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Samuel Kalman. *French Colonial Fascism: The Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919-1939*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. ix + 286 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-137-30708-8.

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References to *L'Algérie française* may strike a somber or even nostalgic note in France today. The phrase simultaneously evokes lost imperial grandeur, the tragedy of civil war and the afflicted legacy associated with Europe's once valorized "civilizing" mission in the world. These themes are muted in Samuel Kalman's latest book, *French Colonial Fascism*, which explores the relationship between the Algerian settler community and right-wing politics in the interwar period. Expanding upon Elizabeth Ezra's "Algerian syndrome" thesis, Kalman seeks to draw attention to the violence and "sordid aspects" often obscured in collective memories and accounts of France's imperial past in North Africa (p. 1). His study insists that European *colon* settlers endorsed a specific brand of extremism that at once rejected republican values and nurtured deeply-held xenophobic and authoritarian attitudes particular to Algerian society. Underpinning this claim is the sustained argument that "colonial fascism" constituted a different animal than its metropolitan variants and ultimately expressed settler desires for independence and a society built upon racial inequality.

As Kalman indicates in his first chapter, *colon* discontent with the metropolitan government was on the rise by the 1920s. The Jonnart law of 1919 that expanded the Algerian electorate in the wake of the First World War set the tone for this troubled relationship. Although falling far short of its initial promise, the legislation hinted at the possibility of broader colonial reforms to come and a willingness on the part of metropolitan officials to cater to Algeria's sizeable Muslim majority. European settlers met these initiatives with hostility, prompting a turn away from French parliamentary democracy and the strident defense of an idealized *Algérie française* imperiled by metropolitan neglect and concessions. The French extreme right was not blind to the contentions simmering in Algeria during the early 1920s, and leading organizations such as the Action française and Jeunesse patriotes initially sought to capitalize on settler discontent in an effort to extend their influence across the Mediterranean.

Yet, as Kalman argues, metropolitan groups continually proved unable to make significant gains in the colony or consolidate strong bases of support among the European population. Time and time again, the leadership relied upon metropolitan notions of empire and the civilizing mission or prioritized French social and economic concerns, believing them consistent with *colon* interests. Such platforms failed, however, to strike a chord with right-wing Algerian radicals. This divide became particularly conspicuous during the late 1930s when metropolitan right-wing groups like the *Partie populaire française* attempted to tone down its anti-Semitic rhetoric and court French labor, driving a deeper wedge between *colon* organizations and their metropolitan counterparts. Kalman's study highlights the persistent failure of the metropolitan extreme right to speak directly to settler interest and define a platform capable of spanning metropole and colony during the interwar period. As a result, settlers found themselves pressed between a metropolitan bureaucracy and colonial administration inclined

toward reform on one hand, and an extreme right reluctant to champion policies sensitive to Algeria's unique concerns on the other.

It is in this milieu, Kalman asserts, that an explicit brand of colonial fascism emerged. During the 1920s, the prominent *Oranais* politician, Jules Molle, mounted a homegrown movement under the banner of the Unions latines that successfully harnessed fascist themes and applied them within an Algerian context. While a virulent anti-Semitism provided the vehicle for rallying supporters and uniting Oran's diverse *colon* electorate, Molle and his cohorts pressed settler xenophobia into the service of a strictly Algerian politic and identity. Appeals to *algérianité* combined the racialized politics central to Algerian life with a sharp rejection of metropolitan rule and governance. At the root of this ideology was a conception of *Latinité*—the idea of a superior and distinct Latin Mediterranean race and culture that stood in sharp contrast to notions of assimilation favored by colonial ideologues. These Algerianist sentiments became integrated into prevailing conceptions of *Algérie française*, bolstering an authoritarian, separatist and racist ideology that challenged the basis of the colonial civilizing mission and argued for the permanence of the colonizer-colonized relationship. Although the Unions latines did not survive after Molle's death in 1931, its fundamental program became the foundation of the Algerian extreme right and resonated in later incarnations under Gabriel Lambert's Rassemblement national d'action sociale and the various branches nominally associated with metropolitan groups like the Croix de Feu.

Kalman's claim to a distinct variant of Algerian fascism is evidenced in the success of homegrown movements led by men like Molle and Lambert and the increasing deference to local elites evident within certain French-affiliated leagues. While authoritarian and anti-Semitic attitudes paralleled fascist movements in Europe at the time, the Algerian right distinguished itself through its emphasis on *Latinité* and hostility toward metropolitan authority. Localized support networks equally permitted fascist organizations a certain freedom of action within the colony. Anti-Semitic riots, sporadic acts of violence against officials and political enemies and mass protests compelled the governor general to move against right-wing radicals on numerous occasions, especially during the tense ideological conflicts that characterized the mid-1930s. Yet, the government's ability to reign in right-wing agitators was hampered by sympathizers and supporters at the local levels. Municipal authorities and law enforcement repeatedly turned a blind eye to unruly settlers, allowing them to perpetrate attacks and foment public disorder with impunity. *Colon* refusals to support any group or policy that did not prioritize and actively promote their specific vision of French Algeria ensured the primacy of *algérianité* within both the leadership and rank and file of the Algerian right, fundamentally placing it at odds with the French metropole.

Although anti-Semitism played a key role in defining a colonial fascist movement, Kalman's book draws attention to the struggles against the political left and, more importantly, the Muslim nationalist movements in the ascent since the 1920s. Algerian nationalism remained divided among a constellation of native leaders, ranging from moderates demanding civil equality to more radical spokesmen calling for independence and the recognition of an Algerian Muslim nation. Yet Muslim nationalists found common cause in the leftist resurgence of the 1930s as the electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936 put the question of Muslim integration and civil equality squarely on the table. The proposed Blum-Viollette Act intended to extend citizenship to some 25,000 sufficiently assimilated Muslim elites—the so-called *évolués*—generating a swell of support among Algerians. Interpreting the act as a threat to a European-dominated Algeria, fascist leaders in the colony used the Blum-Viollette proposal to rouse opposition to the metropole, which, they accused, was now in the clutches of Blum, a Jewish socialist, and Maurice Viollette, Algeria's former governor general ridiculed as "*Viollette l'arabe*" for his supposed arabophilic sympathies. The Popular Front victory galvanized the Algerianist movement as local politicians resigned their posts in protest, colonial newspapers railed against the metropolitan government and pitched battles between *algérianistes* and Popular Front supporters broke out in the streets of Oran. By 1938, the French government was forced to scuttle the controversial bill, drawing significant anger from Muslims and emboldening colonial fascists in the process.

The years of the Popular Front mark a pivotal moment in Kalman's narrative, crystallizing the factions and identities that would play out in what Alistair Horne deemed France's "savage war of peace."<sup>[1]</sup> "In the long term," Kalman states, "the conflict between *indigènes* and settlers, nationalists and the French administration, would only be resolved in the Algerian War of Independence" (p. 132). It is on this note that the importance of his study becomes most evident and the broader implications of colonial fascism most apparent. As Kalman concludes, the authoritarian, anti-metropolitan and *algérianiste* program would lend itself to the Vichy national revolution, resulting in the imposition of the *Statut des juifs* and rescinding of all rights for non-Europeans. It equally prefigured the radical separatism of the OAS during the Algerian War. The xenophobic nationalism forged in interwar Algeria, Kalman asserts, continues to resonate in the Gallic right-wing extremism and anti-immigrant nationalism of Le Pen and the Front National, demonstrating the vitality of colonial mindsets and concepts within post-colonial France.

*French Colonial Fascism* makes an important contribution to the history of interwar Algeria. It is well-researched and draws upon a wealth of colonial newspapers and archival sources to paint a picture of a society divided along deep political, racial and cultural fault lines. At times, however, one is tempted to speculate on the extent of the fascist movement under investigation. Kalman tends to see colonial fascism broadly, often treating "the settlers" as a homogenous body and *algérianité* as an "ingrained" concept in the settler population (p. 177). Jonathan Gosnell's work has suggested otherwise, noting the diverse loyalties and identities that threaded through the social fabric of a colonial society consisting of ethnic groups and sub-groups that did not always gel with the fiction of a "French" Algeria or even a unified "European" settler community.<sup>[2]</sup> Many of Kalman's examples are drawn from Oran, a province with a relatively high Jewish and low Muslim population in comparison to Algiers and Constantine. It is unsurprising, therefore, that firebrands like Molle and Lambert were able to find support for their anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim platforms, as their electorate was inclined toward anti-Semitism, yet unrestrained by potential backlashes coming from surrounding native communities. At the start of his book, Kalman alludes to these disparities. Nonetheless, he does not fully consider that the style of colonial fascism he treats may have been particular to Oran. Other examples coming from different areas are needed to balance his account and demonstrate that such an ideology did in fact cut across the European settler population.

It should also be recalled that even the most radical *colon* agitators continued to use the idiom of *Algérie française* and that this phrase did possess an emotional resonance in a colony that historically guarded its "special relationship" with the metropole. Settlers continued to participate in national elections and to elect representatives to the National Assembly throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, the *algérianisme* of the interwar period could often accent continuity and unity across the Mediterranean just as much as it could reinforce notions of Algerian difference and distinction.<sup>[3]</sup> Even in the lead up to the Algerian War, frustrations over metropolitan policies did not readily translate into outright separatism for a vast majority of *colons*. For many, Pierre Mendès-France's famous declaration "*ici, c'est la France*" in 1954 was a welcome reaffirmation of this historical relationship in a moment of mounting crisis.

It is also worth considering the broader context of interwar French colonialism in relation to the Algerian extreme right. Kalman argues that *algérianité* constituted a rejection of metropolitan colonial policy and the French civilizing mission. This period, however, marked a rethinking of French colonialism in general as policy makers re-evaluated notions of assimilation and association in the wake of the First World War. It is possible to suggest that the colonial right represented one extreme in a larger debate taking place on issues of race, nationality and France's relationship to its colonial subjects.<sup>[4]</sup> Under the circumstances, it is uncertain to what degree support for association and the rejection of assimilation amounted to a rupture with prevailing metropolitan currents.

Despite these criticisms, Kalman's book does shed new light on fascism and interwar politics, subjects on which the author has written extensively in the past. *French Colonial Fascism* is suggestive of the complexities within French fascism, showing it to be a movement highly adaptable to various regional contexts and local transmutations.

## NOTES

[1] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York, NY: New York Review Books Classic, 2006).

[2] Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2002).

[3] Azzedine Haddour, "Algeria and its History: Colonial Myths and The Forging and Deconstruction of Identity in *Pied-Noir* Literature," in Alec G. Hargreaves and Michael J. Heffernan, eds., *French and Algerian Identities From Colonial Times to the Present: A Century of Interaction* (Lewiston, Me.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), pp. 79-90.

[4] See: Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

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