sides of the same coin.

CI.P9 Yet it is no coincidence that most of these histories of information deal with the early modern period. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

¹² For some notable histories of the news industry, see Andrew Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (London, 2014), Terhi Rantanen, *When News Was New* (New York, 2009), Menahem Blondheim, *News Over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), Richard John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (eds.), *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet* (Oxford, 2015), or beyond an Anglo-American context, Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, 1991).

¹³ For a critique of the centrality of the model of modern journalism, see James Carey, ‘The Problem of Journalism History’, *Journalism History*, 1:1 (1974), 3–5. John Maxwell Hamilton and Heidi Tworek, ‘The Natural History of the News: An Epigenetic Study’, *Journalism*, 18:4 (2017), 391–407.

¹⁴ Edwards et al., ‘AHR Conversations: Historical Perspectives on the Circulation of Information’, *American Historical Review*, 116:5 (2011), 1393–435. For France and the Mediterranean region, see Darnton, ‘Early Modern Information Society’ and his *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford, 2007), and John Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, 2013). For some other cases, see Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley, 2006), Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Informed Power: Communication in the Early American South* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), and Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage: The Communications Frontier in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

the explosion of news circulation through telegraphy and mass media created a proliferation of sources that makes it harder for the historian to see the whole panorama of news circulation. From the French seizure of Algiers in 1830 to the proclamation of Algerian independence in 1962, Algeria saw the introduction of the printing press, the optical and electric telegraphs, newsreels, the radio, and at the very end of the colonial period, television broadcasts. As this modern technology implies fundamentally different research methods for the researcher, it has tended to make the modern news industry look exceptional and detached from what happened before.¹⁵

CI.P10 Yet the communications revolution of the nineteenth century did not affect everyone in the same way. Far from creating an equidistant world, these technologies were linked to ideas of progress and Western superiority, and their spread created new inequalities.¹⁶ Several historians have thus pointed out that the spread of the global news system was intimately connected to the colonial expansion. However, they have tended to do so from the perspective of the empires themselves.¹⁷ On the ground, these technologies intersected with existing networks of information circulation. But in May 1881, Algiers was a city in which supposedly ‘modern’ news coexisted and interacted with ‘traditional’ networks of rumour and song. In the words of Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury on India, ‘There is little justification in calling these various channels of communication as traditional or modern. Some were older than others but not necessarily any less technologically aware or progressive in terms of communication.’¹⁸ In order to focus on this

¹⁵ Works on the eighteenth century have rightly challenged this division: see Will Slauter, ‘Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution’, *Journal of Modern History*, 81 (2009), 759–92 and Pierre Rétat (ed.), *L’Attentat de Damiens: discours sur l’événement au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1979).

¹⁶ Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (eds.), *The Globalization of News* (London, 1998). Terhi Rantanen, ‘The Globalization of Electronic News in the 19th Century’, *Media Culture Society*, 19:4 (1997), 605–20. Roland Wenzlhuemer, ‘The Dematerialization of Telecommunication: Communication Centres and Peripheries in Europe and the World, 1850–1920’, *Journal of Global History*, 2:3 (2007), 345–72.

¹⁷ Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics 1851–1945* (Oxford, 1991). James Brennan, ‘International News in the Age of Empire’, in Richard John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (eds.), *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet* (Oxford, 2015), 107–27. Simon Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System 1876–1922* (Oxford, 2003). Ana Paula Silva, ‘Shaping the Portuguese Empire in the 20th Century: The Telegraph and the Radio’, *Icon*, 7 (2001), 106–22.

¹⁸ Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, ‘Sinews of Panic and the Nerves of Empire: the Imagined State’s Entanglement with Information Panic, India c.1880–1912’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 38:4 (2004), 983.

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juxtaposition of different forms of news, I have adopted a broad view of the full news ecosystem, at the expense of detail on individual publications or media.¹⁹

CI.P11 Algeria is a particularly helpful case for this approach. Conquered in fits and starts from 1830 and recognized as a full part of French territory in 1848, Algeria was both a colony in which settlers ruled over a native majority and also an integral part of a metropolitan European state. These peculiar and confusing institutional arrangements have often led Algeria to be taken as an exceptional case. Indeed, recent scholarship has emphasized the distinctiveness of settler colonial societies more broadly, at the risk of making them look completely different from other situations across the world.²⁰ Without erasing the specificities of settler colonialism, this book examines the juxtaposition of a fully fledged European settler society with all the trappings of modernity alongside a vastly larger society with its own networks for distributing information, as a microcosm for understanding what happened to news across the world at this time.

CI.P12 If such a context has been dismissed as exceptional up to now, the challenge is less to make sense of communications theory in a colonial context and more to understand the colonial context in which communications theory emerged. It is not a coincidence that one of the foundational works in modern communications theory was the Canadian historian Harold Innis' *Empire and Communications* (1950), which came out of Innis' concern to explain the material bases of Canadian expansion across the North American continent. In turn, Innis' work was fundamental to that of another Canadian, Marshall McLuhan, possibly the most famous scholar of media in the twentieth century. As products of a European settler society themselves, both Innis and McLuhan tried to understand how European men had extended their control over much of the world at the very moment when they were worrying that this system was collapsing.²¹

¹⁹ The phrase 'news ecosystem' has come to be used recently to refer to a whole range of news producers beyond 'traditional' commercial news outlets such as newspapers. See Pew Research Center, 'How News Happens: A Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City', 11 January 2010, <http://www.journalism.org/2010/01/11/how-news-happens/>. By using it as a category of historical analysis I hope to show that the interacting multiplicity of forms of news is not a recent development.

²⁰ There has been a resurgence of interest in settler colonialism in recent years, particularly around the creation of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*. For an overview, see Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, 2010). For a more historically specific approach, see Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (eds.), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices and Legacies* (New York, 2005).

²¹ Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford, 1950). Marshall McLuhan's most explicit attempt at history is *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto,

- CI.P13 Innis and McLuhan had in common a certain technological determinism that cast the media as the secret agent of historical change. The age of the manuscript was followed by the age of print, and then radio, in a neat, linear sequence. This narrative has come under heavy criticism, and it is now well established that the appearance of new media hardly ‘replaces’ older ones, and that talk of each medium producing an ‘age’ is largely an illusion.²²
- CI.P14 One of the particular side-effects of this linear narrative is that it makes it impossible to conceptualize multiple forms of media coexisting at the same time. In the process, it reduces the kind of uneasy jumble in Algiers described above to a problem of periodization: Algerians were *still* using manuscript; they were *not yet* in the age of print. Modernization theory has often found places like Algeria confusing because it seemed like completely different stages of historical development were present at once.²³ Thus while it might seem obvious to say that Algerians both read newspapers and sung news at the same time, in fact this synchronicity has quite radical implications for how we understand the importance of media in historical change.
- CI.P15 In any given society, no individual medium is responsible for conveying all news. Though one medium may become particularly dominant at a given time, there are always a number of ways of exchanging news that interact with each other. Each of these different media is not neutral and comes loaded with a particular social value, yet the news itself circulates between them.
- CI.P16 In turn, looking at news as a social phenomenon that goes beyond a single medium exposes the flaws in another entrenched historical narrative: that changes in media were responsible for the emergence of nationalism. In *Imagined Communities* (1983), the title of which has become a catchphrase for nationalism, Benedict Anderson made the argument that the most important and widespread modern form of political organization, the nation, emerged because of ‘print-capitalism’. Print-capitalism is the process by which the printing press, starting in the sixteenth century, created unified markets

1962). For more on the racist aspects of McLuhan’s work, see Arthur Asseraf, ‘What’s So New about News?’, *Aeon*, 9 May 2017.

²² On the notion of technologies producing their own ‘age’, see Gabrielle Hecht, ‘Rupture Talk in the Nuclear Age: Conjugating Colonial Power in Africa’, *Social Studies of Science* 32:5–6 (2002), 691–728. For a critical perspective on these theories in Middle Eastern studies, see Walter Armbrust, ‘A History of New Media in the Arab Middle East’, *Journal of Cultural Research*, 16:2–3 (2012), 155–74.

²³ Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford, 2002), 9–10. For a classic modernization theory focusing on media in the Middle East, see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, 1958).

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of readers in vernacular languages for its consumption. These readers could imagine themselves being connected by the experience of reading the same text altogether at the same time.²⁴

CI.P17 Anderson himself expressed dissatisfaction with his argument about the spread of nationalism in later years, especially in his book on transnational imaginaries, *Under Three Flags*.²⁵ As he wrote in one interview, ‘I had also to take seriously the reality that very few people have ever been solely nationalist’, and thus that different imagined communities interacted, in which the nation was only one among many.²⁶ ‘Imagined communities’, after all, can refer to many other forms than the nation, some more local, some more global or religious.

CI.P18 Indeed, for all that it sounded like a radical critique of nationalism, Anderson’s thesis on media was an old one. McLuhan himself noted some twenty years before Anderson that ‘there cannot be nationalism where there has not first been an experience of vernacular in printed form.’²⁷ Going further back, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde sketched out his own understanding of print-capitalism in 1901:

CI.P19 is it not to the great progress of the periodical press that we owe the more precise and wider delimitation, the new and stronger sentiment of nationality, which politically characterizes our contemporary era? [...] We might be surprised to see that, as states intermingle and imitate each other, integrate and morally unify, the demarcation of nationalities deepens and their opposition appears irreconcilable. [...] But this result, seemingly paradoxical, is the most logical in the world. [...] Let us observe that the geographical limits of nationalities, in our time, tend to get conflated with those of the main languages. [...] The reason is that national sentiment has been revived by journalism, and that the truly efficient influence of newspapers stops at the borders of the idiom in which they are written.²⁸

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, [1983] 2006).

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination* (London, 2005).

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, ‘Frameworks of Comparison’, *London Review of Books*, 38:2 (January 2016).

²⁷ McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 261.

²⁸ ‘n’est-ce pas aux grands progrès de la presse périodique que nous devons surtout la délimitation plus nette et plus large, le sentiment nouveau et plus accusé des nationalités, qui caractérise politiquement notre époque contemporaine? [...] Observons que les limites géographiques des nationalités, à notre époque, tendent de plus en plus à se confondre avec celles des langues principales. [...] La raison en est que le sentiment national a été ravivé par le journalisme, et que le rayonnement vraiment efficace des journaux s’arrête aux frontières de l’idiome dans lequel ils sont écrits.’ Gabriel Tarde, *L’opinion et la foule* (Paris, [1901] 2012), 81–2).

CI.P20 Anderson's argument about print-capitalism generating vernacular national audiences was thus hardly novel. Rather, it has its origins in the very period that is the subject of this book, as will be examined more fully in Chapter 1.

CI.P21 What was more distinctive about Anderson's account of this shift was its emphasis on shifting concepts of time. Anderson argued that the newspaper and the novel allowed readers to imagine themselves as a simultaneous collective. Borrowing from Walter Benjamin, he suggested that the regular periodicity of the newspaper created a new 'homogenous, empty time', a secularized time fundamentally different from religious notions of time that had preceded it.²⁹

CI.P22 Scholars of the Arab world have long struggled with these two aspects: the relationship between print-capitalism and nationalism, and the shift from religious to secular time.³⁰ To put it bluntly, vernacular print-markets never developed in Arabic-speaking countries, which continued to use a formalized literary language, with little empirical evidence that nationalism displaced larger religious identities.

CI.P23 Rather than attempting to make Algeria fit into this model of print-capitalism leading to nationalism, I hope to use news as a way to describe a different shift. Following the news, by which I mean tracking what events people considered to be recent, allows for a more subtle account of changes in temporalities. Indeed, the very attempt to periodize news into eras is paradoxical. News contains its own sense of temporality which is at odds with the historian's logic. By definition, to those who experience it, news feels new. Rather than shying away from this contradiction between news and history, between periodization and the event, embracing it can help reveal some of our assumptions about the role of media in historical change.

CI.P24 Instead of a model in which new media flatten time and space to generate new communities, I suggest that in this period new forms of media piled onto existing ones, generating ever more intense and complex news—news that was electric both technologically and socially.

²⁹ The phrase is used repeatedly in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: see esp. 24–33.

³⁰ Scholarship has focused mainly on Egypt: see the debate between Charles D. Smith on the one side and Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski on the other, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29 (1997), 607–22 and 31 (1999), 81–102, and more recently Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, 2011). For an example of the limits of the usefulness of focusing only on print-capitalism in North Africa, see Jonathan Wrytzen 'Colonial State-Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43 (2011), 227–49.

Electrification, Contact, and Flow

CI.S2

CI.P25

If we return to Delignac's reports of Algiers in 1881, one form of news is entirely invisible. Just above the harbour on the seafront boulevard lay the Post Office, where the latest news from Tunis came in the form of electric signal pulsating along wires, transcribed into telegrams.³¹ Algiers was a central node of the telegraph network that connected Algeria to Tunisia, and through an underwater cable, to France. Under the strict control of the French government, telegraphy was not considered subversive and therefore did not warrant surveillance in the eyes of the police.

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Yet it is what Delignac noted the least that was probably having the most far-reaching implications in Algeria. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, news became increasingly electric. News was being conveyed, quite literally, through electromagnetic current on telegraph cables. That made it much faster and denser than before. But the news also became more electric in a more metaphorical sense: the intensification of circulation brought on by new technologies helped build a colonial society divided between 'Europeans' and 'Muslims'. As news circulation became more electric, Algerian colonial society became more polarized, generating the charged atmosphere that Delignac describes in Algiers in the spring of 1881.³²

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At the time, the relationship between the technical meaning of electricity and its social effects was often confused. People in the late nineteenth century felt like the mastery of electricity had brought them into a new age, and they described its effects using a quasi-spiritual language of secular millenarianism, a 'rhetoric of the electrical sublime' in the words of James Carey.³³ Its earliest application, the electric telegraph, was especially exciting, as messages could now be sent across the world instantaneously, disrupting space and time.

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Electricity was fascinating precisely because its underlying mechanism and effects were poorly understood. The *Litttré* (1873–7), the period's authoritative dictionary of the French language, defined *électrique* as

³¹ This was the old central post office on what is now boulevard Che Guevara, not the current more famous Grande Poste which would only be completed in 1910.

³² For a study of the implementation of electric infrastructure in a colonial context, see Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow: The Electrification of Palestine* (Stanford, 2013).

³³ James Carey, 'Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph', in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York, 1988), 160–1. David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). Alain Beltran and Patrice Carré, *La vie électrique. Histoire et imaginaire (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)* (Paris, 2016). Christophe Prochasson, *Les années électriques 1880–1910* (Paris, 1991).

‘electric force: the unknown cause of the phenomena of electricity’ (*force électrique: la cause inconnue des phénomènes de l’électricité*). The word *électrique* could refer both to the physical phenomenon of electromagnetic current and also, by analogy, to the effects of certain stimuli on people: a common figure of speech in French was that news could ‘produce the effect of an electric shock’ (*produire l’effet d’un choc électrique*). It was widely acknowledged that electric current played a crucial but elusive role in the human nervous system, so conceptualizations of the human body and of the telegraphic network mutually influenced each other. In the emerging discipline of social psychology, the telegraph was often understood as the nervous system of modern society, sending the electric stimulus of news that would then cause excited reactions from the crowd. More than a metaphor, this was a shared imaginary of the body and body-politic held together by wires transmitting signals.³⁴

CI.P29 While electricity was commonly used by people at the turn of the twentieth century to describe the changes occurring around them, describing news as ‘electric’ in colonial Algeria has its own distinct valence for the historian of the early twenty-first century. What I wish to suggest is that the effects of this new technology cannot be understood without taking into account how it inserted itself within wider social structures that made up the news ecosystem. It is this unstable interaction that I call electric.

CI.P30 Electricity is a powerful, modern, and invisible energy. It is fundamentally ambivalent—connective, yet dangerous. This ambivalence is richly suggestive of the nature of social contact in colonial societies. Historians of colonialism, and in particular Algeria, have puzzled over the degree of ‘contact’ across the divides of colonial society.³⁵ In this investigation, there is often an implicit assumption that contact is the opposite of violence. Yet violence is in itself a form of contact. When it comes to electricity, ‘contact’ with high voltage can lead to physical injury or death.

³⁴ One famous contemporary source is Gustave Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules* (Paris, 1895). This shared imaginary of the telegraph as nervous system had a long afterlife, as in 1964 McLuhan would write in *Understanding Media*, ‘The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world; 4. More broadly, see Iwan Morus, ‘“The Nervous System of Britain”: Space, Time, and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 33 (2000), 455–75, Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, and Carey, ‘Technology and Ideology’.

³⁵ See the special issue of *Le Mouvement social* on the ‘monde du contact’ in colonial Algeria, eds. Emmanuel Blanchard and Sylvie Thénault, 236:3 (2011), and Jan C. Jansen, ‘Celebrating the “Nation” in a Colonial Context: “Bastille Day” and the Contested Public Space in Algeria, 1880–1939’, *Journal of Modern History*, 85:1 (2013), 36–68.

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CI.P31 The language of electric current also allows us to reconcile a conceptual tension between ‘flows’ and ‘friction’. ‘Flows’ have become a highly popular but often ill-defined concept among global historians. ‘Flows’ suggest a kind of flat landscape, in which the pursuit of the historian is to draw exciting lines across a map through a series of exotic locales from Buenos Aires to Bombay. Yet, as one of the pioneers of global history Christopher Bayly warned, ‘one problem with a history which charts global interconnections [...] is that it may find it difficult to deal with power’.³⁶ States and other powers block, control, and manage circulation as much as they facilitate it. Critics like Anna Tsing have suggested that globalization produces friction rather than smooth flows.³⁷

CI.P32 Here, too, electricity provides a helpful language: electric force connects through polarization, suggesting that long-distance flows rely on local tension. Describing social relations in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Algeria as ‘electric’ can thus help reconceptualize the internal and external relations of colonial society, and to take a fresh look at notions of ‘contact’ and ‘flow’, two major but often unacknowledged metaphors in recent historiography.

CI.P33 By colonial society, I mean the totality of inhabitants of Algerian territory, whether they were described as ‘settlers’ or ‘natives’. It is surprisingly difficult to write about all Algerians with the same analytical gaze. Studying the ‘colonial situation’ in Algeria, to use George Balandier’s 1951 expression, involves putting together two very different bodies of sources, chronologies, and questions used to study two populations.³⁸ As such, the problem is frequently one of optics: when one zooms in to understand the subtleties of settler society, the majority of Algerians recede in a blurry background, while the opposite is also true. Holding the two in sharp focus is a tricky act that can also run the risk of creating a false sense of balance between the two, overlooking hegemonic power relations.³⁹

³⁶ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), 475.

³⁷ For the most influential anthropological works, see on ‘flows’, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996) and on ‘friction’, Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, 2005). A useful critique of tracing ‘flows’ in Middle Eastern history is Aaron Jakes, ‘A New Materialism? Globalization and Technology in the Age of Empire’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47 (2015), 369–81.

³⁸ Georges Balandier, ‘La situation coloniale: approche théorique’, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 11 (1951), 44–79. Gregory Mann, ‘Anti-Colonialism and Social Science: Georges Balandier, Madeira Keita, and the “Colonial Situation” in French Africa’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55:1 (2013), 92–119.

³⁹ This study does not attempt to write a kind of ‘symmetrical’ history giving both sides equal weight, which can reinforce an impression of separate sides. For a methodological

CI.P34 Earlier scholarship on Algeria only dealt with either the European or the Muslim perspective. At best, like Charles-Robert Ageron's still classic *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine* (1979), historians separated developments in the European and Muslim spheres in entirely different chapters. More recent work has attempted to show the extent and limits of interactions, for instance in terms of shared political practices.⁴⁰ Some of the most effective attempts to do this have been at the microhistorical level, especially in the work of Fanny Colonna, which shows the subtleties of everyday social interactions between people who knew each other well but were nonetheless split apart by huge structural forces. Tellingly, Colonna described her characters as *électrons libres*, rogue particles bouncing in the charged fields of colonial power relations.⁴¹

CI.P35 Scholars of North Africa have paid relatively little attention to information circulation. Notable exceptions include Julia Clancy-Smith's study of the Algerian–Tunisian borderland in the nineteenth century, *Rebel and Saint*, and Omar Carlier's history of the *café maure*. Pieced together, studies on infrastructure, forms of political sociability, and political scandal offer fragmentary insights into different aspects of the information ecosystem.⁴²

defence of this approach in the different context of early modern Indonesia, see Romain Bertrand, *L'Histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe–XVIIe siècle)* (Paris, 2011).

⁴⁰ Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine vol. 2* (Paris, 1979). For more recent general histories of Algeria in the colonial period, see in English, James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge, 2017) and in French, Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale* (Paris/Algiers, 2012). For social histories that feature a range of actors in colonial Algeria, see Christelle Teraud, *La prostitution coloniale. Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc (1830–1962)* (Paris, 2003), Hannah-Louise Clark, 'Doctoring the Bled: Medical Auxiliaries and the Administration of Rural Life in Colonial Algeria, 1904–54', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2014, and Jan Jansen, 'Celebrating the "Nation" in a Colonial Context: "Bastille Day" and the Contested Public Space in Algeria, 1880–1939', *Journal of Modern History*, 85:1 (2013), 36–68.

⁴¹ Fanny Colonna, *Le Meunier, les moines et le bandit. Des vies quotidiennes dans l'Aurès (Algérie) du XXe siècle* (Paris, 2010) and *La Vie Ailleurs. Des "Arabes" en Corse à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2015). For other microhistories, see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c.1800–1900* (Berkeley, 2012). Edmund Burke III, 'The Mediterranean before Colonialism: Fragments from the Life of 'Ali bin 'Uthman al-Hammi in the 18th and 19th Centuries', in Julia Clancy-Smith (ed.), *North Africa, Islam and the Mediterranean World* (London, 2001), 129–43. Jessica Marglin, 'Mediterranean Modernity through Jewish Eyes: The Transimperial Life of Abraham Ankawa', *Jewish Social Studies*, 20:2 (2014), 34–68.

⁴² Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley, 1994) covers a wide range of information circulation. Omar Carlier, 'Le café maure. Sociabilité masculine et effervescence citoyenne (Algérie XVIIe–XXe siècles)', *Annales*, 45:4 (1990), 975–1003. Annick Lacroix's recent thesis on the postal system provides a comprehensive examination of the development of communications infrastructure within Algeria: see 'Une histoire sociale et spatiale de l'Etat dans l'Algérie colonisée. L'administration des postes, télégraphes et téléphones du milieu du XIXe siècle à la Seconde

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Based on these works, my own strategy is to follow the news as a heuristic device to see exactly what moved across different communities in Algeria and what did not. This approach requires great care in designating different populations.

CI.S3

A Divided Society

CI.P36

Observing the population of Algiers in 1881, Delignac's reports had special categories for the surveillance of 'Muslims' and 'Italians'. Under colonial rule, the law recognized different categories of people in Algeria. The first were French citizens. These were either people born in metropolitan France, Europeans who had acquired French citizenship in Algeria, or Algerian Jews. There were also European foreigners (*étrangers*), most frequently Spanish, Italian or Maltese, who were not citizens but enjoyed certain privileges like diplomatic protection from their home government. From the turn of the twentieth century onwards they tended to acquire French citizenship, thus forming an increasingly uniform 'European' community.⁴³

CI.P37

Facing this European minority of citizens and foreigners, which formed 10–15 per cent of the total population throughout the period of this study, was a majority of people variously referred to as *indigènes* (natives), *musulmans* (Muslims) or *sujets* (subjects)—that is, people who did not enjoy the privileges of French citizenship. It is important to note that 'Muslim' in Algeria is a technical term that does not necessarily mean that a person actively practised Islam. Rather, as Laure Blévis has shown, 'Muslim' was a racial category: for instance, legal 'Muslims' could convert to Catholicism but they would still not enjoy the privileges of citizenship.⁴⁴ Finally, Algerian

Guerre Mondiale', Thèse de Doctorat, ENS Cachan, 2014. Didier Guignard, *L'abus de pouvoir dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Nanterre, 2010) provides a subtle account of information circulation between Algeria and metropole at the turn of the twentieth century. Scholarship on journalism will be addressed in Chapter 1.

⁴³ On Europeans, see David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870–1920* (Cambridge, 1990) and more recently Hugo Vermeren, 'Des "hermaphrodites de nationalité"? Colonisation maritime en Algérie et naturalisation des marins-pêcheurs italiens de Bône (Annaba) des années 1860 à 1914', *REMM*, 137 (2015), 135–54.

⁴⁴ Kamel Kateb, *Européens, "indigènes" et juifs en Algérie (1830–1962)* (Paris, 2001). Laure Blévis, 'La citoyenneté française au miroir de la colonisation: étude des demandes de naturalisation des "sujets français" en Algérie coloniale', *Genèses*, 53 (2003), 25–47. Alexis Spire, 'Semblables et pourtant différents. La citoyenneté paradoxale des "Français musulmans d'Algérie" en métropole', *Genèses*, 53 (2003), 48–68. Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London/New York, 1995). Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*.

Jews, though recognized as ‘native’ (*indigène*), were granted French citizenship in 1870. In the period of this study, they were in legal terms a peculiar subset of French citizens with strong social and cultural links to their Muslim neighbours.⁴⁵

CI.P38 There is no consensus among scholars about how to name different populations in Algeria. Some of the categories used at the time, like *indigène* (native), are still offensive. Others, like *algérien* (Algerian), changed meaning across the period studied: in the late nineteenth century, an ‘Algerian’ was a European settler (along the model of ‘American’ and ‘Australian’), while by the mid-twentieth century the term usually meant a Muslim, making it difficult to use the same words as the sources. In this book, I use the term ‘Algerian’ to refer to all people living on Algerian territory, regardless of their legal status. ‘European’ refers to a person of French, Spanish, Italian or other European descent who came to live in Algeria under colonial rule. ‘Muslim’ refers to the majority-colonized population because this term was used consistently throughout this period for self-description, a point to which I will return in Chapter 2. At times, people will specifically be referred to as citizens and subjects when emphasizing differential access to civil rights, and I have also used occasionally the language of ‘settler’ and ‘native’ (*colon/indigène*) to emphasize this dynamic when paraphrasing texts which employ this world view.⁴⁶

CI.P39 If ever there was a time when this binary division of the world was normalized, it was in the electric years between 1881 and 1940.⁴⁷ This was the period when colonialism was meant to ‘work’ in Algeria. Before that, the conquest of Algeria had been a chaotic process, unfolding from 1830 until at least 1857 in the north. Overt warfare was followed by a series of insurrections and administrative changes that reflected great French uncertainty

⁴⁵ On the earlier phase of colonial rule before Jews became French citizens, see Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, 2010). Jews living in the southern territories of the Mzab remained legally ‘natives’ and did not acquire French citizenship until the 1960s: see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago, 2014).

⁴⁶ Use of such terms, of course, does not imply their endorsement—in other historiographies, like the historiography of South Africa, scholars use colonial- and apartheid-era categories like ‘black’, ‘African’, and ‘coloured’, their use only acknowledging that these categories had legal and social meaning.

⁴⁷ For the use of ‘normalization’ in the context of New Caledonia, see Isabelle Merle, ‘De la “légalisation” de la violence en contexte colonial. Le régime de l’indigénat en question’, *Politix*, 17:66 (2004), 137–62. On the 1880s as a shift to a more routine form of violence, see Sylvie Thénault, *Violence ordinaire dans l’Algérie coloniale. Camps, Internements, Assignations à résidence* (Paris, 2012). Another important study of the normality and excess of colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century is Guignard, *Labus de pouvoir dans l’Algérie coloniale*.

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about the territory. It was only in the early 1880s that, following a major insurrection in most of eastern Algeria in 1871, the French Third Republic stabilized as a regime and imposed an administration of the colony that would prove durable until the Second World War.

CI.P40 In this period, Algeria was divided into three *départements* (Oran in the west, Algiers in the centre, and Constantine in the east) and the Southern Territories of the Sahara under military administration. All of these were overseen by a governor-general resident in Algiers who was directly appointed by Paris, while the minority of male French citizens voted to send representatives to the French Parliament.

CI.P41 Normalization effectively meant division. The Republic employed as a method of government a rigid distinction between citizens who shared in this rule and subjects who could only endure it. As civil rights expanded to include the entire male European population, the contrast with the colonized populations only became sharper.⁴⁸ In 1881, the French Parliament passed two iconic laws that solidified the Republican-colonial regime in Algeria: together they give their starting date to this study. First, the law on the *indigénat* durably placed Algerian Muslims outside the regime of Republican law, allowing them to be ruled under a state of permanent exception which severely restricted their liberties, one of which was freedom of expression. Second, the law on freedom of the press, still enforced in France today, created one of the most liberal regimes for those who enjoyed French citizenship. Both the *indigénat* and the *liberté de la presse*, whose interaction will be explored more fully in Chapter 1, were symbolic of a settler colonial Republic which increasingly tied French citizens in Algeria to the metropolitan fold while aggressively rejecting Algerian Muslims and all the natives of the Empire to a pale beyond the rule of law. Here as elsewhere, metropolitan citizenship and colonial repression emerged conjointly: the more inclusive the Republic became towards its citizens, the more formidable its powers of containment became towards its subjects.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ On the transformation of metropolitan peasants under the Third Republic, see the classic Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (London, 1979), and the more recent Chloé Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens. Les républicains français face au bonapartisme rural (1848–1880)* (Paris, 2010). On the 1880s as a turning-point in Algeria, see Sylvie Thénault, in Bouchène et al. (eds.), *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale* (Paris/Algiers, 2012), 159–60.

⁴⁹ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997). For some particularly salient examples of this in the French context, see Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago, 2012) and Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006).

CI.P42 French Algeria was not wholly peaceful after 1881. Conquest continued in the south and parts of the Saharan desert would only come under French control during the First World War, and even then only tenuously.⁵⁰ In the north, periodic and localized bouts of violence erupted, like the events of Margueritte in 1901 or the insurrections of the Beni Chougran and the Aurès, all of which will be dealt with in greater detail in later chapters. The First World War in particular marked an important caesura of mass military mobilization and suspension of civil liberties even for Europeans.

CI.P43 By the interwar period, this surprisingly durable system started to look more uncertain. The whole period from 1936 onwards is best seen as a gradual collapse of a certain Republican colonial model which had been stabilized in the 1880s. Political agitation and diplomatic tension in the long build-up to the Second World War saw many of the laws characteristic of the unequal liberties of the Third Republic gradually suspended in 1938–9.⁵¹ Finally, in 1940, the Republican regime itself collapsed under German invasion, ushering in a brief period of Vichy rule. In 1942, Algeria was invaded by Anglo-American forces, ending a century of nearly unquestioned French military dominance over that territory. While French rule was never formally challenged throughout the Second World War, it opened up a period of high turbulence, starting in 1945 with massacres at Sétif and Guelma and culminating in the outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence in 1954, which would result in the end of French colonial rule and the mass departure of the Jewish and European population in 1962.

CI.P44 Before independence was on the horizon, in the years of violent normality between the 1880s and 1930s, on the surface Algeria looked much quieter than its neighbours. The invasion of Tunisia in 1881 was the beginning of a phase of imperialistic frenzy in late-nineteenth-century France. In the next few years, a generalized European scramble would claim the rest of North, West and Central Africa and the Middle East. All of these developments were closely watched in the ‘old’, officially pacified colony of Algeria. This made news of troubles elsewhere especially sensitive, which is why Delignac was so concerned about news from Tunis in 1881.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York, 2009).

⁵¹ On this joint European and colonial crisis in the late 1930s, see Martin Thomas, ‘European Crisis, Colonial Crisis? Signs of Fracture in the French Empire from Munich to the Outbreak of the War’, *International History Review*, 32:3 (2010), 389–413.

Distance and Scales

CI.S4

CI.P45

The reports around the invasion of Tunisia in 1881 produced by Delignac are completely banal. They are part of an extensive genre of administrative report which produced boxes upon boxes of files attempting to track what they call the *répercussions des nouvelles sur l'état d'esprit*, the repercussions of news on the state of mind. This was a longstanding practice to assess public opinion, and while the language underwent some slight changes, the underlying concern remained remarkably stable.⁵²

CI.P46

These reports usually focused on news of events abroad. Despite periodic disturbances, authorities generally believed that the biggest threat to public peace was the influence of outside events rather than disturbances within Algeria. News thus had the subversive potential to connect a tightly policed colony under seemingly firm French control to zones of instability abroad. The reports suggest an official anxiety about the power of news to move between different scales. The concern of these reports is about metamorphosis: something explicitly defined as *elsewhere* might become a problem *here*. The big, macro, distant event could, through some mysterious process, come to affect the most intimate thoughts of Algerians, their very states of mind, their *états d'esprit*.

CI.P47

News can help us approach the problem of scale through a more critical lens instead of taking local, national, or global scales for granted.⁵³ Much of the scholarship in media studies takes the centrality of the nation state for granted. Thus, classic studies on news circulation take 'foreign' and 'domestic' events as self-evident categories.⁵⁴ In colonial Algeria, what was 'domestic' and 'foreign' depended entirely on one's perspective. For Europeans in

⁵² On the phrase 'état d'esprit' and French administrative practices of reporting on opinion in the nineteenth century, see Pierre Karila-Cohen, *L'Etat des esprits. L'invention de l'enquête politique en France (1814–1848)* (Rennes, 2008) and François Ploux, *De bouche à oreille. Naissance et propagation des rumeurs dans la France du XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2003). For the eighteenth century, see Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in 18th Century France* (Philadelphia, 1995).

⁵³ On the uses of 'scale' in history, see Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles: la micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996), and for an English summary, Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, 'Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History', *International History Review*, 33:4 (2011), 573–84.

⁵⁴ The classic and still often-cited study is Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, 'The Structure of Foreign News', *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:1 (1965), 64–91. For studies building on Galtung and Ruge, see for instance Sophia Peterson, 'International News Selection by the Elite Press: A Case Study', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45:2 (1981), 145–63 and more recently Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill, 'What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited', *Journalism Studies*, 2:2 (2001), 261–80.

Algeria, events in Paris were domestic news, and news coverage primarily reflected French metropolitan and European diplomatic politics, while completely ignoring any incidents that affected Muslims living in the same city. By contrast, many Muslims in Algeria found local political struggles between Frenchmen in their own city to be irrelevant, whilst reports of developments in Cairo or Istanbul seemed very close.

CI.P48 To highlight this dynamic between news and distance, this book focuses on news of events external to Algeria and their differential importation within colonial society. This work has benefited from and aims to participate in an increasingly rich body of scholarship in French and in English that re-inscribes Algerian history in its wider Maghrebi, Mediterranean, African, Islamic, as well as French imperial contexts.⁵⁵ Traditionally, the historiography on Algeria focused on events in metropolitan France, obscuring Algerians' links with other places. To take up James McDougall's critique, the history of colonial Algeria is 'primarily French history, and then the history of France-and-Algeria'.⁵⁶ While colonial historiography emphasized Algeria's ties to France, Algerian nationalist historiography reversed this by insisting on Algeria's Arab identity and its connections to the Middle East. These two mirror images, by assuming that Algeria was always already fundamentally French or Arab, tended to diminish the politics involved in making it one or the other. Yet in the words of Fredrick Cooper,

CI.P49 historical analysis does not present a contrast between a past of territorial boundedness and a present of interconnection and fragmentation, but rather a back-and-forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies [...] To study colonization is to study the reorganization of space, the forging and unforaging of linkages.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Bouchène et al., *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*. On the issue of Algeria in its wider contexts more specifically, see the special issue 'Désenclaver l'histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale', eds. Hélène Blais, Claire Fredj, and Sylvie Thénault, in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 63:2 (2016). On Algeria and the Middle East, see James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge, 2006) and Augustin Jomier, 'Un réformisme islamique dans l'Algérie coloniale. Oulémas ibadites et société du Mزاب (c.1880–c.1970)', doctoral thesis, Université du Maine, 2015. For Algeria in the wider history of the French Empire, see David Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870', *Past and Present*, 210 (2011), 155–86. On the African dimension, see James McDougall and Judith Scheele (eds.), *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (Bloomington, 2012) and Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁵⁶ James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge, 2006), 31.

⁵⁷ Fredrick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, (Berkeley, 2005), 92, 105.

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CI.P50 Colonialism did not close Algeria off from the world or open it up, but generated a particular geography.

CI.P51 The ‘Algeria’ described in these pages is the territorially bounded colonial state which gives this study its location. At the heart of this book is a tension between this state’s attempts to control mobility and its inhabitants’ persistent tendencies to locate themselves according to completely different geographies. News is one way to understand the geography of living in a colonial society. Rather than an international history focusing on diplomatic relations between states or a global history tracking material flows of goods or people, this is a history that looks at how people in the past understood the world they lived in.⁵⁸ News deals with events that are unknown to the audience yet relevant to them. An event directly witnessed does not need to be reported at all, but conversely a report of an event far away which the audience cannot relate to is of little interest. The events described must thus be far, but not too far. Sharing news helped people locate what was close and what was far. The vast majority of people in colonial Algeria never physically migrated beyond its borders, but their understanding of the world was transformed through exposure to new forms of news.

CI.P52 At its core, news is a way of managing the distinction between the internal and the external. In colonial Algeria as in many other places, news was deeply gendered. The relationship between news and distance extended well beyond the distinction between the national and the international and reached deep into the domestic sphere. In the legitimate ordering of society, it was men who went out into the world and sought its news, while women stayed at home.⁵⁹ The domestic space was gendered female, while men went outside and encountered foreigners and heard their tales. Spaces of sociability, like the café, were closed off to women, and news often came indirectly

⁵⁸ This kind of work has been particularly important in the study of early modern globalization: see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Delhi, 2004), Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d’une mondialisation* (Paris, 2004), and *What Time Is It There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (Cambridge, 2010). For a case focusing specifically on the Islamic world, see Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford, 2010).

⁵⁹ On the gendering of the inside/outside divide, see Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine* (Paris, 1998). Though Bourdieu’s work was based on an ethnographic study in Algeria that he conducted in the 1960s, I read it here for its theoretical value rather than as a description of Algerian society. For more on gender in colonial Algerian society, see Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York, 1994); Feriel Lalami, ‘L’enjeu du statut des femmes durant la période coloniale en Algérie’, *Nouvelles Questions féministes*, 27:3 (2008), 16–27; Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*; Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*; and Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman’s Imperial Story: Madame Luce in Nineteenth-Century Algeria* (Stanford, 2013).

through husbands and male relatives. Women were particularly associated with gossip or personalized forms of information, while ‘hard’ news about politics was associated with men. This gender divide applied across colonial society, whether European, Muslim, or Jewish. This is not to say that women had no access to news, but that they were not seen to have any.

CI.P53 State authorities participated in the patriarchal order and ruled through men. Their obsession with monitoring Algerian contact in the international sphere contrasts with their utter disinterest in the circulation of information within the domestic sphere. Authorities feared women’s contact with the outside so little that Muslim women did not even need passports, as it was assumed that they would only move under the authority of a male passport-bearer.⁶⁰ This means that the roles of women within the news ecosystem were rendered largely invisible by state surveillance, except in times of crisis. In turn, this suggests that the state’s concerns participated in shaping what was newsworthy and what was not.

CI.S5

Thinking with a State

CI.P54 Delignac was not an especially accurate observer. In fact, we know that he was poorly regarded as a policeman because a few months earlier, during an investigation on certain subversive foreign Muslims in Algiers, his superior had entirely bypassed him, for ‘he possesses none of the necessary qualities to direct a secret mission where one must bring discrete zeal and a sense of initiative, which I have never met in Mr. Delignac.’⁶¹ The concern was that by being indiscreet, Delignac could end up spreading news to an audience of watchful Muslims that something was afoot, rather than intercepting it. Delignac was not an observer of Algerian news; rather, he was a part of it.

CI.P55 This book aims to rectify some of the ways in which we have understood the relationship between the colonial state and society. Several works have focused on the relationship between empire and information, pointing out that effective surveillance, or the maximal retention of information with minimal leakage, was a key aspect of colonial rule. As Christopher Bayly pointed out in his study of British India, colonial rule could survive only if it

⁶⁰ Jules Cambon, *Instruction sur la surveillance politique et administrative des indigènes algériens et des musulmans étrangers* (Algiers, 1895).

⁶¹ Préfet of Algiers to GGA, 17 January 1881, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

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could keep track of local information networks.⁶² Similarly, in North Africa, Julia Clancy-Smith's *Rebel and Saint* described information as a 'commodity to be fought over and negotiated over' in the French takeover of the Algerian–Tunisian border region, and Martin Thomas indexed the stability of colonial rule in the interwar period to the accuracy of intelligence practices.⁶³ Yet in these works, there is sometimes a danger of making information a mere arena for the projection of external power-relations with no explanatory power or causal force of its own.

CI.P56 Colonial authorities themselves tended to conceptualize information as a weapon to be deployed instrumentally in the service of other struggles. Back in 1881, Delignac frequently did this by equating contraband news with smuggled gunpowder, both just as likely to detonate volatile social situation.⁶⁴ This is only one of several different ways of conceptualizing information, and one that we need not necessarily adopt ourselves. Looking at information in a colonial context does not mean reducing it to a story of control and resistance towards French power.

CI.P57 For this reason, this is not a history of French intelligence in Algeria; rather, it is a history that uses the surveillance archive as a launching pad into a broader world of news. Following on from Ann Laura Stoler's work on the Dutch East Indies, I see archives as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed or biased sources'.⁶⁵ In and of themselves, surveillance reports are evidence for a certain official understanding of how news worked which will be elaborated upon in the following chapters. Even if they mainly described how news *should* work rather than how it worked in practice, they reveal normative, prescriptive conceptions of news which had their own effects on social relations.

⁶² Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996). On India, see also Deep Kanta Lahiri-Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire 1830–1920* (Basingstoke, 2010) and Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India c.1830–1900* (Oxford, 2016).

⁶³ Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint*. Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley, 2008). For other cases in the French Empire, see Kathleen A. Keller, 'Colonial Suspects: Suspicious Persons and Police Surveillance in French West Africa, 1914–1945', PhD thesis, Rutgers University, 2007.

⁶⁴ 'Rapport spécial du commissariat central de police d'Alger', 4 May 1881, ANOM/GGA/1H84.

⁶⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 20. By contrast, see James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990) and Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC, 1999).

CI.P58 Surveillance reports are also interesting because they contain a wealth of information on a cross-section of people living in Algeria. Surveillance archives contain documents that are not produced by the administration itself, haphazardly capturing bits of paper produced by a number of actors: manuscripts, private letters, and newspaper clippings. Hidden within the French colonial archive lies a wealth of popular poetry and intellectual production in Arabic.

CI.P59 Moreover, the surveillance archive is one way to work through a fundamental difficulty of working on news, which is that most of it is by definition ephemeral and shared through media that are difficult for the historian to recover. This applies to oral forms of news like rumours, songs, and radio broadcasts which were rarely recorded during this period, and to early newsreels which have not always been preserved. Even written news was not meant to last. The most haunting example of this is telegrams. In archival boxes lie thousands of small translucent sheets of paper on which incoming telegrams were recorded. The ink on them is either faded, rendering them illegible, or worse, its acidity has eaten through the thin paper, so they crumble in the fingers of the researcher trying to grasp the past. Frustrating though this may be, this material perishability is an index of the transient quality that makes news distinctive.

CI.P60 Focusing on the state archive is but one of many possible approaches to studying news, and one that comes with certain costs. As the state only got involved when an unusual disturbance occurred, it privileges the exceptional incident rather than routine practices of news, and it may also overestimate the importance of news in people's daily lives. Yet police surveillance and the writing of reports was also part of daily life, and men like Delignac were not isolated from the wider circulation of news in society. As we will see in later chapters, policemen read newspapers and worried about current events, which affected their policing. Conversely, many Algerians were aware that they were under surveillance and that certain forms of news were more sensitive than others.

CI.P61 I have relied on two archival collections that provide relatively continuous accounts throughout the sixty years of the period studied. The first are the surveillance reports from the archives of the Bureau des Affaires Indigènes, the Native Affairs Bureau of the Government-General of Algeria (GGA) in Algiers. Though the Affaires Indigènes series theoretically only deals with Muslims, it in fact contains a great deal of accidental information on Europeans and Jews as well. Other collections, such as the Fonds Ministériel (correspondence between the governor-general in Algiers and

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his superiors in the Ministry of Interior in Paris) for the 1880s and 1890s, or the governor-general's cabinet for the 1930s, allowed for a wider view of developments involving Europeans.⁶⁶ As all documents removed from Algeria at independence in 1962 were placed together in the ANOM in Aix-en-Provence, it has also been possible to delve deeper into local levels of administration, down to the *préfecture*, *sous-préfecture* or commune.

CI.P62 The other main element is correspondence between the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GGA, housed in the diplomatic archives of La Courneuve. The GGA reported back to the Interior Ministry, but diplomatic officials corresponded with their counterparts in Algiers regularly to keep track of how diplomatic tensions might affect Algeria and also how Algerians living abroad might affect France's diplomatic relations. An extremely rich source for Algerian connections with the outside world and the French state's attempt to manage them, this correspondence has been little used by historians. Other archives I have used more sporadically are the Algerian National Archive in Algiers, the archives of the *wilayat* of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, the National Archives of Tunisia, the Service Historique de la Défense in Vincennes, Italian diplomatic archives at the Farnesina and private archives, especially those of the amateur ethnographer Joseph Desparmet at the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme.

CI.P63 Newspapers, paradoxically, are difficult sources to use for a history of news. The volume of newspapers read in Algeria over a sixty-year period, which includes those printed locally as well as newspapers printed in France and throughout the Mediterranean, is far too abundant to be read in its entirety. Moreover, different publications often carried the same news. I have consulted newspapers in the French and Algerian National Libraries as well as in local *wilaya* archives in Algeria, with an eye to form, to see how individual publications were constructed and their broad coverage. Overall, I have privileged the exceptional incident rather than routine practices, not just because crises are more easily trackable in state archives but also because it

⁶⁶ Sources at either end of the period are richer than in the middle, as there is a significant gap in coverage between c.1907 and c.1930. The archives of the Fonds Ministériel in the Interior Ministry between 1907 and 1945 disappeared during the Second World War. For the 1930s, these are complemented by the cabinet files of governor-generals. Governor-generals before Jules Carde (1930–5) and Georges Le Beau (1935–40) appear, like many other Third Republic civil servants, to have taken their papers with them when they left office.

is in moments of tension that the involvement of the widest possible range of actors becomes visible.

CI.P64 In order to examine the full range of interactions across colonial society, I have attempted as much as possible to cover the full linguistic spectrum. This includes the two main written languages, French and formal Arabic (*fusha*), as well as more sporadic publications in Spanish and Italian. The languages that most Algerians spoke, by contrast, were rarely written down, whether the Algerian dialect of Arabic (*darija*) or one of several Berber languages (*Tamazight*). Whenever possible, I have made use of the few documents recorded in those primarily spoken languages as well, drawing on the generous expertise of others when necessary.

CI.P65 The story begins with the development of the newspaper in Algeria, starting with the French conquest of 1830. The printing press was intimately connected to the belief in the superiority of colonial rule. While the French believed that the power of the press could modernize Algeria, the newspaper as an object had a much messier life. Focusing on the iconic 1881 law on the freedom of the press and its application in Algeria, Chapter 1 shows the gap between beliefs about media and their actual role in the circulation of news.

CI.P66 What were some of the unexpected consequences of new forms of media? Chapter 2 delves into this question in more detail by looking at the extension of the telegraphic network in Algeria and its role in transforming geographies of news. Zooming into the case study of a particular village, it examines how the telegraph helped Muslims in Algeria connect to other Muslims across the world while distancing them from their European neighbours at the turn of the twentieth century.

CI.P67 While Chapter 2 focuses on space, Chapter 3 delves into the relationship between news and time. Focusing on a single event, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 in western Algeria, it looks at a wide range of news in manuscript, rumours, and song. By comparing the different temporalities they carried, it asks what might have constituted a shared 'event' in a divided society. This in turn raises questions about the relationship between news and history.

CI.P68 If news is intimately connected to notions of time, how can we describe its change? Chapter 4 takes the story forward into the interwar period by tracing the development of news on the radio and in the cinemas, and how they interacted with the formation of a mass political culture, looking in particular at the role of news of the Spanish Civil War.

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CI.P69 Continuing this analysis of how news can build political communities, Chapter 5 looks at how news of events in Libya (1911–19) and then Palestine (1929–39) became a space to debate colonialism in Algeria. It shows how uncertainty about the meaning of distant events helped forge the boundaries of an Algerian national community. Finally, the epilogue brings the preceding chapters together by briefly opening the story onto the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) and beyond to wonder when, if ever, the news stopped being electric.