


this). By placing opposing discourses in one and the same text, al-Ma‘arri allows space for both belief and unbelief.

Despite this restrictive mode of interpretation, the work under review remains a greatly valuable contribution to al-Ma‘arri’s scholarship.

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L’Algérie des oulémas: Une histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine (1931-1991)

Charlotte Courreye (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 2020). Pp. 536. €43.00 paper. ISBN: 9791035105334

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Charlotte Courreye’s *L’Algérie des Oulémas* is a major contribution to the historiography of 20th-century Algeria and to the growing literature on the relationship between the ‘ulama’, or “religious intellectuals” more generally, the state, education, religion, and politics. The book explores the location and the meanings of religious authority in Algerian society and state-formation through the history of the Islamic reformist movement, institutionalized in the 1930s. The reformists’ subsequent significance for anti-colonial nationalism, state-building and Arabization, political legitimation and opposition, Islamism and anti-Islamism is explored in meticulous detail and with impressive lucidity through a combination of institutional, social, intellectual, and political history. Courreye’s treatment of the thinking, preoccupations, and activities of the ‘ulama’ and their inheritors covers a great deal of ground with remarkable precision. Politics, education, social and institutional spaces, practices, and discourses are all considered. The author approaches these topics through a loosely Bourdieusian sociological framework (drawing on the concepts of field, social capital, and habitus), which helps organize her exposition without ever becoming reductive or restrictive. Combining detailed archival work in French with interviews carried out over four years of fieldwork, and an exhaustive reading of the press, memoirs, and other publications in Arabic, the resulting book is a first-rate work of scholarship.

Courreye’s study shares two aims with much of the recent, especially francophone, scholarship on Algeria. Firstly, she contributes to the de-particularization, or “de-provincializing” (*désenclavement*), of Algeria as a case, situating the country more fully and properly within a wider Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic world context, rather than as a wholly *sui generis* case or one confined in a Franco-Algerian echo chamber. Secondly, she connects the colonial and post-independence periods, considering Algeria’s history across the “threshold” of independence in 1962. In both respects, she succeeds admirably. Indeed, it can now be said, thanks to works like this one, that the history of Algeria today is no longer at all determined by the constraints of chronology and spatiality that earlier scholarship, including my own, complained about fifteen or twenty years ago. Three of the book’s eight chapters, but two-fifths of its page length, cover the late colonial period (1931–54) and the war of independence (1954–62), while another five chapters, three-fifths of the volume overall, address what happened to the reformist ‘ulama’ from the 1960s to the early 1990s. There are also several glances forward to the early 2000s, including in the introduction, which opens



with a slogan from one of the 2019 *hirāk* demonstrations. Taking this wide-angle and long-term view allows Courreye to trace continuities as well as ruptures, and to draw a compelling, meticulous picture running all the way from the foundation of the Jam‘iyat al-‘Ulama’ al-Muslimin al-Jaza’iriyyin (Association of Algerian Muslim ‘Ulama’) in 1931 to the onset of the crisis in Algeria in 1991 that led to civil war a year later.

The first three chapters of *L’Algérie des Oulémas* give a chronological account of the Association under the presidencies of ‘Abd al-Hamid Ben Badis and Bashir al-Ibrahimi, and during the war of independence. There is no lack of existing literature on the first two of these periods, in particular, and Courreye has read all of it, in English, French, and Arabic. Her account, however, is a wholly new and independent one based on extensive research in the archives and the Algerian press. The book, thus, both builds on the existing scholarship and is freed from some, now dated, assumptions and frameworks. Courreye confirms some of the existing picture, such as the much denser presence of the Association and its sympathizers in eastern Algeria than in the west of the country. In other respects, though, she provides a much fuller picture than we have hitherto seen, such as when she examines the actual content and material conditions of reformist education. Reexamining this story from 1931 to 1962 would have been a major undertaking in and of itself, but the bulk of the book is still to come. Chapters 4–6 look thematically at the reformist current from 1962 to the late 1970s, from the initial staking out of positions at independence through the reformists’ relationship to the state, as both regime insiders and outsiders, to their role in Arabization and language policy, and vis-à-vis the Berberist movement. Chapters 7 and 8 take us through the 1970s and 1980s, the reformists’ position in relation to “state fundamentalism” and mounting oppositional Islamism, and the crisis conditions of the late 1980s and early 1990s in which the Association was reactivated. These chapters include some of the book’s most important contributions, including discussion of the educational trajectories of reformist leaders’ children, and the attitude—more positive than has often been claimed—of reformist educators toward Algerian Arabic, or *darija*.

Focusing on the ‘ulama’ across this whole period in Algeria is not entirely straightforward. The formal institutional life of the Association that Courreye takes as her main object of study ended sometime in 1958, or perhaps in 1963; the details of what happened to the Association during the war of independence are not entirely clear, and somewhat controversial, and Courreye’s careful account of the question is indicative of her consistently painstaking approach and encyclopedic command of the evidence. The Association was refounded, or reactivated, in 1991, albeit very briefly, before ceasing activity in 1992 and reemerging in the early 2000s with the personalities whom Courreye interviewed. It continued to exist in the interim as a professional network, a body of opinion, a social tendency, or an inheritance up for grabs among different political and social movements. As such, the ‘ulama’ were no less important after 1962, when the Arab and Muslim nation they had championed against French colonialism was endowed with a formally Arab and Muslim state, than they had been in reshaping the religious field in late colonial Algerian society. But, as Courreye shows, they were from the start a mostly amorphous group, not a clearly defined unit of analysis. Without a major institutional center of Islamic learning, at least until 1984, Algeria’s ‘ulama’ in the 20th century more closely resembled Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori’s “new religious intellectuals” than the clerics of Qom or al-Azhar. They were teachers, journalists, clerks, directors of schools, shopkeepers, or artisans, as well as imams or preachers at independent mosques. After independence, they were often civil servants, especially in the officialized bureaucracy of religious affairs and in education, but could also be oppositional figures, especially from the early 1980s onward. In fact, what emerges perhaps most clearly is the extent to which the ‘*ālim*’ was always, in this context, a “competitive authority” figure (p. 17). Membership of the group was dependent on social, more than state or institutional, recognition. But it was also a self-designation, mobilizing a certain Islamic cultural capital to make certain kinds of claims in, and on, the religious field, claims that were never uncontested by others.

A major theme of the book, accordingly, is the changing, but constant, significance of the tensions between claims to religious authority, visions of proper education and social morality, and the state, whether colonial or national. What Courreye gives us is a detailed and astute history of an important dimension of state-formation, religious politics, and the many-sided Islamic movement in Algeria, especially in the 1960s through the 1980s. In this regard, the book moves well beyond everything else written on this subject up until now. Essential reading on Islam in 20th-century Algeria, it should also be read much more widely, and should bring Algeria into a clearer comparative perspective alongside the burgeoning work on these same topics in other contexts.

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