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Living French Colonial Theory: An examination of France's complex relationship with Islam in its African Colonies as viewed through the lives of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

In current scholarship, the colonial period within Africa has long been defined as a controversial era, almost encapsulating the entirety of Occidental hubris in one distinct age of time. By and large, the European powers invaded foreign lands, claimed them as their own by right of superior cultural standing, attempted to spread their way of life, and manipulated both the occupied territories and their inhabitants for their own economic, cultural, and spiritual gain. Such incursions were morally justified by the Oriental paradigm, which broadly claimed that European cultural and intellectual superiority gave the cultural Occident the authority to control, speak for, and know the entirety of the Oriental world. As a colonial power, France brought its own unique perspective to the pursuit of colonial might in the form of the concept of the *mission civilisatrice* and the legacy of the French Revolution. Within the auspices of the larger Orientalist paradigm which guided the second colonial empire, France imposed its civilizing mission on the largely Muslim North and West African colonies. These occupied lands posed a special threat to French hegemony because they shared a common monotheistic religion which could not be easily dismissed on the basis of Orientalist logic and could potentially pose a very real threat to French control. Thus, French policy toward Islam was unceasingly suspicious of Islam – evolving in its understanding of the religion and Muslim African culture but always with an eye to the practical aspects of administrating and controlling an Islamic colony.

This paper utilizes the larger complexities surrounding the French relationship with Islam as the basis for an examination of the lives of two colonial figures, Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani. Both men were prominent Islamists with career trajectories deeply steeped within Orientalist rhetoric in the late nineteenth-century and with strong ties to Algeria. However, a detailed and comprehensive accounting of the significance of their contributions and how they each advanced the Orientalist perspective has not yet been a focus of scholarly historical inquiry.

Octave Houdas functioned within the realm of scholarly study – educating a new generation of Orientalists at institutions in both Algeria and France and translating documents relative to the Islamic histories of North and West Africa. In contrast, Xavier Coppolani worked as a self-styled Islamists for the French colonial government, exploring and writing strategic treatises on how the pre-existing Muslim culture could be best employed to French gain. During their respective lifetimes both men played a critical role in the evolving French conceptions of Islam yet have had their lives and works essentialized and undervalued by modern historical study. By employing a wide variety of their works, spanning from French archival material to government reports to textbooks, this paper will address both their individual contributions to Franco Islamic relations and the larger roles they, as the Orientalist scholar and administrator, respectively, played in the perpetuation of the Orientalist paradigm. Many documents represented primary sources which were in French and were reviewed at locations in France.

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Introduction

The history of any country's colonial experience is a difficult subject to approach as the details of colonial activity often provoke understandably vitriolic reactions amongst the members of the modern readership. The hubris displayed by colonial governments within Europe and while occupying or annexing another territory was often shocking. The history of France's colonial activity is no exception to this general rule. Throughout the course of the rise and fall of both of the French colonial empires, the French government both in *l'hexagone* and in the colonies showcased a continually evolving colonial policy based on changing territories, and evolving conditions within both the colonies and within France itself. Although French colonials encountered a number of unexpected and arduous ideological and physical obstacles, one of the foremost challenges to French colonial activity came with the invasion of Algeria and the control of a truly Muslim colony.

Although a brief foray into Egypt under Napoleon at the turn of the nineteenth-century provided France with at least nominal experience in administrating an Islamic country, Algeria was the first instance in which France truly faced the difficulties inherent in attempting to govern a Muslim populace. Both during the first century after invasion and its later experience administrating a Muslim West Africa, the largely secular France maintained a tricky relationship with the Islamic faith as a whole. It was respected as both superior to the majority of animist religions due to its monotheistic nature and its cursory relation to Christianity, but was also mistrusted as a potentially

insidious force whose emphasis on religious devotion and living a holy lifestyle had the power to threaten French hegemony.

As a whole, it is difficult to establish if France had a concrete policy to deal with Islam and its potential threat during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Modern scholarly debates have abounded on this subject with no clear consensus.¹ Meanwhile, an examination of source materials from the time period presents a rather schizophrenic view of policy. Islam was seen as oscillating cataclysmically between being a force for good and one for evil, a help or a hazard and was constantly governed and re-governed in whatever method was deemed best for French interests at that moment in time.² In such a potentially hazardous situation, it is no great surprise that a number of self-styled experts in Islam became extremely powerful advisors within the French government and played a significant role in relations with the Islamic community and the formulation of colonial policy. These men, through their knowledge of Arabic and Islamic culture, went on to become great scholars, administrators and explorers, almost uniformly playing a crucial role in French understanding of Islam because of the severe dearth of usable information at the time. Two such men are the subjects of this study: Octave Houdas, a professor of Arabic and translator, and Xavier Coppolani, an explorer and colonial administrator.

Houdas and Coppolani merit serious analysis within the annals in modern historical

¹ See: David Robinson. "French 'Islamic' Policy and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal." *The Journal of African History*. Vol. 29, No. 3 (1988), pp. 415-435; and Donal Cruise O'Brien. "Towards an 'Islamic Policy' in French West Africa. 1854-1914." *The Journal of African History*. Vol. 8, No. 2 (1967), pp. 303-316; as well as the excellent summary of their contrasting arguments in Charles C. Stewart. "Colonial Justice and the Spread of Islam in the Early Twentieth Century." *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française v. 1880-1960*. Edited by David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1997, pp. 55-56.

² See: ANSOM, Algérie 2U1-2 for further information about surveillance and French authority and ANSOM, Algérie 81 F 995 for a description of the fluctuating opinions regarding the threat of Pan-Islamism. Also see ANSOM, AP 61 COL for information on such concerns in Afrique Occidentale Française.

scholarship both for the pivotal but heretofore often overlooked roles they played in the development of French conceptions of Islam and for the uniquely disparate types of Orientalist scholar they represent within the larger framework of the colonial Orientalist paradigm.

Throughout the course of their respective lifetimes, both Houdas and Coppolani reached enviable heights of power and influence in their chosen careers. If examined from afar, it would seem that the livelihoods of Houdas and Coppolani have much in common. Each man functioned in approximately the same time period and rose to prominence by presenting himself as an expert in Islamic issues. However, their situations are unique in that they chose startlingly different courses to becoming Islamists, and gained prominence in dissimilar realms of Islamic studies. Houdas traveled mainly in the fields of academia and education. He was trained in Arabic in Algeria and Marseille, first becoming a professor in an Algerian lycée. As his career expanded and his reputation grew, he moved to Paris and became a professor of Arabic at the prestigious *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris. By the end of his career, in scholarly circles Houdas was known as one of the foremost experts in the Arabic language, serving as a conduit between the metropolitan population of France and the larger Islamic world through his teaching, his continued work with the *Medersas* of Algeria and most notably, his numerous translations of key African Islamic texts, including the famed *Tarikh-es Soudan* and *Tarikh el-Fettach*. Coppolani, in contrast, spent almost the entirety of his life working in Africa, ingratiating himself within the French administrative community, and fashioning himself into an expert in Islam for the use of the French colonial service. Although he too published a major work, *Les*

Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes, which was co-written with Octave Depont; the majority of his work was not done for the sake of education but with providing the French government with strategic information which could be used to better control their Muslim populations. Thus, Coppolani began a career of exploration, mediation, and self-promotion, traveling throughout the African colonies, claiming new territories and mediating between French and indigenous interests. Before his unfortunate murder at the hands of a disgruntled Muslim local in Mauritania, Coppolani rose to great prominence through both his impressive accomplishments and his gift of self-promotion. He is best known for being credited as the founder of modern Mauritania.

Despite the fact that Houdas and Coppolani employed very different methods to attempt to reach a greater understanding of Islam in the French African colonies, they were both part of the larger tradition of Orientalist scholarship. Modern understandings of the terms “Orientalism” and “Orientalist” are laden with unfortunate connotations of European hubris, largely due to the pioneering work of Edward Said in his seminal *Orientalism*. However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an Orientalist was simply a “shorthand [description] for the various scholars and disciplines engaged in the study of the peoples and cultures of Asia ...the systematic inquiry into the literature, religions, cultures, and philosophies of Asia by emphasizing the mastery of local languages and the close scrutiny of indigenous and often sacred texts.”³ As the century progressed, the definition of Orientalist scholarship grew to include travelogues, administrative reports, histories, and novels, all of which claimed to provide a deeper understanding of the exotic other culture based on the experience and expertise of its

³Douglas Peers. “Orientalism.” *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*. Edited by Kelly Boyd. Vol. 2 (M-Z). London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999, pp. 884.

author. Thus, under the umbrella of Orientalist scholarship, it was very possible to approach the study of other cultures in strikingly disparate ways, as evidenced by the contrasted works of Houdas and Coppolani. Yet within the time period, all of the aforementioned disciplines were considered valid paths to a more substantial and well-rounded knowledge of the Orient and enabled the body of Orientalist scholars grew substantially in the post-Enlightenment period. In aggregate, it grew to include all those who claimed a fascination with non-Western cultures, whether they be Asian or African cultures. The career of such a study came to be known as Orientalist. Said's work was so groundbreaking because it forced the modern intellectual establishment to reevaluate the assumptions which underlay the entirety of Orientalist scholarship. Orientalism was a discipline which claimed its entire *raison d'être* to be an increased understanding of other cultures, yet it was largely based on the application of European models to the Orient. It evaluated other cultures and their scholarly texts through a deeply European framework of cultures. It argued that a Western intellectual, such as an Xavier Coppolani or a Gustave Flaubert could not only briefly travel within a country and gain a complete understanding of the intricacy of its functioning, but could also be qualified to represent it to the European world. By upholding such patterns which implicitly forced the Orient into a subservient role, the entirety of non-European culture became something that could be described and spoken for by the West, rather than something capable of defining itself.⁴

From such a perspective, evaluating the work of any Orientalist scholar on its own terms becomes a difficult endeavor. However, it is the contention of this paper that such an enterprise is extremely worthwhile for two primary reasons. Firstly, despite the

⁴ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 3-6.

prominence of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani and the magnitude of the feats which they achieved within the larger Orientalist framework, their significance has been largely dismissed by historical scholarship. For various reasons, the annals of history have confined them to relatively minor roles, subordinated to figures such as Pierre Lyautey, Alfred Le Chatelier, Silvestre de Sacy, Alexis de Tocqueville and General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, all of whom are far more celebrated and discussed for their contributions to French colonialism. In the rare instance when Houdas or Coppolani is the subject of academic debate, both are relegated to an almost clichéd, singular dimension of their lives. Houdas becomes either “the man responsible for translating the *Tarikh el-Fettach* and the *Tarikh es-Soudan*” or “the father-in-law of Maurice Delafosse.” Meanwhile, Coppolani is noted either for the tragic circumstances of his death or the correspondingly almost comical circumstances surrounding his rise to notoriety in North and West Africa. However, such approaches do both men a great disservice, as they discount their numerous other accomplishments, interests, influences and great contributions they made to the development of French attitudes toward Islam in its African colonies. In different ways, both are underappreciated figures in the history of French colonialism and deserve to be discussed on a larger scale within historical scholarship.

Secondly, beyond the individual significance of the two men, a contrasted study of Houdas and Coppolani provides an excellent encapsulation of the nature of Orientalist scholarship in the nineteenth-century. Their differing research foci and very dissimilar intellectual legacies, despite upbringings and educations which are nominally quite similar, provide an intriguing window into the nature of both the larger Orientalist

paradigm within nineteenth-century France and the specific nature of France's relationship with Islam in its African colonies. An examination of their lives and works provides insight and an important and unique but overlooked perspective into the policies of French government and the French intellectual establishment during this crucial period in its history. Along the lines of the works of William B. Cohen, Barnett Singer, John Langdon and Charles André Julien, this paper will be approached as a study of the individuals behind the policy, a detailed examination of two of the men who are generally overlooked now but were instrumental to both French understanding of Islam in Africa and the formation of colonial policies and administration.⁵ These repercussions of their works would affect the development of French Islamic territories for centuries to come.

Houdas and Coppolani were human in that they were men motivated by their personal experiences, thoughts and ideals. Without a full understanding of what these impulses were and how they came about, any grasp of their prodigious roles in French colonial policy would be incomplete. Thus, with such concepts in mind, this study will attempt to examine and define both the lifetimes and the scholarly outputs of these men, approaching the discussion with a full awareness that both their histories, circumstances and the eventual fruits of their intellectual labor were symbiotic.

Chapter One is intended to serve as a general summary of the prevailing cultural events and influences surrounding the lives of both men – within France, West Africa, and Algeria. Subjects as diverse as the rise and fall of the first colonial empire, the

⁵ See: William B. Cohen. *Rulers of Empire: The French Colonial Service in Africa*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1971; Singer, Barnett and John Langdon. *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004; as well as Charles André Julien, *Les Techniciens de la Colonisation (XIXe- XXe siècles)*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946.

evolution of French colonial theory and the histories of Algeria and French West Africa all affected the construction of the worlds in which they developed their views, and consequently their scholarly output. Chapter Two begins with a detailed examination of Orientalist theory. It relates Orientalism to the prevailing colonial theories at the time, as well as the historical scholarly establishment. This is discussed as a means of providing a larger framework for the presentation of the life and accomplishments of Octave Houdas. There has been no real scholarly attempt to provide a biography of Houdas and this chapter will attempt to correct this historical oversight. By examining his personal history, a summation of his life and works, and the larger environment in which he worked, this chapter will provide a much-needed window into the works of a prominent scholar and the larger academic establishment within nineteenth-century France. Next, Chapter Three describes the life and works of Xavier Coppolani both as the subject for larger scholarly discussion and as an example of the subset of Orientalism devoted to administration and fieldwork. Much like the Chapter Two, Chapter Three will present Coppolani's fascinating personal history and how his individual ambitions affected both the development of his career as an Islamist and French colonial understandings of Islam as a whole. To more largely situate Coppolani within his time period, there is a discussion of both the larger aspects of the Orientalist paradigm to which Coppolani subscribed as well as the general administration of French North and West Africa. Chapter Four serves as a short comparison of the life and works of these two men. It focuses on their distinct types of Orientalism, similarities and differences within their research methods and personal histories, and the ways in which they have typically been examined within historical discourse. Finally, the conclusion examines the difficulty of

approaching a study of an “Oriental” territory within a colonial empire. It discusses how the Orientalist paradigms present within “Occidental to Oriental” relations affect even modern historical scholarship and how the Orientalist paradigm, which has supposedly been largely eradicated, affects even the most enlightened attempts at creating an African history.

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Chapter One

No historical figure can be truly understood without a thorough comprehension of their time period and the forces that shifted and defined the worlds in which they lived. Without an understanding of the circumstances which defined their surroundings, any analysis of their lives and works would be glaringly incomplete. For example, Houdas moved to Algeria as a young boy with his family just a few short years after the French invasion in 1830. They were one of the many settlers encouraged by the government to both increase their own fortunes and provide Algeria with an influx of skilled laborers, necessary to build and maintain the colonial infrastructure. Young Houdas' future was very much intertwined with his experiences in Algeria, as his childhood there inspired his interest in Arabic, Islam and an increased understanding between the Christian West and the other cultures of the world. Similarly, the circumstances of Xavier Coppolani's modest upbringing in Algeria enlightened the very ambitious young man to the serious potential for fame and glory if one possessed the skills to bridge the ideological and physical boundary between European and Muslim culture. A sound appreciation of evolving colonial theory before, during, and after his lifetime offers new dimensions to this career path and its debatable efficacy. Thus, this introduction is intended to serve as a general summary to both the time period and the evolution of conditions in North and West Africa, spanning from the original French invasions in Africa to the Assimilation versus Association debate.

By the time of the French invasion of Algiers in 1830 and the official beginning of the second French colonial empire, France had already had a great deal of experience in the colonial arena. The country had not only survived the rise and fall of an empire, but had also had a brief exposure to the intricacies involved in invading and administrating an African colony. The first French colonial empire began in approximately 1605 with the founding of the Port Royal in the new French colony of Acadia. From its inception to its end in the 18th century, this expansive and prosperous empire grew to include territories as diverse as North America, the West Indies, Egypt, and India.⁶ These colonies were generally quite a profitable endeavor, and even men such as Voltaire who disliked colonial enterprise were willing to admit that even the poorest European was able to more easily obtain previously costly commodities.⁷

The first colonial empire was also greatly affected by the French revolution and the changing conceptions of the Rights of Man which it inspired - leading to a sharp questioning of slave labor and native exploitation and a subsequent rebellion in the colony of Saint Domingue in which Natives demanded their political rights based on the precepts of the French Revolution.⁸ These concepts which glorified secularism, liberty and the rights of man became deeply ingrained in the French consciousness and led to the commonly-held believe that France was the most culturally superior of all the European countries, and thus most naturally inclined to civilize the “barbarism of the Orient.” This became one of the fundamental foundations of colonial theory within the second empire.

⁶ Louis Vignon. *L'Expansion de la France*. Paris : Guillauman et Cie Libraries, 1891, pp. 51-6.

⁷Voltaire. *Œuvres de Voltaire ; 15-18*. “Essai sur les Mœurs.” Vol. 3. Paris: Werdet et Lequien Fils, 1829, pp. 435-43.

⁸ Carl Ludwig Lokke. *France and the Colonial Question: A Study of Contemporary French Opinion 1763-1801*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1932, pp. 129.

Ironically however, shortly after the revolution, it was decided that it was impossible to grant native subjects the same rights as Frenchmen.

The years immediately following the revolution were also notable for Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt, which was done for both practical and ideological reasons. Occupying Egypt allowed France to simultaneously control a much larger amount of Mediterranean trade and to greatly inconvenience their colonial rivals, the British. As Napoleon's foreign minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, a great proponent of the Egyptian invasion, stated: "Egypt, as a colony, would soon replace the products of the Antilles and, as a route, would give us [control of] the trade with India; for everything in commercial matters depends on time, and time would allow us five voyages against three by the ordinary route [around the Cape of Good Hope]." ⁹ Ideologically, the possibility of invading Egypt was also alluring to Napoleon on a personal level. It satisfied his almost pathological need to prove himself as a great statesman and military man, by allowing him to possess the land of the Pharaohs and Alexander the Great, and styling himself as the newer, more modern incarnation of their legendary might and power. Despite his lofty ambitions, and an impressive team of imported Oriental experts brought to research and to create a sort of living archive of the expedition, the French were expelled from Egypt in 1801. ¹⁰

The French empire began to slowly shrink as territories were lost through a series of military conflicts with England beginning roughly with the Seven Years War in 1756. A few small, scattered territories were later restored to French control, but by the 1803 sale of Louisiana to the United States, the first French colonial empire was largely

⁹ Pallain, *La Mission de Talleyrand a Londres en 1792* : As Quoted in Lokke, pp. 186.

¹⁰ Said, pp. 80-88.

dismantled. Based on these experiences, the general French antipathy toward the establishment of another empire was widespread. As the historian Agnes Murphy notes in her book, *The Ideology of French Imperialism*, nineteenth-century France was singularly disinterested in Colonialism. According to her analysis, there were many reasons for this state of affairs, including: the former losses of colonies, a number of maritime disasters, and the abolition of slavery, which no longer made the functioning of the old commercial regime to be as practical or as lucrative as it had previously been.¹¹ Murphy's supposition seems to be quite historically accurate, but the renowned Alexis de Tocqueville, argued a slightly different position on France's growing disinterest in colonial might in his 1833 letter, "Some Ideas about What Prevents the French from Having Good Colonies." He claimed that the French were more naturally suited to land-related exploits and did not innately fit within larger maritime concerns. "The land is the natural theater of her power and glory. Maritime commerce is but an appendage to her existence; the sea has never excited, nor will it ever excite, those national sympathies and that sort of filial respect that navigating or commercial peoples have for it."¹² Thus, the experiences of the first colonial empire and its eventual loss profoundly colored the attitudes and approaches toward the second empire in the *hexagone*. It instilled a general apathy toward both colonialism and colonial issues amongst both the populace and the government that didn't begin to reverse until the end of the eighteenth-century and the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War.

¹¹ Agnes Murphy. *The Ideology of French Imperialism 1871-1881*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1949, pp. 12-13.

¹²Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Writings on Empire and Slavery*. Edited and Translated by Jennifer Pitts. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, pp. 1.

If the French were largely uninterested in colonialism in the years following the fall of the first colonial empire, how and why did France invade and subsequently colonize Algeria on 5 July 1830? Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no single complete history surrounding the reason for invasion. Undoubtedly, the most fantastical of the reasons given for the invasion of Algeria claimed that the *dey* of Algiers, the Turkish representative of the Ottoman empire in the city, slapped the French consul in Algeria after accusing him of unsavory behavior in a failed business deal. As a form of retaliation for this insult, the consul ordered the severing of all diplomatic ties with Algeria and relations between the two countries devolved until the eventual French conquest in 1830.¹³ Another supposed motivation was the destabilization of the massive Algerian piracy industry.¹⁴ However, as is usually the case, the real reasons for invasion were far more practical than far-fetched stories of inflated egos and pirates. According to Charles-Robert Ageron, France hoped to increase its commercial relations with Algeria to bolster its stagnant economy and to quiet the growing unrest with the Restoration monarchy within France. King Charles X yearned to quiet the growing unrest within France by both fighting a war to increase French national pride and then later be able to boast of the new colonial jewel in its crown. This strategy proved unsuccessful and precipitated both the overthrow of King Charles X and a turbulent period in France's history. Yet despite the changes with *l'hexagone*, Algeria remained a French colony for over a century.¹⁵

¹³ A. Berbrugger. "Introduction ." *Revue Africaine. Journal des Travaux de la Société historique algérienne*. Vol.1, 1856, pp. 3-9.

¹⁴ Lucette Valensi. *On the Eve of Colonialism: North Africa Before the French Conquest 1790-1830*. Translated by Kenneth J. Perkins. New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1969, pp. 112.

¹⁵ Charles-Robert Ageron. *Modern Algeria : A History from 1830 to the Present*. Translated and Edited by Michael Brett. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1991, pp. 5-9.

It was this colony with somewhat inauspicious beginnings that grew to become what was arguably the most important territory of the second French colonial empire. In the period immediately following invasion, a system of military rule under General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud was instituted which relied heavily on the infrastructure already in place from the previous Turkish administration.¹⁶ One major change to the pre-existing infrastructure was the 1844 addition of an administrative body known as a *bureau arabe* in each *cercle* or subdivision of Algeria, composed of “experts” in Arabic and Islamic studies. Their jobs were to live and work surrounded by the Native population, both gathering information on indigenous culture to transmit back to the French army and also to act as a more direct form of government for the local populations of Algeria.¹⁷ This included the Berbers, an indigenous people native to the Maghreb for a period of centuries, the Arabs, descendants of former Islamic invaders also known as Moors, the Arabized Berbers, the Algerians, and the Jews, who were mainly descendants of Iberian migrants.¹⁸

Many within France and the French administration felt that the *bureau arabe* was an ingenious idea, as it allowed the French to have a better idea of what was happening on the ground. Both Napoleon III and Alexis de Tocqueville were vocal proponents of the work of the *bureaux arabes*, with Tocqueville going so far as to claim that “No institution has been more useful in our domination of Africa than the Arab bureaus.”¹⁹ Predictably however, not all were fond of the work of the *bureaux*. The period between

¹⁶ Barnett Singer and John Langdon. *Cultured Force: Makers and Defenders of the French Colonial Empire*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, pp. 61-2.

¹⁷ ANSOM, Algérie I 1 I “Rapport sur la cercle d’Oran ,” 1856.

¹⁸ Octave Houdas. *Ethnographie de l’Algérie*. Paris : Maisonneuve Frères et Ch. Leclerc Éditeurs, 1886, pp. 31-32.

¹⁹ Tocqueville, 138.

the 1830 invasion and the 1850s experienced a massive influx of European settlers known as the *colons*, who found the *bureaux arabes* to be overly friendly to the indigenous, to the extent that their own rights were overlooked. There was then a mostly negative public opinion of the *bureaux arabes* within Algeria and correspondingly of the military government which was responsible for its implementation. When Napoleon III questioned why the *colons* disliked the *bureaux arabes* so vehemently, Patrice de MacMahon explained to Napoleon III, that it was for the same reason that smugglers hated customs agents.²⁰

As an example of this cultural divide between the *colons* and the supposed “arabophiles,” when Napoleon III came into power in 1848, he visited Algeria to examine the colony for himself, announcing that “France’s first duty was to attend to the welfare of three million Arabs,” to the great consternation of the *colons*. When, in 1863, he extended equal rights and the possibility of French citizenship to the indigenous population of Algeria, the *colons* revolted. They waged a full assault against “The Emperor of the Arabs,” even going so far as to attack his policies in parliament, accusing him of sacrificing the welfare of native Frenchmen for the indigenous population.²¹ The antipathy felt toward Napoleon III was so great, that by the advent of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, the majority of the *colon* population hoped for a destruction of his regime. In effect, the surrender of Napoleon III at Sedan meant the end of the second French colonial empire and the establishment of a French republic that the *colon* population hoped would be more sympathetic to their concerns.²²

²⁰ Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans*, 20.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 36-40.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 47.

Under the rule of the empire and the Algerian military regime, the Muslim and indigenous populations were granted a certain number of rights, largely negligible rights that required the compromise of their beliefs and the acceptance of French “civilization” but rights nonetheless. However, the announcement of a new civil regime in Algeria under the French republic and controlled by the *colons* was a startling prospect that would almost certainly further reduce their status and liberty within the country. It inspired both a wave of justified panic in the indigenous population and a number of rebellions and clashes with the *colons*. During this period as well, the influence of the *bureaux arabes* slowly decreased. This was partially due to the end of military government but also because of a number of scandals, in which various *bureaux* officers were accused of corruption and cruelty eventually led to the downfall in their power.²³ However, the legacy of the *bureaux arabes*, encouraging greater understanding of indigenous cultures, greatly influenced the development of Islamic policies in West Africa.

The French had long maintained a presence on the shores of Senegal, where it had managed a number of trading posts since as early as 1637.²⁴ However, full-scale colonization of Senegal and the West African territories did not begin until nearly two hundred years later when it became evident that there was the possibility for profit making. It was noted as early as the first colonial empire by Bertrand, the Minister of the Marine, that France would greatly benefit from being able to obtain the tropical goods that were produced in the Antilles and Caribbean islands in new colonial possessions that

²³ Christopher Harrison. *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 16.

²⁴ Anfreville de la Salle. *Notre Vieux Sénégal : son histoire, son état actuel ce qu'il peut devenir*. Paris : A Challamel, 1909, pp. 3-5.

were much closer to home.²⁵ The French West African colony (Afrique Occidentale Française or the A.O.F.) was officially founded by government decree in 1895 but the French military government had already begun a policy of aggressive territorial expansion in the 1840s. This began in a small outpost in Senegal under the leadership of Governor Léon Faidherbe with a massive campaign to both encourage expansion and to deal with the rebellious indigenous population, notably including the regimes of the Tokolor people of Futa Toro, a number of Sufi brotherhoods and the Madiyanke.²⁶ For the majority of the Muslim inhabitants of West Africa, any incursion by the French into their lands was treated as a holy war, that is, a military or political response deeply steeped in religious rhetoric.

The resistance shown most often by the Muslim powers was typically some combination of military combat and strategic alliance. The history of West African politics is littered with broken treaties, agreed upon only nominally and then quickly ignored whenever it was deemed convenient.²⁷ Despite the constant threats of war and rebellion outside French-occupied lands, the size and number of the colonies in West Africa slowly grew. By 1905, the A.O.F. was composed of five colonies, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey and the Western Sudan and one military territory, Mauritania.²⁸ While the largely hostile relations the A.O.F. maintained with its primarily Islamic neighbors defined much of its early history, within the colonies themselves, a number of governors practiced an enlightened and tolerant policy toward Muslims

²⁵ Bertrand, *Discours à l'assemblée nationale le 19 decembre 1791m sur l'état actuel de la colonie de Saint Domingue* (Paris, 1791) : As Quoted in Lokke, pp. 175.

²⁶ Robinson, "French 'Islamic Policy,' pp. 418.

²⁷ "African Initiatives and Resistance in West Africa 1880-1914." *UNESCO General History of Africa: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*. Edited by A. Abu Boahen. Vol. 7. Berkeley, California: James Currey Ltd., 1990, pp. 55-59.

²⁸ Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 35.

residing within the A.O.F. inspired by French republican ideas and the Algerian precedent. For example, Faidherbe instituted a Muslim Tribunal in St. Louis, Senegal, which officially sanctioned Islamic law. In the beginning of the twentieth-century, the Governors-General Roume and Ponty instituted a Muslim Affairs service, engineered to provide an “Islamic policy” for West Africa, based on Algerian precedent and a keen awareness of local circumstances.²⁹

Although it was not a uniform reaction, the great military loss of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, which resulted in the loss of the French département of Alsace-Lorraine to the German army, inspired a number of public figures to speculate that perhaps the best way for the nation to regain some of its former prestige was to devote more resources to the colonial project. Amongst the most vocal figures encouraging a renewed concern for colonial activity was the deeply patriotic economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu. Men such as Leroy-Beaulieu can be credited with attempting to inspire renewed French interest in colonial enterprise by using their political and cultural influence to inspire government officials to pursue colonial expansion. He was a whole-hearted supporter of colonialism, believing that it would reinvigorate France economically, increase patriotism and provide a home for the former residents of Alsace-Lorraine who wished to retain their French citizenship.³⁰ As he famously wrote “One of the great faults of our politics for almost the past two centuries has been that of looking upon France as purely continental and European country, and of giving only a distracted attention to our distant possessions. If this false tendency had not prevailed for some generations, we would today hold a much more important place in the world than that which remains to

²⁹ Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power,” pp, 109, 113.

³⁰ Paul Leroy-Beaulieu. *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, 2nd edition. Paris: Guillauman et Cie Libraries. 1882, pp. 323.

us.”³¹ Although Leroy-Beaulieu’s enthusiasm for increased colonialism was certainly a persuasive force, if not necessarily contagious, another group of the intellectual establishment was urging the French to become more active colonialists and explorers.

The geographical societies, colonial groups, and comités scattered throughout France came into great prominence in the 1870s, encouraging geographical knowledge amongst the members of the French public, sponsoring explorations, and lobbying French ministries to devote more attention to their colonial empire.³² Their enthusiasm for other cultures and increasing French knowledge of their cultures and sciences allowed for an immediate growth in exploration of Asian continents and Africa. They also propagandized colonial and geographical issues within France by publishing a number of prominent journals, subsidizing voyages and research, developing geographical schools, and creating a brotherhood of men with a deep interest in Oriental concerns. Their unique interest in the colonies and the Orient, founded primarily for the purposes of increased knowledge rather than strategic utility, provided the impetus for the development of a mass interest in Orientalism based on scholarly concerns.³³ Thus the appearance of the geographical society and the men of its ilk played a great role in the popularizing of interest in the colonies for reasons that extended beyond the enlargement of French colonial power.

One of the fundamental hallmarks of French colonial policy is the idea of the *mission civilisatrice*, which underpinned much of the ideological reasoning behind the French colonial project. The *mission civilisatrice* was a uniquely French concept which

³¹ Murphy, pp. 140.

³² Notice sur la société de Géographie (Paris : Société, 1900), pp. 27 : As Quoted in Murphy, pp. 41 and Henri Brunshwig. *French Colonialism 1871-1914 : Myths and Realities*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1966, pp. 105-116.

³³ Raoul Girardet. *L’Idée Coloniale en France, 1871-1962*. Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972, pp. 71-74.

stemmed from the larger belief that French culture was a highly civilized one, due to its ingrained tenets of liberty, equality, fraternity and secularism. It was then the highly evolved Frenchmen's duty to spread that civilization to all parts of the world which had not been so enlightened.³⁴ According to the historian Alice Conklin in her book *A Mission to Civilize*, in the period prior to 1914, the institution of the *mission civilisatrice* had two primary functions. First, it was believed that due to the extreme poverty of the majority of the colony's inhabitants, they must bring civilization by improving "their subjects' standard of living through the rational development, or what the French called the *mise en valeur*, of the colony's natural and human resources." This was primarily accomplished through the construction of infrastructure, primarily railroads, which would open large parts of the continent to trade and civilizing influences. Second, and perhaps most importantly, "the French insisted that civilization required that the different West African peoples had to evolve within their own cultures, to the extent that these cultures did not conflict with the republican principles of French civilization."³⁵

It was this idea of the necessity of accepting French societal precepts that provided a dramatic undercurrent to the entirety of the French civilizing mission. If, as the *mission civilisatrice*, implies, the primary ideological rationale behind colonial expansion was to bring civilization to the barbaric indigenous societies of non-Western cultures, then surely that must necessitate some form of acceptance of French culture amongst the members of the local population. In the early years of the second colonial empire, this required assimilation, which broadly "meant that the colony was to become an integral, if noncontiguous, part of the mother country, with its society and population

³⁴ Alice L. Conklin "Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 103, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 420-421.

³⁵ Conklin, pp. 6.

made over – to whatever extent possible – in her image.”³⁶ Thus, a new colony was not viewed on its own terms – it and its people were examined for the ways in which they might become more French. Needless to say, the indigenous populations of North Africa were not eager to abandon their cultures, religions and ways of life merely because French officials claimed that it was the only way to become civilized. A small number of the local population known as the *evolués* did accept the French ways of life, renouncing Islamic beliefs such as abstention from alcohol and the right to practice *sharia* law and were highly praised by the administration for their changed way of life. However, they often found themselves in an undefined middle ground – not fully accepted by the *colons* because they were not European and regarded as traitors by the rest of the local population.³⁷ In practice, assimilation was a very difficult policy to enforce, as it required the full renunciation of a previous lifestyle under the somewhat dubious assertion that it would make the native populations more civilized.

As the empire grew and French exposure to both Islamic culture and the difficulties of governing such a colony became more prominent, there was a marked shift in attitudes, emphasizing instead a policy of association, rather than assimilation. This took a far more flexible approach to the administration of indigenous populations, as it no longer required everyone to become French. Instead, it emphasized “the idea that the determining factors in all colonial policy should be the geographic and ethnic characteristics and the state of social development of the particular region submitted to

³⁶ Raymond F. Betts. *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, pp. 6.

³⁷ Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans et la France (1871-1919)*. 2 vols. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, pp. 306.

foreign control.”³⁸ Rather than forcing all colonies to develop within the lines of the French experience and values, within association, the native groups would be allowed to develop on their own terms, maintaining their own institutions, while still under the larger umbrella of French control. This change in theory allowed far more freedom within native cultures, as well as allowing the administrators of individual colonies far more autonomy. Pierre Lyautey, one of the most famous of the French colonial administrators, was a vocal proponent of assimilation, claiming that above all else, indigenous peoples should be treated kindly and have their ways of life and religions respected by the French. However, despite these concessions, he still maintained that it was a mistake to govern in a style that allowed for complete autonomy, maintaining that it was a mistake to rule “with an open hand.”³⁹ This change in colonial theory occurred before the official founding of the A.O.F. and the majority of the policies regarding Islam within West Africa were greatly colored by association and the ideals of French republicanism.

By the 1850s and the dramatic expansion of the A.O.F., France had already had extensive experience administrating two Muslim colonies. The first was somewhat debatable – the brief five year tenure in which Napoleon I controlled Egypt. However, the second, the sustained occupation of Algeria, provided the administrators within the A.O.F. with a wealth of information and experience to more effectively govern their new colonies. When later incorporated with the relative successes of the colonies in West Africa, from the initial colonial invasions in Senegal under the leadership of Faidherbe, to the pacification of Mauritania by Xavier Coppolani, it was generally assumed within

³⁸ Betts, pp. 106-7.

³⁹ Pierre Lyautey. *L'Empire Colonial Français*. Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1931, 513-514.

France that their nation had the necessary experience to claim themselves to be a “Muslim Power.”⁴⁰ Despite the fact that such claims proved to be dramatically premature, French colonial policy with regard to Islam developed dramatically throughout the course of the occupation of various Muslim colonies.

West African administrators were able to both emulate the successes of Algerian experiences, and avoid many of the pitfalls. For example, much of the Algerian government ruled with a close eye to its Muslim populations and a tight grasp around all their activities while the governments of West Africa allowed a great deal more freedom to its indigenous populations.⁴¹ This inspired a nominal degree of tolerance for religious practices rarely seen within the auspices of the secular republic. Under Faïdherbe, a Muslim tribunal was established, the government sponsored a number of *hajj* trips, and there was an increased appointment of indigenous staff members within government bodies. Although not all of the administrators took such an interest in espousing such liberal Islamic policies, by and large, the treatment of the Muslim population within the A.O.F. was far more lenient and open-minded compared to its predecessors.⁴²

French West Africa is also the arena in which the intellectual luminaries Alfred Le Chatelier and Paul Marty each rose to great prominence. Le Chatelier was a celebrated Islamist before his voyage into West Africa due to his impressive education and previous experience in Algeria. His work in the A.O.F. culminated in the groundbreaking study *Islam dans l’Afrique Occidentale*, which remained a cornerstone of French perceptions of Islam until the arrival of Paul Marty. Broadly, it claimed that St Louis had become a tremendous Muslim epicenter, populated primarily by Tijani

⁴⁰ Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power,” pp. 105.

⁴¹ ANSOM, Algérie 2U1 contains an entire file of Muslim surveillance.

⁴² Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power,” pp. 106-7.

Muslims, yet faced no direct threat from the Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhood, a conclusion greatly at odds with the prevailing wisdom of the Algerian school, which claimed that Sufi brotherhoods were one of the largest threats to French hegemony.⁴³ Marty, who also had a strong connection with North Africa, arrived in the A.O.F. after the turn of the twentieth century, and produced a number of reports on the state of West African Islam which came to define French policy in the period leading up to World War I. He was one of the first to popularize the distinction between *Islam Noir* and *Islam Maure*, the first of which was practiced by the primarily black, or *sudan* ethnic tribes which melded together the previous animist religions with Islamic precepts. *Islam Maure* was considered to be far more orthodox and practiced by the *bidan*, or lighter skinned West African inhabitants.⁴⁴ Marty also contributed to a change in West African policy which grew to favor those who practiced “traditional” animist religions and those who were Muslim. Previously, it was assumed by such great philosophers as Hegel that although the practice of Islam was potentially dangerous to French power, it showed that the indigenous populations were slowly progressing in their religious beliefs from the largely pagan animist religions of their past, to a more civilized and sophisticated monotheistic religion.⁴⁵ Marty however argued that the acceptance of Islam did not necessarily illustrate progress as such religious vows could be superficial and based on practical concerns. Instead, he claimed that the animist populations of West Africa should be protected from the encroaching influence of Islam.⁴⁶

⁴³ Harrison, 31.

⁴⁴ Robinson, “France as a Muslim Power,” pp. 122.

⁴⁵ G.W.F. Hegel. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree. London: Bell and Delderly, 1872, pp. 97.

⁴⁶ Harrison, pp. 130.

Thus, with such an overwhelming amount of information how exactly does one begin to gain a general appreciation of French attitudes toward Islam in North and West Africa? Is the history of French Islamic policy best represented by the views of the early settlers which claimed that any hint of Muslim culture must be abandoned for a total acceptance of French culture? Or is it perhaps best represented by the more tolerant *bureaux arabes* which were so influential in the formation of policy under the military government? Maybe French attitudes toward Islam should be more generously associated with its claims of being a Muslim power and the later associationist policies of West Africa? Or finally, is it best represented by the works of individual actors who ingratiated themselves within Muslim culture and tried to understand its intricacies in a format more easily understood by a European audience? As the historian Christopher Harrison writes “What then in French eyes were the essential features of African Islam? At the turn of the century you paid your money and you took your choice.”⁴⁷

Despite these definite anomalies in French relations with African Islam, there was also an evolution in understanding as well as common themes which underlay nearly all of the French attitudes toward Islam. In the end, the most significant of these was the fact that colonial policy was generally driven by whatever the French felt was in their own best interest at the time. This changed, evolved and was subject to dueling interpretations at various stages in the nineteenth-century but ultimately was done with a great eye to self-preservation and self-interest. When it became clear that forced assimilation was creating rebellion and discontent, making it difficult to control the native populations, association came into vogue as a policy which accorded more freedom and agency for the indigenous under French rule. Thus from a French

⁴⁷ Harrison, 202.

perspective, the works of men such as Coppolani, Le Chatelier, and Marty were primarily of great importance because the information they provided would entrench French power by providing a greater understanding of native culture and the most effective ways to govern it. Their works could be scholarly, such as Le Chatelier's *L'Islam dans l'Afrique Occidentale* and appeal to all facets of the European community but always included an implicit understanding that their discoveries were made for the benefit of French rule. In contrast, the writings of the geographical societies and men within academia, such as Houdas, had the potential for such strategic uses, but were primarily utilized to enhance the understandings of other scholars, explorers and the drawing room Orientalists – the powerful men within French society who were captivated by the dynamics of other cultures. Their reliance on translations of primary sources, and exploration for the purposes of enhanced scientific and cultural knowledge did not readily provide the same amount of policy application as a government report. There was not so much of a definite divide between the various types of Orientalists as much as a divide between the later application of their works.

Chapter Two

The colonial theories discussed within the previous chapter: assimilation, association, and the *mission civilisatrice* were tremendously important within eighteenth and nineteenth-century France. They provided justifications for colonial endeavors as well dictating the treatment of the indigenous populations within a French-occupied area. Any discussion of French colonialism within that era which ignores or diminishes the importance of these theories would be glaringly incomplete. They guided the practical day-to-day governing of colonial occupation and French views of its colonial residents. Despite the supreme importance of these theories and their ilk in the realm of practical administration, they are merely aspects of the larger paradigm of Orientalism. The Orientalist concept is a far more capacious beast, which underlies both the motivations for the colonial endeavor and European perspectives of the entirety of the non-Western world. The perspectives and motivations which defined theories of French colonialism such as assimilation, were based upon the ingrained notions of European superiority and civilization which were the result of centuries of Orientalist thought processes.

To better illustrate the enormous epistemological differences between these sets of theories, it is perhaps easiest to elucidate their conceptual differences. Together, assimilation, association, and the *mission civilisatrice* were theories which were consciously created to serve a specific purpose – the regulation and larger framework of colonial activity. In contrast, within the eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century, the term “Orientalist” meant little more than a scholar well-versed in the languages and literatures

of the Orient, then only later developed to encompass all those who took a marked interest in issues related to the Orient and the propagation of Oriental knowledge.⁴⁸ When writing his *Bibliothèque des idées reçues*, Gustave Flaubert chose to define an Orientalist simply as “un homme qui a beaucoup voyagé.”⁴⁹ Although this definition then expanded to include a very specific type of colonial policy within British India which represented “a conservative and romantic approach not only utilizing the languages and laws of both Muslim and Hindu India, but also desiring the preservation of allegedly traditional social relations,” by and large, its meaning remained largely unchanged until the advent of postmodern theory and the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said.⁵⁰ Beyond the slight changes in early definitions of Orientalism, its characteristics as an ideology which spawned cultures of repression within the non-Western world were largely unknown to the European intellectual establishment. This made Orientalism a far more sagacious force than a theory knowingly constructed by the French for the purposes of colonial administration. Orientalism instead was a series of preconceptions which enabled such theories to appear.

Said was not the first to delve into the ideological depths of European cultural constructs. His work was inspired by the studies of generations of post-modern theorists including Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Friedrich Nietzsche.⁵¹ The theoretical work of Foucault particularly underpinned Said’s larger theory of Orientalism by drawing on Foucault’s concept of discourse as the means

⁴⁸ Peers, pp. 884.

⁴⁹ Gustave Flaubert *Catalogue des opinions chic* in *Œuvres* : As Quoted in Said, pp. 185.

⁵⁰ John M. MacKenzie. *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. xiii.

⁵¹ A.L. Macfie. “Introduction.” *Orientalism: A Reader*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. 5.

through which knowledge is transformed into power. This perception is heavily entrenched within language and the power relationships which it produces. When combined with the anti-imperialist rhetoric of scholars such as Frantz Fanon and the discussions of the regeneration of mythologies of Roland Barthes, the concept of discourse is elevated to an entirely new field of complexity and cultural understanding.⁵² Thus, Said's foremost contribution to the field of Orientalism was to expose it as a larger philosophical construct by appropriating the work of his forebears to best illustrate its furtive role in the construction of knowledge of the entirety of the non-Western world. Without such an epistemological foundation, Orientalists would merely remain the scholars and voyagers of the nineteenth-century definition.⁵³ They would be left with an ideological ignorance of the forms of knowledge which enabled them to gain these roles and propagandize constructed views of the Orient.

Within the introduction to his book Said assigns three separate but mutually-reinforcing definitions of the term Orientalism. The first deals with its previously-established academic connotations. In this definition, "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism." The second approaches Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident,'" otherwise known as "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics,

⁵² See: Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge Classics, 1969, pp. 7-10; Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1961, pp. 3-10; Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Levers. London: Vintage Books, 1992, pp. 109-120.

⁵³ Peers, pp. 884-885.

novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on.⁵⁴ This definition encompasses both the assumed ideological and cultural divide between the Orient and the Occident and the more imaginative descriptions of the Orient referenced by the later definitions of the term. It paints the entirety of non-Western world as the cultural contestant to Europe, helping to define what is European by explicitly delineating what it is not – that is, Oriental.⁵⁵ Such a view saw the definition of the Orient as based on supposed factors which differentiated it from the west, namely its exoticism, barbarism, femininity, sensuality and chaos. These alleged characteristics were then essentialized within the scholarly and creative dimensions of Orientalist thought. They were always discussed with the prevailing assumption that due to its being Oriental, that is, non-Western, all elements of the non-European world must display these characteristics.⁵⁶

This version of Orientalism also encapsulates the creative works which evolve from the collection of “facts” and pre-conceived ideas regarding what made something “Oriental” and how these cultures were subsequently portrayed. Within Said’s definition, this version of Orientalism could include the works of such creative luminaries as Jane Austen, Paul Gauguin, and Dante, all of whom composed major works based on pre-conceived ideas of non-European cultures which to an extent, fetishized the exotic within them.⁵⁷ For example, in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said presents a study of Orientalist ideas within the literature of the colonial and post-colonial periods, continuing the examination of many of the themes addressed within *Orientalism*. He addresses the

⁵⁴ Said, *Orientalism*. pp. 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 58, 65,

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

continued presence of imperialistic principles within the confines of culture, specifically the Western literature of the colonial and post-colonial period. One of the most startling examples that can be given to illustrate this role of the “imagined Orient” within literature is Jane Austen’s treatment of the West Indies in her novel *Mansfield Park*. The novel’s plot serves as an excellent description of the European tendency to use literature and other creative endeavors as tools to propagate larger and longer-held stereotypes within Orientalist discourse. In *Mansfield Park*, the protagonist’s family has made its fortune off of the exploitation of a sugar plantation in Antigua. The colony itself is portrayed as a dark place which brings out the worst impulses in all those that go there. By the end of the novel, the evil inherent within human nature has manifested itself in the lives of both the primary characters that regularly traveled to and from the colony, nearly causing their physical and moral destruction. Such perspectives within enormously popular pieces of literature like *Mansfield Park* serve as excellent examples of the role of long-held stereotypes and supposed facts in the promulgation of information about the Orient.⁵⁸

Finally, the interplay between the strictly academic and the imaginative discussions of the Orient lead to Said’s final and most complex definition of Orientalism. He claims that:

“Taking the late eighteenth-century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having

⁵⁸ Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York, Vintage Books Ed., 1993, pp. 80-97.

authority over the Orient.”⁵⁹

In other words, this definition of Orientalism describes the power relationships inherent within the historical Orient and Occident, and the logic of ascendancy which substantiated the European ability to control and define aspects of the Orient based on pre-conceived notions of innate superiority. It exactly defines what Said claims characterized the Orient to Western intellectuals: the very simple fact that it was not Europe. The notions of power imbedded in such a seemingly straightforward definition are at the core of Said’s definition of Orientalism. Thus within Western thought, the Orient was forced to play the role of cultural contestant to European values, and could be made to fit into such a mold because it was believed to be unable to speak for itself.⁶⁰

This relationship generally implied a sense of “lack” surrounding the Orient, as the Orientals themselves were unable to define themselves on Western terms and within the experience of the Western tradition, therefore they were considered separate and not as advanced. Thus, the Orientalists who claimed to attempt to better know the Orient were really attempting to both define it on their terms, through such institutions as the European reliance on the written word, and then speak for it within the larger European intellectual sphere. It was this logic which ultimately provided the means and ideology for the transition of Orientalism into a physical discourse within the colonial enterprise.⁶¹ Yet it is this conception of Orientalism which is undoubtedly the most influential to the construction of knowledge about the non-Western world because it literally underpins all relationships between Europe and all non-European cultures. As Gayatri Spivak so rightly points out in “The Politics of Interpretation,” “One cannot of course ‘choose’ to

⁵⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 1-2.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

step out of ideology. The most responsible ‘choice’ seems to be to know it as best one can, recognize it as best one can, and, through one’s necessarily inadequate interpretation, to work to change it...⁶²

The historical and cultural repercussions of Said’s conclusions sparked a maelstrom within the modern intellectual establishment, with scholars scrambling to agree or disagree with Said’s deductions and later to apply these new understandings to their own individual areas of study. Within most realms of academia, the revelation of the Orientalist paradigm was generally met with acceptance and curiosity as to how this new concept would affect the examination of studies of the non-Western world. However, historians accepted Said’s conclusions with far more trepidation than the majority of its academic counterparts. Perhaps the most vocal of Said’s critics within the realm of historical study was Bernard Lewis, the noted Orientalist scholar of Islam and the Middle East. He argued that Said made serious errors in his approach to *Orientalism*, discounting large parts of history, while picking and choosing whatever examples best suited his conclusions, rather than attempting to construct a theory based on historical fact. Lewis’ vitriol toward Said and the concept of the Orientalist paradigm is startlingly prominent in his article “The Question of Orientalism” which goes so far as to claim that this new definition of Orientalism was “poison” and polluted “so many previously useful words [now] unfit for use in rational discourse.”⁶³ It is however possible that his violent reaction was partially inspired by the largely critical discussion of his works and methods

⁶² Gayatri Spivak. “The Politics of Interpretation.” *In Other Worlds : Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988, pp. 120.

⁶³ Bernard Lewis. “The Question of Orientalism.” *Orientalism: A Reader*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. 251.

within the pages of *Orientalism*.⁶⁴ Lewis was not the only scholar to question the more ideological, as opposed to historical precepts upon which the new theory of Orientalism was based. David Kopf, an expert on South Asian history wrote an enlightening piece entitled “Hermeneutics versus History” which called into question Said’s largely negative viewpoint of Orientalism and his seeming dismissal of the scholarly products of centuries of Orientalist thought. As Kopf writes “Unfortunately, Said is not really talking about Orientalism as it existed in concrete historical reality: as an ideology, a movement, and a set of social institutions. For him it is an idea, a construct, almost always sinister, with its own ‘history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary.’ It is a discourse...” According to Kopf, this attitude diminishes the power of Said’s conclusions and does a tremendous disservice to years of scholarly research and devotion which must now be summarily dismissed as innately flawed and inaccurate.⁶⁵ While calling on historical examples to provide an illustration of larger Orientalist frameworks, Kopf claims that Said is more concerned with the larger theoretical paradigm of Orientalism. That is, the ideological archetypes which formed the bases for why and how these historical events occurred. This necessarily leads to an emphasis on postmodern theory and a large variety of historical source material to serve as examples of these larger concerns.

Kopf raises a valuable question. What then becomes of the discoveries and works of Orientalist scholars whose writings, according to modern thought, are innately colored by a flawed logic? Are they merely dismissed for subscribing to the ingrained paradigm within cultural studies during their time periods? Or is it possible to appreciate their larger works while maintaining awareness of their embedded premises of “speaking for

⁶⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 315-321.

⁶⁵ David Kopf. “Hermeneutics versus History.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 39, No. 3 (May 1980), pp. 496.

the Orient?” The long-established history of Orientalist scholars and their tremendous accomplishments would seemingly argue that such a dismissal would be wrong, and that there is much to be appreciated within these works, imperfect though they may be. A brief examination of the major names within the field of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Orientalism provides a list of numerous historically-critical individuals whose contributions to their society’s understanding of Islamic culture shaped the prevailing attitudes of the time period. Sir William Jones, the eighteenth-century British philologist and lawyer was a vocal figure in English understandings of India. Employed within the British East India Company, he translated and proliferated a number of local texts to a wider European audience which helped to incite widespread British interest in India and Hinduism. He also used a number of classical Hindu poetic conventions to create his own poetic works which glorified the British occupation of India and their civilizing influence.⁶⁶ Although the example of Jones certainly conforms to Said’s assertion that the Occident often appropriated Oriental traditions, using them to reinvigorate their own stagnant culture, it seems unfair to summarily dismiss the entirety of his works based on his Western hubris.⁶⁷

Or perhaps it would be valuable to discuss the example of Eugène Burnouf, the eminent French translator of a number of texts ranging from classical Persian documents to Buddhist Sutras. After his death, his friend Jules Michelet credited him with elucidating the common bond between Christianity and Buddhism, saying that through his work “I so plainly saw the unique miracle of two Gospels, the one arising from the

⁶⁶ Michael J. Franklin. “Cultural Possession, Imperial Control, and Comparative Religion: The Calcutta Perspectives of Sir William Jones and Nathaniel Brassey Halhed.” *The Yearbook of English Studies*. Vol. 32 (2002), pp. 8.

⁶⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 115.

Orient, the other from the Occident.”⁶⁸ In a similar vein, Silvestre de Sacy was a prominent French Orientalist at the turn of the nineteenth-century who was essentially the godfather of French Orientalism and Islamic studies. He was the first Arabic professor appointed to the renowned *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris, a post Octave Houdas would later occupy and became its director in 1824. During his time there, he inspired a new generation of Islamists whose own studies would be dramatically affected by Sacy’s approach.⁶⁹

He was the first president of the *Société Asiatique* and was responsible for the publication of a number of seminal texts within French Islamism, including the *Principes de grammaire générale*, the *Chrestomathie Arabe* and was a member of the team responsible for the publication of the *Tableau historique de l’érudition française*. His work codified the Islamic Orient in a form previously unseen in France, and added a dimension of his own intellectual beliefs to the translation of Arabic texts. Although Edward Said rightfully points out that his undertakings were colored by his own preconceived ideas of the Islamic Orient, that is, that it could be shortened, edited and the Orientalist scholar could pick and choose those works which he believed best represented it, his work paved the way for the likes of Octave Houdas, almost literally creating a field which had been previously neglected.⁷⁰

Houdas’ chosen method of increasing knowledge of foreign cultures was thus hardly an original one – it tapped into nearly a century of pre-existing Orientalist scholarship which prized textual studies and translation as the most effective ways to

⁶⁸ Raymond Schwab. *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*. Translated by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 291.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 297.

⁷⁰ Said, pp. 124-127.

approach the study of the Orient. The works of celebrated predecessors such as Silvestre de Sacy and Sir William Jones only enhanced the idea within the European consciousness that scholastic means of gaining knowledge of the Orient were most effective and that these efforts resulted in the most successful way of knowing and speaking for Oriental cultures. Houdas was firmly a scholar. His career trajectory was continually defined by education – both through the publication of new academic sources and the teaching of students within France and Algeria.

But during his time period and the era immediately following his influence, there was a startling shift in these preconceived assumptions, which claimed that ethnography gave a more thorough and complete understanding of Orientalist cultures. Despite its doctrinal changes, such a belief was still deeply ingrained within the larger Orientalist paradigm. The West could come to know and define the Orient, by focusing on an anthropological, “in the field” approach to the study of other cultures. This divide and eventual transition is perhaps best typified by Maurice Delafosse, the son-in-law of Houdas and a prominent Africanist. Examinations of his work reveal an oscillation between research methods which were deemed typically “Orientalist,” that is, based on translation, teaching and the like, and “Ethnographic,” based on increased cultural understanding through physical exposure and often work within the colonial administration. In the essays within *Maurice Delafosse. Entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l’itinéraire d’un africaniste*,” especially “L’Afrique par défaut ou l’oubli d’orientalisme,” Delafosse is presented as a conflicted soul torn between the Orientalist example of his father-in-law Houdas and his ethnographic mentor François-Joseph Clozel, a governor of the A.O.F. While such premises are debatable, they interestingly

typify the supposed evolution in Orientalist thought, using the two major influences in the professional life of Delafosse to represent the changing precepts of what forms of activity most effectively represented the Orient. However, Houdas encountered no such doctrinal challenges, remaining a firmly committed academic until his death.

Despite the fact that Houdas' numerous translations were renowned for their groundbreaking contributions to the field of Islamic studies, very little is known about Houdas the man. What information survives beyond his texts is primarily in the hands of his granddaughter, Louise Delafosse, and included in her biography of her father, Maurice Delafosse. Entitled *Maurice Delafosse: Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*, this book is a valuable source which provides an as-yet matchless wealth of information on the personal life of both Delafosse and his beloved father-in-law, Octave Houdas. By using her unrivaled access to private familial archives and her own memories of her father and grandfather, Louise Delafosse is able to portray both men in a softer, more domestic light than most historical figures usually receive in their posthumous biographies. She is also able to illuminate the character and personal history of Houdas – a man whose personal life is a complete mystery to those who attempt to glean information about him from the available public archives.

Unfortunately however, it is exactly this familial lineage and perspective that makes this biography a somewhat dubious historical source. Within its pages, Louise Delafosse displays an almost reverential admiration for her father that colors the nature of her discussion and the conclusions she draws about both his person and his legacy. For example, her biased views affect the presentation of her parents' marriage (her mother was Alice Houdas, Octave's youngest daughter) turning it into a largely idealized account

which fixates on their romance and barely mentions his notorious extramarital affairs with local women while within West Africa. Furthermore, as an obviously devoted Christian, she is occasionally judgmental about the well-known atheism of her father and grandfather, particularly within the discussion of her grandfather Houdas' anti-Catholic sentiments.⁷¹ Although this book provides an obviously biased familial account of the lives of Delafosse and Houdas, it is unfortunately the only real available source on the life of Houdas beyond pleasantries regarding his well-regarded translations. Thus, approaching such an academically-questionable work as an historical source is an endeavor which must not be taken lightly, and any discussion of its conclusions must be presented for what is: an unprecedented but imperfect look into the personal life of an accomplished yet enigmatic historical figure.

Octave Houdas was born in Outarville, an unassuming and small French community in the Loiret between Paris and Orleans on the first of October, 1840. At the age of six, Octave's father, a land surveyor named Victor, was suddenly transferred to the small Algerian port city of Dellys, and uprooted his family to come with him – including his wife, and his three children, Octave, Mathilde and Eugène. This move exposed young Octave to the intricacies of Islamic culture, a religion which fascinated him, and provided an entirely different spiritual viewpoint to that of the strict Catholic upbringing he would soon come to reject. According to Louise Delafosse, this spiritual repudiation came at the startlingly young age of twelve, when Houdas realized he had accidentally broken one of the strict rules surrounding preparation for communion by eating a radish shortly before mass. Such a crime was supposed to result in sudden death and when Houdas

⁷¹ Louise Delafosse. *Maurice Delafosse : Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*. Paris : Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-mer, 1976, pp 186-191, 244-245.

grasped that he had not been immediately smited for his allegedly heinous transgression as anticipated, he became a nonbeliever. From that tender age, he stopped attending mass but evinced a highly liberalized and tolerant attitude toward all forms of faith, especially Islam, for he believed that it contained few of Catholicism's shortcomings and deserved a more nuanced understanding within Western culture.⁷² This perspective served as an underlying theme for the majority of his published works and his life within academia, that is, his tendency to always approach Muslim culture through a balanced and tolerant standpoint, which allowed for a more informed reading of Islam and those who practiced it.⁷³

Houdas completed his schooling in Algeria and Marseille, eventually becoming certified as an official interpreter in 1860 soon after completing a tertiary degree in the Arabic language in Algeria. In 1863 he began his career as a professor of Arabic, rising quickly through the academic ranks, and soon becoming a full professor at the *lycée d'Oran*. Despite his fame as a translator and the ever-increasing honors and opportunities he received later in his life, it was this career as a professor which would sustain him, as he willingly chose to remain an educator until his death, encouraging a new generation of men to pursue careers related to the Arabic language and Islam. As his reputation as an expert in the Arabic language grew, Houdas was offered a number of prestigious opportunities, including a post at *l'École des lettres d'Alger* in 1878, eventually being named the president of the school's Oriental section and later named the *inspecteur*

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 188-189.

⁷³ Octave Houdas. *L'Islamisme*. Paris : Dujarric, 1904, pp. VIII.

general des medersas d'Algérie.⁷⁴ It was also here that his three daughters, Édith, Valentine, and Alice were born.

In addition to these professional honors, Houdas' name as an academic, translator, and repository of a formidable amount of information on Islamic culture was increasingly recognized in the intellectual community. He slowly began publishing various translations and original works on Islam and Arabic during this period. Although the majority of his most significant translations were not written until his time in Paris, his works in a number of scholarly journals and the like were ever more respected. In her book, *Maurice Delafosse : Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*, Louise Delafosse recounts a letter her grandfather Houdas received in 1894 from a young professor named A. Faïk in response to his article on the Koran in the *Grande Encyclopedie*. He writes:

*« J'ai éprouvé à la lecture de cet article une vive satisfaction et je dirai même un grand soulagement. Vous êtes un des rares, pour ne pas dire le seul Européen et non musulman, qui ait exprimé de la façon la plus impartiale son idée au sujet de ce code religieux musulman qui renferme la morale la plus pure et les préceptes les plus pratiques. Aussi, permettez, je vous prie, à un jeune musulman de vous exprimer la plus vive admiration qu'il a conçue pour votre personne. Un tel témoignage devait être assez rare à la fin du siècle dernier. »*⁷⁵

“During the reading of this article I experienced both a real satisfaction and a great feeling of relief. You are truly one of the rare, for being one of the only Europeans and non-Muslims to deal impartially with the

⁷⁴ Delafosse, *Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*, pp. 186-187.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 188.

Muslim religious code and morals. Please allow me as a young Muslim to express my very great sense of admiration for you. A fair treatment of these issues has been difficult to find.”

This flattering status as a gifted translator and spiritually-tolerant individual afforded Houdas a great respect within academic and indigenous circles. Throughout his lifetime, he was known as “Cheikh Houdas” for his extensive knowledge of Islamic culture by a number of Muslim notables, including the close friend of the French administration, Sheikh Sidia. It was this reputation as an Arabic expert, translator, and appreciator of Muslim culture which eventually won him his coveted position as Arabic professor at the renowned *École des Langues Orientales Vivantes* in Paris.

During this period, Houdas wrote the vast majority of his original works and gained access to the extensive community of Orientalists within Paris, including Marcellin Berthelot, the future governor François Joseph Clozel, and the members of the *Société de géographie*, who would later be responsible for providing him with a large number of the original documents he translated. By the time of his death, Houdas had taught and inspired a generation of new Islamists, both in Algeria and France, translated a startling number of documents crucial to the history of both North and West Africa, and wrote a number of ground-breaking original works surrounding Islam, Muslim culture, and Arabic. Despite the numerous accolades he received and the fact that he had established the type of personal relationships and mutual respect with his peers which usually encourage the glamorous life of an explorer or the prestige of a major political position, Houdas instead chose to spend his life in the pursuit of knowledge. It was this omnipresent focus on knowledge, combined with the desire to propagate it to others

which truly defines the thrust and importance of Houdas' career. His works and their impact on subsequent generations are his primary legacy.

Although Octave Houdas left behind a great imprint on colonial French understandings of Islam within his lifetime, there are few records which exist on him in the archives of the *Institut de France* in Paris. Within the Fonds Terrier, the private papers of Auguste Terrier, a powerful figure in colonial and academic circles, as well as the former President of the *Comité de l'Afrique Française*, there are just four short papers on Octave Houdas. The first, dated 8 December 1916, is a death announcement written by Maurice Delafosse, informing Terrier of the recent passing of his father in law.⁷⁶ The remaining three papers compose an exhaustive record of the publications of Octave Houdas during his apparently bustling and active lifetime. This record lists a total of 34 different publications, which ran the gamut from translations of classical and modern texts, to textbooks, to original scholarly works detailing the histories of Algeria, and Islam.⁷⁷

Undoubtedly the most famous items within his literary canon are the translations of the *tarikhs* –the *Tarikh es-Soudan* and the *Tarikh el-Fettach*. These documents, literally translated to mean annals, compose the two most valuable pieces of historical record of Timbuktu. They elucidate the history of a roughly similar time period and provide contemporary accounts of politics, daily life, royal histories, and the development of the oral and written tradition. These contrasting accounts of sixteenth and seventeenth century Timbuktu provide a crucial window into a dramatic period within the city's existence and exhaustively chronicle the city's history in a fashion unrivalled by any

⁷⁶ IF, Fonds Terrier, "La Mort d'Octave Houdas," 8 December 1916.

⁷⁷ IF, Fonds Terrier, "Resumé des Travaux et Publications de M. Octave Houdas," 8 December 1916.

other historical document. Historically, Timbuktu had long been a major centre of learning within the Islamic world and a source of fascination for European explorers, who heard tales of the mysterious scholars of the isolated city. It was not until the early nineteenth-century and the covert expedition of René Caillé that Europeans gained true information about the city, which had previously been heavily guarded. But the city's intellectual history after the fifteenth-century institution of Islam intrigued the European scholarly establishment because it was an example of an Oriental culture which was highly literate and relied on processes of education and transcription which were at least nominally similar to Europe's own.⁷⁸ This was a rare situation within pre-colonial Africa and the relative dearth of text-based societies led to serious difficulties in European attempts to reconstruct an African history within their Occidental doctrinal auspices.

One of the first major works published by a European on Timbuktu was *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse* by Felix Dubois. Published in 1897, Dubois' research on Timbuktu coincided with Governor Faidherbe of Senegal's increasingly aggressive military policy, which intended to extend French influence as far as the Nile and encompassed the area surrounding Timbuktu.⁷⁹ Within the pages of the history, Dubois presents an exhaustive chronicle on all known information regarding Timbuktu, combined with the personal experiences of his own travels to the city in 1895. It contains a heavy focus of current affairs and details of the things he saw while on his expedition but also contains an unprecedented amount of early history on Timbuktu, primarily from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸⁰ The majority of this information was learned from Dubois' exposure to a local history document published in the seventeenth century

⁷⁸ E.T. Hamy. *Tombouctou Conférence*. Paris : Librairie Armand Colin, 1902, pp. 2-4.

⁷⁹ Philippe Gille. *Ceux qu'on lit*. Paris : C. Levy, 1898, pp. 335.

⁸⁰ Félix Dubois. *Tombouctou la Mystérieuse*. Paris : Librairie E. Flammarion, 1897.

by Abderrahman ben Adballah ben □ Imran ben □ Amir EsSa'di known as the *Tarikh es-Soudan*. It provided a contemporary account of life within Timbuktu, based on what was assumed to be Es-Sa'di's own political exposure and an account of local oral and written tradition.⁸¹ Dubois brought the manuscript back to Paris, entrusting it to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, which would later be used in Houdas' final translation of the *Tarikh es-Soudan*. This final version was an amalgamation of three versions of the manuscript into one more coherent whole. The two others were also recovered by European explorers – one largely similar to the version provided by Dubois recovered by General Archinard and one sent by the director of the École des lettres in Alger.⁸²

While in Timbuktu, Dubois learned of the existence of another mysterious chronicle of local history known as the *Fettasi* by Mahmoud Kâti ben El-Hadj El-Motaouakkel Kâti and his descendants, which he was told provided the most comprehensive historical account of the former Nigerian countries, and served as the fundamental basis for nearly all other works on the history of the area. However, the work appeared to Dubois only in legend, as he was assured by local scholars that the only copies of the manuscript had been destroyed long ago. This deplorable situation was mourned by scholars interested in Timbuktu until the 1911 historical research mission of Bonnel de Mézières, sent by Governor Clozel to further explore the libraries of Timbuktu. While researching, Bonnel de Mézières was shown an incomplete and fragile manuscript, which was believed by his guide to be one of the most precious sources on local history. Bonnel de Mézières copied the document, transferring it to the hands of

⁸¹ Abderrahman ben Adballah ben □ Imran ben □ Amir EsSa'di. *Documents arabes relatifs à l'histoire du Soudan. Tarikh es-Soudan*. Translated and edited from the Arabic by Octave Houdas. Paris : E. Leroux, 1898, pp. III-VI.

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. XV.

Clozel who then entrusted it to the *École des langues orientales* in Paris. For a period of time, European scholars were unable to discern exactly what this document was, until a closer examination and a newly-discovered version of the document was recovered bearing the title of the storied *Tarikh el-Fettach*. Its translation was entrusted to the much-respected team of Octave Houdas and his son in law Maurice Delafosse, who in addition to being prominent members of the staff at the *École des langues orientales*, were also close personal friends of Governor Clozel and Bonnel de Mézières, the men responsible for the discovery of the document. They based their translation off of the original manuscript, first shown to Bonnel de Mézières in Timbuktu, its copy, and a more complete but largely illegible version discovered by Jules Brevié in 1912.⁸³ It later went on to cause an academic sensation and still serves as the most complete translation of the document for scholars interested in the history of West Africa.

Although the process of acquiring the *tarikhs* was an especially laborious one which proved to be somewhat dramatic, its basic points serve as a good illustration for the typical acquisition of Oriental manuscripts by Western scholars. Generally, in the experience of Houdas, these manuscripts were acquired through the holdings of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, and personal and scholarly relationships. The large majority of manuscripts available within France were brought to the country by explorers who travelled within the Orient and were able to return either copies of its major documents or the originals with them. Most often, these were entrusted to larger scholarly bodies such as the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, which made its most precious

⁸³ Mahmoud Kâti ben El-Hadj El-Motaouakkel Kâti and lhun de ses petits-fils. *Tarikh el-Fettach ou Chronique du chercheur pour servir à l'histoire des villes, des armées, et des principaux personnages du Tekrour*. Edited, translated and notes and index written by Octave Houdas and Maurice Delafosse. Paris : Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1913, pp. I-XIII.

holdings available only to an elite group of academics but allowed those men unprecedented access to the texts. Examples of such manuscripts are the Dubois-sponsored copy of the *Tarikh es-Soudan* and the *Histoire du sultan Djelal-ed-Din Mankobirti*.⁸⁴ Depending on the patronage of the explorer, that is, the person or group which provided the financial backing for a mission, any documents or scholarly information discovered were returned to them. Thus, Houdas gained access to the *Histoire de Maroc* manuscript due to his close ties with the Parisian geographical societies which sponsored the mission which led to its discovery.⁸⁵ As a continuation of the importance of personal relationships in acquiring scholarly manuscripts, Houdas also obtained a number of the works he later translated through his close friendships with notable people within Algeria and West Africa. For example, he received copies of the *Tedzkiret en-Nisiān* from Louis Archinard and the *Nozhet-El Hâdi* from the Algerian Cadi Si Choâib.⁸⁶ Despite his reliance on the travels of others to provide him with manuscripts while within France, Houdas did not confine himself merely to depending on others for access to documents, as he was often responsible for discovering them himself, as was the case with the *Epigraphie Tunisienne*.⁸⁷

Beyond translations, Houdas also wrote a number of Arabic textbooks which were widely used throughout Algeria and France during his lifetime, and proved to be

⁸⁴ Mohammad ibn Ahmad ‘Ali al-Nasawī Chibab al Din. *Histoire du sultan Djelal-ed-Din Mankobirti, prince du Kharezm*. Translated by Octave Houdas. Paris : E. Leroux, 1895, pp. V.

⁸⁵ Ettordjeman Elmo’ Arib An Douel Elmachriq. *Le Maroc de 1631 a 1812*. Translated by Octave Houdas. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Ernest Leroux, 1886.

⁸⁶ *Tedzkiret en-Nisiān fi Akhbār Molouk es-Soudān*. Edited and translated from the Arabic by Octave Houdas. Paris : Librairie d’Amerique et Orient, 1899, pp. XIII; Mohammed Esseghir Ben El Hadj Ben Abdallah Eloufrani. *Nozhet-El Hâdi: Histoire de la Dynastie Saadienne au Maroc 1511-1670*. Translated by Octave Houdas. Paris : Ernest Leroux, 1889, pp. VII.

⁸⁷ Charles Barbier de Meynard. “Mission de Basset et Houdas en Tunisie.” *Journal Asiatique*. 1re série (1882), pp. 279-80 ; René Basset and Octave Houdas. *Epigraphie Tunisienne*. Alger: P. Fontana et Compagnie, 1882.

extremely consequential in the teaching of Arabic.⁸⁸ Through his lively publications, he also contributed greatly to the ongoing scholarly debates regarding the dynamics of the Arabic language. The multiplicity of works which he published on the intricacies of Arabic grammar, differing interpretations of words and correcting the inaccuracies within other translations were truly great indeed.⁸⁹ Finally, in addition to the translation of notable works throughout African history and treatises on Arabic grammar, Octave Houdas also composed a number of scholarly original works meant to inform both academics and laymen alike about on Islamic and African issues. Perhaps the most famous of these, is Houdas' *L'Islamisme*, a basic introduction to Islamic precepts, doctrine and its specificities within Africa. Along similar lines, *l'Ethnographie de l'Algérie* was published to give readers an informative yet accessible account of the many ethnic groups within the country and how they relate to their neighbors in the rest of the Maghreb. It is most effectively utilized, however, as a brief history of the situations which led to the nineteenth-century ethnographic state of affairs.⁹⁰

The life and works of Octave Houdas display a strong, prevailing belief in the idea that education is the best way to bridge cultural gaps and create larger understandings between dissimilar cultural groups. This is obvious both in his impressive list of publications and translations, made available to the larger French intellectual establishment to aid in comprehension of Islamic cultural mores, and his sustained commitment to teaching. Although the majority of his time teaching was spent

⁸⁸ IF, Fonds Terrier, "Resumé des Travaux et Publications de M. Octave Houdas," 8 December 1916.

⁸⁹ See: Octave Houdas. "Lettre d'Alger." *Journal Asiatique*. Ire série (1884), pp. 42-50; and Octave Houdas and G. Delphin. *Recueil de Lettres Arabes Manuscrites*. Deuxieme Edition. Alger : Adolphe Jourdan, 1891. Both provide good examples of Houdas' larger collection of works on Arabic grammar.

⁹⁰ Houdas, *L'Islamisme*, pp. VIII, 1-9; Houdas, *l'Ethnographie de l'Algérie*, pp. 5-8, 122.

helping young Europeans or their descendants to better understand Islamic culture through comprehension of Arabic, he also played a pivotal role in the establishment and functioning of the *medersas*, or schools, within Algeria, which were largely under French supervision and created for the benefit of indigenous children. These scholarly institutions had a tremendous strategic utility for the French and became an ideological battleground between the French colonial and indigenous cultures, who although conquered militarily, were unwilling to completely relinquish their previously-held cultures and beliefs.⁹¹

Prior to French colonialism, the majority of indigenous children were educated in the *zâouiya*, or *medersas*, religious schools which taught literacy based on the reading and memorization of passages from the Koran. These courses were typically taught by local Muslim scholars who operated in conjunction with the neighbourhood mosque or Sufi Lodge. The French were widely suspicious of this form of education, claiming that it was both a threat to their authority, overly fixated on religion, and largely ineffective in its teachings. This last assumption was based on little more than French prejudice, as the *zâouiya* actually reached a large percentage of the local population which would have otherwise been ignored by conventional schools and instilled a basic degree of literacy within much of the citizenry. However, the French promptly made an effort to close these schools and instead institute a system of public education that indoctrinated indigenous populations with a largely pro-French message, in addition to their Arabic courses. They attempted to institute a system of public education to replace the previously-used religious schools which was much neglected and underfunded during the

⁹¹ Alf Andrew Heggoy. "Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict." *Comparative Education Review*. Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 1973), pp. 180-181.

first 30 years of colonization due to the supposedly overstretched colonial administration and *colon* intervention.⁹²

After 1883, and the French occupation of the majority of Algeria, renewed focus was given to the necessity of conquering the local populations both culturally and militarily, forcing an increased acceptance of French cultural mores through religion and education.⁹³ Within the realm of education, the most significant of these efforts was the institution of the French-Arabic *medersa*, whose aim, according to Louis Rinn was to give an education which simultaneously respected local religious precepts, while slowly encouraging an appreciation of French science and morality.⁹⁴

Financing indigenous education within Algeria afforded the French a tremendous number of luxuries. First, it allowed them to control the material which was disseminated within the schools. This could include a required understanding of French, a course in European politics, or history presented as sympathetic to French power and cultural gains. Potentially, this also entailed the strict control of professors hired to best indoctrinate the students with a pro-French outlook.⁹⁵ It also enabled the French to appear as benevolent overlords to those who would rebel, claiming that they ignored their cultural mores and treated the local populations badly. Finally, it allowed the French to train a new generation of indigenous students, sympathetic to French interests to later work in government as civil servants.⁹⁶

⁹² Louis Rinn. *Note sur l'instruction publique musulmane en Algérie*. Paris : P. Fontana et Compagnie, 1882, pp. 1-7.

⁹³ Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans*, pp. 337-342.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁵ ANSOM, Algérie 2U 16, "Lettre sur l'enseignement musulman."

⁹⁶ Louis Brenner. *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. London, Hurst & Company, 2000, pp. 45.

Despite such obvious strategic advantages to funding and controlling indigenous education within an altered form of a local institution, *medersas* never truly became the powerful force they had the potential to eventually be. Although they did achieve a number of successes in educating members of the local population, their reach typically only extended as far as the children of the wealthy and powerful local inhabitants who lived in the major cities. Although they did succeed in creating a group of Europeanized indigenous citizens, these graduates typically found themselves straddling the uncomfortable divide between a European culture which would never truly accept them and a traditional one which felt betrayed by their repudiation of local beliefs. Very few of those local inhabitants ended up playing a major role in Algerian government because only a minority emerged qualified for the few jobs which were available.⁹⁷

Houdas' role in teaching at these *medersas* and later monitoring appears by all accounts to be one that he took very seriously. He began his career teaching at the local lycées and universities, and fastidiously undertook his examinations of the local *medersas*. His granddaughter claimed that even after his move to Paris, he travelled annually to Algeria for the express purposes of visiting and inspecting the quality of local education. Although it is somewhat unclear what his purpose was in these missions beyond the general "inspecting," his continued and passionate devotion to the cause of "Franco-Muslim cooperation" was praised in 1909 by the Islamic theology professor M. Ben Mouhoub at the newly-inaugurated *medersa de Constantine*.⁹⁸ No matter what the undertaking, whether it be the inspection of medersas meant to increase cooperation between France and the native populations of Algeria, the publication of newly-unearthed

⁹⁷ Heggoy, pp. 185-186.

⁹⁸ Delafosse, *Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*, pp. 191.

historical documents or the membership in a geographical society, the trajectory of Houdas' career displays a remarkable devotion to increasing understanding between two supposedly disparate cultures. Perhaps due to his childhood, which assiduously combined the results of a Christian upbringing with a tolerant secularism and an exposure to Islamic cultural precepts, Houdas was a rare individual able to look beyond factors of religion and race to see the true value of cultural appreciation and understanding. This unique perspective informed the trajectory of his career, the challenges which he would undertake and should ultimately help to define his historical legacy.

University Of Cape Town

Chapter Three

If Octave Houdas is best known for his outstanding and diverse scholarly output, including the translation and publication of a number of Arabic texts, both historically vital and obscure, his contemporary Xavier Coppolani is perhaps well known for how others have been inspired to write about him. A Corsican national raised in Algeria, Coppolani quickly rose through the ranks of Algerian government as a sort of self-styled expert in Islam. Through the course of his elevation, he published one major text *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes*, with the eminent Arabist Octave Depont but primarily worked as a government emissary and explorer. Instead of using his knowledge of Islam to educate the larger French public and inform the French government in the distinctly academic form of Houdas, Coppolani worked as an ambassador to the Muslim populations of North and West Africa, representing French interests amongst a number of tribes and eventually expanding the French West African Empire to include a new territory, Mauritania. By the time of his premature death in 1905 at the hands of a West African Muslim, Coppolani was one of the most prominent voices on Islamic issues in the African colonies.

Despite these heady accomplishments, Coppolani's achievements would have most likely fallen into the annals of history as one of many similar officials who gave his life in the service of French colonial interests. However, others worked to ensure his legacy due to the dramatic circumstances of his death and the fascination he seems to have inspired in his contemporaries. The vast body of literature surrounding the life of

Xavier Coppolani is almost shocking when compared to the dearth of information that exists on the majority of his contemporaries. Even the most celebrated of French administrators, such as Pierre Lyautey or Joseph Gallieni were less memorialized by their peers, making the total amount of biographical information available on Coppolani seem almost excessive. The majority of these works stem from notable devotees such as Robert Arnaud, a young French Algerian who began his career as a member of Coppolani's retinue and maintained an almost fanatical obsession with his mentor throughout the rest of his life. Arnaud became an important government member in his own right, yet despite his many accomplishments and interests, he continued to keep alive the memory of Coppolani's exploits.

Xavier Coppolani was born to a poor family of low social standing in Corsica. Much like Octave Houdas, his family moved to Algeria when Xavier was young to gain more opportunities than they would have had in their native Corsica. It was in Algeria that Coppolani received his lycée education and studied at Constantine's *École normale*. No matter what the success he achieved in his later life, Coppolani always evinced a strong desire to be better, to accomplish more and to gain more respect. This attitude, which defined the entirety of his career, was most likely the result of his impoverished childhood, in which he almost literally had to start from nothing and slowly work his way up the administrative ranks through sheer willpower. While in school, Coppolani studied Arabic and gained a basic knowledge of Islam.⁹⁹ Upon graduation, he shrewdly realized the need for experts in the field of Islamic studies and Arabic translations. Coppolani worked diligently to fill this dearth in the French colonial administration by attempting to

⁹⁹ F.M. Colombani. *Un Enfant de Cyrnos sur les traces des Almoravides*. Tunis : Imprimerie du Nord, 1955, pp. 17-20.

style himself as that very thing. It is difficult to know if Coppolani's career in Islam was the result of a genuine passion or merely a well-timed career move. The most extensive biography which exists of Coppolani's early life was written by his devoted protégé Robert Arnaud, working under the *nom de plume*, Robert Randau. In Randau's eyes, Coppolani could do no wrong. Thus, the picture painted of Coppolani's motivations and accomplishments is almost pathologically laudatory. However, in his study of West African Islam, the historian Christopher Harrison approaches all of Coppolani's actions with a great skepticism and implies that he was merely a social-climber with the bare minimum of necessary skills for his vocation. One generally leaves Harrison's examination of Coppolani that he was better-served by his skill at self-promotion and his great personal charm than his knowledge of Islam.¹⁰⁰ Although my personal research led to no conclusion either way, such an explanation would certainly seem congruous with Coppolani's self-presentation in many of his personal reports and publications, which typically over-state his importance and paint him as a great hero.¹⁰¹ He began an administrative career within the French Algerian government working in a small *commune mixte* and attempting to slowly reach new heights of authority within the administration. Coppolani was smart enough to realize that this would best be accomplished with a patron, finally reaching the end of his wait upon meeting Octave Depont and getting the opportunity to publish his first major text.¹⁰²

Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes was a major work of Islamic study undertaken by Octave Depont and Xavier Coppolani, first published in 1897. In 1895,

¹⁰⁰ Harrison, pp. 20-22, 33-40.

¹⁰¹ ANSOM, Mauritanie "Dépêche sur les pays maures," 4 April 1904 ; ANSOM, AP "Mission Coppolani," 1899.

¹⁰² Robert Randau. *Un Corse d'Algérie chez les Hommes Bleus: Xavier Coppolani, le pacificateur*. Alger : A. Imbert, 1939, pp. 1-10.

the Governor-General of Algeria, Jules Cambon requested a survey of Algerian Islam and the Sufi brotherhoods be undertaken by a qualified Islamic expert to expand French understandings of the religious dynamics within its occupied territory. At the time, prevailing wisdom held that the Sufi brotherhoods throughout Algeria were the most significant threat to French hegemony, as they provided a centralized and organized leadership to select groups of the Muslim population, which could make France vulnerable to rebellion. Such viewpoints were based on the mistaken supposition that membership within the Sufi brotherhoods had grown exponentially since French invasion and were seen by the local population as an institutionalized vehicle for dissent.¹⁰³

At the time of publication, Depont was already a preeminent figure in the French colonial administration renowned for his expertise in Islamic issues and his reputation would only grow more illustrious as time passed. He was such a respected figure that in 1911, Governor-General Lutaud named him the lead Inspector of Algeria's *communes mixtes*, departments with both European and indigenous residents, and in 1929, he published *L'Algérie du Centenaire*, an exhaustive summary of relations with the native community of Algeria, which glorified their freedoms and rights¹⁰⁴. It is thus, somewhat, unsurprising that Depont, along with his young disciple, were entrusted with such a potentially significant study.

In total, *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes* reaches an astonishing 570 pages of text, tables and charts, with the majority of its bulk devoted to an analytical history of Sufism, including detailed sections devoted to the analysis of individual brotherhoods,

¹⁰³ Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans et la France*, pp. 514-515.

¹⁰⁴ Octave Depont. *L'Algérie du Centenaire : L'œuvre française de libération, de conquête morale et d'évolution sociale des indigènes. Les Berbères en France. La représentation parlementaire des indigènes*. Paris : Libraries de Recueil Sirey, 1929.

financial information on annual revenues and expenses, the political role of Sufism, and the interplay between Sufis and the larger whole of Muslims. Their analysis holds the rare distinction of being simultaneously overly generalized and yet also very specific in some respects (e.g., quite often treating Sufism as one homogenous and monolithic body while also focusing on the intricacies of belief within the individual brotherhoods). It is in these small details that the book truly shines, as Depont and Coppolani provide an exhaustive description of nearly every significant prayer, tradition, and school of thought within Sufism. This results in a somewhat overwhelming body of information to be chronicled but occasionally proves truly informative as a window into Sufi practices in the late nineteenth-century. For example, in the chapter entitled “Dénombrements des confréries religieuses” Depont and Coppolani give specific information on the exact number of schools, leaders and religious institutions for nearly every Sufi brotherhood within the Maghreb.¹⁰⁵ All this original detail is presented while still being attentive to the Orientalist scholarship previously composed, and attempting to fit it into the larger theoretical trends and understandings of Islam at the time of publication.¹⁰⁶

Although Depont and Coppolani did provide a wealth of previously un-discussed information in the gigantic tome, its final conclusions were ultimately very much in keeping with the prevailing wisdom of the time period. Their findings are presented in a way which is steeped in the rhetoric which characterized the Algerian school of thought during the late nineteenth-century. Namely, it claimed that if Islam is properly exploited, it could be of tremendous strategic utility to the French powers through its wide scope and acceptance within the Algerian population. That is, if France could control Islam,

¹⁰⁵ Depont, Octave and Xavier Coppolani. *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes*. Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1897, pp. 212-219.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 295.

then France could control the entirety of Algeria. However, the greatest threat to the ultimate realization of this goal was the supposed nefarious political domination of the Sufi brotherhoods. The brotherhoods and their leaders were allegedly the most prominent threats to French hegemony and their power and influence was greatly exaggerated within the scholarly works which conformed to the theoretical boundaries of the Algerian School of Thought.¹⁰⁷

In this sense, the conclusions of *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes*, although much-quoted and of great influence in the continually-developing French understanding of Islam, accomplish very little. After the enormous amount of fascinating information presented within the book, from a modern perspective, this conformity to prevailing rhetoric almost seems disappointing, and its theoretical resolution has been criticized by a number of historians, including Charles-Robert Ageron who claimed that the book's final conclusions had been composed in advance.¹⁰⁸ In a sense, however, the presentation of rather uninspired final conclusions was actually a fairly sound political move on the part of the writing team of Depont and Coppolani. By so accurately tapping into the abounding fears about Islam, that is, its dual strategic and revolutionary potential, the authors ensured that their study would make a splash within the larger policy world. It did garner the intended amount of attention in the years following its publication due to its unique ability to so accurately tap into pre-existing fears and beliefs regarding Islam. It seemed to say that "Yes! You were right! There is reason to fear the influence of Sufi brotherhoods but thanks to our exceptional knowledge of Islam, we can tell you the best ways to outsmart them." Among these recommendations were an increased state control

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰⁸ Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans et la France*, pp. 515.

of religious institutions, encouraging alliances with Muslim notables, particularly the *marabouts* and rewarding all those Islamic figures who were loyal to France as a means of slowly gaining increased control over the Sufi and larger Muslim religious establishment.¹⁰⁹

By confirming pre-existing fears and then presenting themselves as uniquely qualified to control their threat, Depont and Coppolani essentially made themselves indispensable figures to the sustaining of French colonial power within Algeria. If Robert Arnaud's assertion that the majority of the book was written by Coppolani and Depont's name was only attached to add gravity to its conclusions is true, then Coppolani potentially engineered a tremendous boost to his previously stagnant career and reputation.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, it was his contribution to this study which made his name within colonial circles and opened new doors to unprecedented power and influence. *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes* is, therefore, a unique historical document. It provides a wealth of useful information on Islam within Algeria in excessive detail which can be appreciated by modern historians and also engineers the career of Xavier Coppolani as an Islamic expert and necessary asset to the French colonial administration of Algeria.

Coppolani parlayed this great strategic success to a number of projects sponsored by the colonial government. Unlike the precedent of many strategic experts, Coppolani never joined any one administration and was instead traded on a project-by-project basis through various ministries. However, despite his Algerian background and the history of military control in the country, Coppolani primarily worked for civilian-sponsored

¹⁰⁹ Depont and Coppolani, pp. 264.

¹¹⁰ Harrison, pp. 20.

governments and had a shaky relationship with the military in general.¹¹¹ This somewhat tenuous position within a number of bureaucratic structures afforded Coppolani a good deal of freedom in available projects and a better chance of making a name for himself more quickly. Coppolani was sent as a French government representative to negotiate with various tribes throughout North and West Africa a number of times before his most personally significant mission to Mauritania. The objectives of his expeditions were varied – such as the reports undertaken for the Northwest African Inter-ministerial Commission to examine the effects of foreign encroachment into French territories and increased colonial cooperation.¹¹² However, the most famous of these perhaps are the 1899 trips to the Moorish and Tuareg tribes of the Sahel and the Tuareg north of Timbuktu sponsored by Jules Cambon.¹¹³

The first of these expeditions, according to Coppolani's record, was a great success. In his "*Rapport d'ensemble sur ma mission au Soudan français*," Coppolani was typically on message, beginning his report by asserting that France must cultivate friendships with the local *marabouts* and praising his own role in gaining Moorish trust for both himself and France. He is characteristically dramatic in his descriptions of the indigenous peoples' great devotion to France, claiming that they no longer fear fighting their great enemies because they know the French will protect them and even go so far as to lay down their swords in front of him, the great peacemaker. This self-congratulatory report spans thirty-four pages for a period of time which reached little over a month.¹¹⁴ Yet, as Harrison mentions, in his reporting of the second half of this mission, negotiating

¹¹¹ Randau, pp. 25-30.

¹¹² ANSOM, Mauritanie "Rapport présenté à la commission interministérielle du nor-ouest-africain," 1901.

¹¹³ Harrison, pp. 34.

¹¹⁴ ANSOM, AP "Rapport d'ensemble sur ma mission au Soudan français," 1899, pp. 1-19.

with the Tuareg outside of Timbuktu, Coppolani remains uncharacteristically silent, while two of his traveling companions, Robert Arnaud and a Captain Henrys present very different views of the mission's end result in letters written to the president of the *Comité de l'Afrique française*, Auguste Terrier.¹¹⁵ In keeping with his fawning biography of Coppolani, Arnaud is typically effusive about the efforts of "his Coppo," breathlessly describing his brave deeds and expressing his admiration for the tremendous diplomatic skill of his mentor.¹¹⁶ In contrast, Henrys, a military commander based in Soudan [present day Mali] wrote that he was unimpressed with Coppolani's supposed rapport with local Muslims, claiming that they refused to even talk with him¹¹⁷ Coppolani's unusual reticence would seem to support Henrys' view that the mission was a failure. Perhaps that is why later that year he was so set on beginning the most significant expedition of his short life – the pacification of Mauritania.

Despite his numerous other contributions to French colonialism and Islam, it is undoubtedly Coppolani's final mission to Mauritania which inspired the infamy most commonly attributed to his name. The beginnings of the mission commenced in 1899 under the vocal encouragements of Coppolani himself. His main attraction to the operation seems to be, as always, pride. The previous failure of the expedition amongst the Tuareg north of Timbuktu had wounded his ego and left him in need of a new cause. Undoubtedly, the successful conquering of a new French colony would both give him a renewed *raison d'être* and increase his prestige. According to Robert Arnaud, a significant element in his justification for "Why Mauritania?" was that Coppolani, like many of the time period, believed that the lighter-skinned Moors and Tuaregs were

¹¹⁵ Harrison, pp. 35.

¹¹⁶ IF, Fonds Terrier "Arnaud to 'Mon Capitaine,' 8 May 1899: As Quoted in Harrison, 209.

¹¹⁷ IF, Fonds Terrier "Lettre de Tombouctou," 27 July 1899 pp. 8-10.

culturally and intellectually superior to those with a darker complexion and a more native African descent.¹¹⁸ As the ethnic population of Mauritania was largely composed of the lighter-skinned variety of inhabitant, he alleged that the “white races” of Mauritania would be more hospitable to colonial incursion than the supposedly more volatile black-skinned inhabitants living south of the Senegal River.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the sharp divide between the warrior and priestly classes within Mauritania would give him an excellent opportunity to put the precepts of the Algerian school into practice. By attempting to separate and favor the priestly tribes over the warriors through a policy of rewarded cooperation and the threat of military invasion and eventual occupation, Coppolani hoped to firmly implant his foot in the door and enable France to gain control of Mauritania.¹²⁰

The current Mauritania is an expansive country primarily covered by desert. Its boundaries stretch from Senegal, with which it shares the Senegal River as a border, Morocco, Algeria, and Mali. In the late nineteenth-century, Mauritania was little more than an immense stretch of desert which lay between two of France’s colonial possessions. However, its location could potentially be of great strategic utility to the French who hoped to one day join the two colonies and possibly invade and occupy Morocco as well. A strong base in Mauritania would make such an invasion exponentially easier and encourage closer relations between the A.O.F. and Algeria. France had previously maintained a slight colonial presence in the country when Governor-General Faidherbe breached the Lower Senegal River Valley to deal with the

¹¹⁸ Randau, pp. 25-35.

¹¹⁹ ANSOM, AP 1420/1 “L’Organisation politique et administrative des pays maures de notre empire du nord-ouest africain, 12 June 1901 : As quoted in Harrison, pp. 37.

¹²⁰ Alfred G. Gerteiny. *Mauritania*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1967, pp. 102.

disrupted trade in the area.¹²¹ However, despite these possible strategic advantages to an occupied Mauritania, many within the French government approached the endeavor with trepidation. According to historian Christopher Harrison's summary of the various prevailing fears, the foreign office was concerned about harming diplomatic ties with other European countries with local interests, the interior of Mauritania was judged to be inhospitable and difficult to reach due to its immense deserts and warlike inhabitants, and many simply argued that the occupation of Mauritania was simply not worth the required effort.¹²²

The mixed opinions regarding a Mauritanian conquest were weighed by the French government and eventually it was decided to establish a civilian protectorate within Mauritania based on close ties with the administration of neighboring Senegal and allowed Coppolani to begin the process of pacification. He gained the support of two of the most prominent Muslim clerics in the area, Sheiks Sidiya Baba and Saad Bu, both close allies of Coppolani and the administration who were each willing to support France in exchange for their help in controlling the local warrior clans. They remained strong supporters of the French for decades after the Mauritanian pacification, to an extent which shocked even the future Governor William Ponty.¹²³

Thus, in the short term, Coppolani's plan to peacefully invade was successful due to clever diplomatic maneuvering. However, the actual implementation of Coppolani's ambitious plan required extensive time and effort, and encountered quite a lot of defiance

¹²¹ Simonetta Calderini, Delia Cortese and James L.A. Webb Jr. *Mauritania*. Vol. 141 in the World Biographical Series. Oxford: Clio Press, 1992, pp. xi-xvii.

¹²² Harrison, pp. 37.

¹²³ ANSOM A.O.F. Senegal "Rapport au sujet de la politique indigène en Afrique occidentale française, January 1913.

along the way, both violent and non-violent.¹²⁴ As time passed, Coppolani slowly began to gain ground with his larger movement toward pacification as an alternative form of conquering, relying heavily on his previously-held Algerian school beliefs, his personal charm, and his negotiating abilities. On the way to his next conquest in Ardar, Coppolani and his men were forced to stop and make camp for the evening. It was here that disgruntled members of the Muslim Ghoudf brotherhood were able to sneak into the camp and assassinated Coppolani.¹²⁵

Among those with him were his close friend Arnaud, who seems to have been haunted by his mentor's premature death. He published two books on the subject, which are the most complete records available on the activities of Coppolani's final day on earth and the circumstances of his tragic death.¹²⁶ Arnaud later went on to become a significant figure in French colonial Islamism in his own right, eventually being named the Chief advisor to the A.O.F. on Islamic affairs, and writing the hugely influential *Précis de politique Musulmane*, a tome similar to Coppolani's own *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes* in its dramatic breadth and scope. He became renowned for his attempts to bridge French values with local tradition, as evident in the self-aggrandizing stories told in his semiautobiographical *Les Meneurs d'hommes* in which Arnaud paints himself as a wise soul able to combine modern doctrines with local traditional precepts.¹²⁷ However, despite his impressive list of personal accomplishments, Arnaud

¹²⁴ Yahya Wuld al-Bara. « Les théologiens mauritaniens face au colonialisme français : Étude de fatwa-s de jurisprudence musulmane. *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française v. 1880-1960*. Edited by David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1997, pp. 99-105.

¹²⁵ Louis Songy. "Assassinat de M. Coppolani." *Au Sénégal : la France d'Afrique*. Paris : Librairie d'éducation nationale, 1908, pp. 236-237.

¹²⁶ ANSOM, Archives Privées, Papiers Randau "La Mort de Coppolani;" ANSOM, Archives Privées, Papiers Randau "Le Pacificateur de la Mauritanie."

¹²⁷ Randau, Robert. *Les Meneurs d'hommes* : As quoted in Cohen, pp. 55.

quite obviously never moved beyond the influence of his former mentor and the circumstances surrounding his assassination. For a brief while, Arnaud composed works of fiction which detailed the thinly-veiled lives of Frenchmen and women working for the colonial service within Africa. Their characters are beautiful, intelligent and well-read, with one of his most powerful recurring figures quite clearly modeled on Coppolani.¹²⁸ Perhaps the most enduring sign of Arnaud's borderline obsession with the memory of Coppolani is an examination of the contents of his private archives available for public perusal at the Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer, the French government's division of overseas archives. His records contain an enormous amount of files, the majority of which are devoted to Coppolani. There are records of symposiums sponsored in Coppolani's honor to discuss the finer points of his textual legacy, letters from friends lamenting his loss, publishers receipts for manuscripts written about Coppolani and innumerable newspaper clippings of articles sporadically published to remind the larger European public of Coppolani's memory and tragic sacrifice.¹²⁹ It is through his efforts that the majority of the existing work on Coppolani and his life endures today.

Arnaud was not the only major figure to be haunted by the shocking circumstances of Coppolani's death. As a person, Coppolani seems to have inspired a great deal of personal loyalty in a number of figures. In his article "De Coppolani à l'Empire," Jean Pomier lamented the premature loss of such a great colonial figure, going so far as to use one of the most amusing descriptors of Coppolani employed by an admirer:

"Ce livre est un hommage. On voit aussi qu'il est une leçon. Nous ne

¹²⁸ Harrison, pp. 44.

¹²⁹ ANSOM, Archives Privées, Papiers Randau.

faisons ici que souligner l'hommage rendu à un maître de volonté, à un initiateur, à un savant modeste. À un de ces types d'humanité que nous appellerions volontiers un surhomme, si ce mot n'avait eu le sort injurieux, depuis les commentateurs maladroits de Nietzsche, de prendre un sens répugnant de dominateur tyrannique et de triomphant égoïsme. Mais soulignons davantage la leçon, les leçons qu'il comporte, et dont plus que jamais aujourd'hui le prix est éminent. Aujourd'hui."¹³⁰

"This book is intended as a tribute but one can see that it also imparts a lesson. All that we can truly do here is to recognize and return the sacrifice of a master of giving, an instructor, a modest intellectual. To one of those great types of men that one would voluntarily call superman if Nietzsche's critics had not already tarnished the term, instilling within it a repugnant sense of tyrannical domination and egoism. But learn from the lesson, the lessons which he lived, or today, the costs will be imminent. Today."

Friends were not the only people who attempted to find a larger meaning in the circumstances of Coppolani's death. The violent assassination by a Muslim of a man who consistently championed the necessity of forming bonds and alliances with France's Muslim subjects, dramatically threw into question his beliefs and consequently, the teachings of the Algerian school. The time of his death happened to coincide with a larger movement of anti-clericalism within France and the French colonies. It was generally assumed by administrators that the *marabouts*, whom Coppolani recommended befriending, were the Islamic equivalent of the suddenly-despised clergy. This belief, as

¹³⁰ ANSOM, Archives Privées, Papiers Randau "De Coppolani à l'Empire par Jean Pomier," pp. 883.

it coincided with the brutal death of the defender of pacification, only served to escalate tensions between the French and Muslim populations.¹³¹ This atmosphere of mutual suspicion continued relatively unabated for the next few years, culminating in the Ouali of Goumba affair, when the French government of Fouta-Diallon became convinced that Tierno Aliou, the Ouali of Goumba, a powerful but elderly Fulbe cleric was attempting to incite revolution. They staged a large sensational trial in which the Ouali was eventually sentenced to death but due to his advanced age, died of natural causes before the sentence could be carried out.¹³² The period immediately following the death of Coppolani then called into question the theoretical precepts which he had spent his life defending although the Orientalist paradigm survived.

More generally, within the confines of the A.O.F., French colonial administrators practiced a form of government which was highly depended on precedent. By learning from the intricacies of the evolving Algerian relationship with Islam (e.g. the *bureaux arabes* and the Algerian school of thought), the new governors of the A.O.F. were able to tap into a veritable reservoir of information on and experiences with Islam. This precedent enabled West African governments to avoid some of the pitfalls of previous administrations and focus on policies which worked more effectively within the A.O.F. Thus, the work of a man such as Coppolani, who examined any number of tribes, cultures and religious practices all while still emphasizing the same type of rhetoric, would have been tremendously useful in the early years of West African administration. The A.O.F. as a body was far larger and more diverse than Algeria, containing within its boundaries a wide variety of territories, peoples and cultures. But had not yet learned how best to

¹³¹ Harrison, pp. 40-42.

¹³² Gouvernement général. *L'Afrique occidentale française*. Janvier 1912, pp. 14.

administrate such varied populations. Through periods of trial and error that led to more localized, as opposed to centralized way of approaching Islam which better fit the realities of the West African experience. Although his work undoubtedly contained merit beyond the experimental application of a broader theory, it could be argued that Coppolani in West Africa represented a form of the old guard hopelessly devoted to theories which were no longer applicable to the colonial reality. The circumstances of his violent death and the reverberations it affected throughout colonial circles can be seen as a salient reminder of the constantly-evolving need to reassess pre-conceived conceptions of colonial populations and the need to evaluate each colony on its own merits while attempting to safeguard French interests.¹³³

It is Octave Houdas who conforms most rigidly to the Orientalist paradigm elucidated by Edward Said in the pages of *Orientalism*, as he was a scholar who translated a number of classical texts from an Oriental country and, thus, attempted to “speak for” the Orient by defining the forms in which it could be discussed. Xavier Coppolani undoubtedly participated in the perpetuation of the Orientalist discourse as well, albeit, in a different form. As a European national working and living within Africa, Coppolani most obviously conforms to the dimension of Orientalism which could best be termed as “Orientalism by proxy.” As always, the dynamics of this situation are best elucidated by Edward Said in his conjecture that:

“Residence in the Orient involves personal experience and personal testimony to a certain extent. Contributions to the library of Orientalism and its consolidation depend on how experience and testimony get

¹³³ ANSOM, Archives Privées, Papiers Randau “De Coppolani à l’Empire, par Jean Pomier.”

converted from a purely personal document into the enabling codes of Orientalist science. In other words, within a text there has to take place a metamorphosis from personal to official statement; the record of Oriental residence and experience by a European must shed, or at least minimize, its purely autobiographical and indulgent descriptions in favor of descriptions on which Orientalism in general and later Orientalists in particular can draw, build, and base further scientific observation and description.”¹³⁴

By living within Africa and actively attempting to codify his personal experiences, that is, to use his personal exposure to Islam and Arabic as a means of perpetuating certain forms of knowledge about the Orient and the continuation of French colonial occupation, Coppolani actively participated in the perpetuation of Orientalist discourse.

Coppolani and his administrative career also correspond to Said’s definition of Orientalism in the content of his scholarly research. Said argues that “When a learned Orientalist traveled in the country of his specialization, it was always with unshakable abstract maxims about the ‘civilization’ he had studied; rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty ‘truths’ by applying them, without great success to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives.”¹³⁵ Such a tendency to be relatively unaffected by the reality of the local situation surrounding him was almost painfully characteristic of Coppolani’s interactions with Islam. As a firmly committed member of the Algerian school of thought, literally all of the work that he produced claimed to confirm that the Sufi brotherhoods were a threat and *marabouts* could prove to be valuable allies for France. Even when there was evidence to the contrary, Coppolani

¹³⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 157.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 52.

remained ideologically steadfast and refused to surrender his previously held beliefs about what exactly defined Algerian and West African Islam.

Furthermore, there does seem to be one glaringly obvious element to the role of the “Orientalist expert” within colonial administration: the blatant contribution to the continued French presence within an Oriental country. Instead of ideological repression and control, the colonial administrator was literally attempting to control the Oriental based on his own understanding of European cultural superiority. The scholarly undertakings of men like Houdas were largely attempted for the sake of knowledge and education, despite their participation in the deeper Orientalist paradigm as conforms to Said’s postmodern and theoretical understanding of the term. Yet with the career of Coppolani, there are no such deeper layers of meaning and repression. His life’s work was the pursuit of knowledge for the larger pursuit of power. He used his fluency in Arabic and exposure to Islamic culture to both strategically benefit the colonial administration and concurrently increase his own influence. He claimed to speak for and understand the indigenous populations of Orientalist countries and used that power to blatantly assert the Occident’s right to control the Orient. Thus, Coppolani contributed to the perpetuation of the Orientalist paradigm through his obvious belief in European cultural superiority and its right to exert its domination throughout the globe.¹³⁶

What then was the intellectual and cultural legacy of Xavier Coppolani? As a scholar, Coppolani published a valuable and detailed work on the Sufi brotherhoods yet instead chose to fit its conclusions into the larger prevailing logic of the time period, that is, the Algerian school of thought to make his conclusions more marketable. In fact, this

¹³⁶ Edward Said. “Shattered Myths.” *Orientalism: A Reader*. Edited by A.L. Macfie. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. 101-102.

larger theme ran through the entirety of his works – marketability. How best could he market himself, his knowledge, his works, and his conclusions to better achieve that earthly respect and prestige that he so clearly desired? How can the legitimate contributions to the French understanding of Islam of a man so desperately striving for power and influence be judged? Such quandaries are the reason why Coppolani has generally been relegated to the realm of historical clown. Coppolani’s very real and valuable supplements to the understanding of Islam and French exposure to the new territory of Mauritania were lasting legacies whose real benefits are often ignored for the salacious and more voluminously chronicled elements of his history. Yes, there are scandals, vertical mobility, egoism, and tragedy within the life of Xavier Coppolani but there are also sustained instances of cultural insight which merit an inclusion in the larger scholarly discourse of the life and works of Xavier Coppolani.

Chapter Four

Thus, in the final analysis of the comparative lives of these two men, Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani, what lessons can be gleaned from their corresponding life experiences? Relating back to the title, what exactly does it mean to live African history and how do Houdas and Coppolani fit into that larger question? What, in the end is the result of a life within the annals of history? Without resorting to banalities, such a question is difficult to answer comprehensively. Perhaps because its language is so often couched in generalization or truisms, attempting to accurately summarize and analyze the life of an historical figure is a difficult endeavor. Too often a comprehensive profile of an historical event, person, or phenomenon is in its conclusion reduced to niceties and trite statements which do a great disservice to the remainder of the historical inquiry. Thus, this chapter will attempt to avoid such an ideological impasse by comparing the similarities and differences in the lives and legacies of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani through the prism of the larger theoretical concerns discussed throughout this study. By always maintaining a sharp awareness of the effects of the Orientalist paradigm, the influence of geographical and ideological surroundings, and the need to create a full portrait of any historical figure to best understand his or her true impact, this chapter both briefly emphasizes the pre-existing themes of this study and attempts to take a fresh look and the comparative lives of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani.

Within the confines of the Orientalist paradigm elucidated by Edward Said in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, is the idea that even beyond the knowing repression of non-

Western peoples which occurred during the colonial enterprise, there was a deeper and far more pervasive form of repression couched within the European scholarly discourse and its implied rhetoric of Western superiority. Said broadly claims that this inescapable cultural dynamic between the exotic Orient and the culturally-superior Occident which could come to know, describe, and eventually speak for the entirety of the non-Western world ingrained a dialogue of inferiority which has characterized relations between the cultural East and West for centuries.¹³⁷ Both Houdas and Coppolani seemingly fit into Said's larger definition of the term "Orientalist." Houdas exemplified Orientalism through his role in the Orientalist academic establishment, picking and choosing both classical and modern texts worthy of translation, as well as more directly dictating the curriculum which was taught to indigenous school children in the Algerian *medersas*. Coppolani, in contrast, knowingly contributed to the perpetuation of indigenous repression under the French colonial government, using his supposed expertise in Islamic studies to aid the government's strategic occupations in North and West Africa.

One of the larger distinctions I have relied on within the comparative aspects of this study is the contrast between Houdas and Coppolani as disparate Orientalist "types." In this logic, Houdas becomes "the scholar." According to the typical Orientalist definition, this makes him a stuffy Western academic "specializing" in either the knowledge of an individual Oriental culture, language or both. In the lines of Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan, such an individual translated and edited classical texts, thereby essentializing the Orient as a bizarre and historically-defined place which was unable to enter the modern world. Furthermore, by editing texts, as in publishing a *Chrestomathie*, or a collection of a culture's significant literary passages, and deciding exactly which

¹³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 3-6.

aspects of the Orient were the most important to know, the Orientalist perpetuated the notion that he was able to speak for the Orient on a more comprehensive scale.¹³⁸ In contrast, “the explorer type” practiced what I deemed “Orientalism by proxy,” that is a type of Orientalism based on the supposition that by living in an Oriental environment, one can codify personal experiences and create a reservoir of Oriental knowledge which eventually metamorphizes into an official record of what defines the Orient. Within their travelogues, men such as Gustave Flaubert did just this – turning their own personal experiences into indisputable fact regarding the nature of Oriental life and culture.¹³⁹ However, viewed through the case studies of Houdas and Coppolani the boundaries between these two distinct types are not nearly as rigid as they first appear. Houdas, “the scholar,” also spent a great deal of time living within the Orient and used his experiences there to inform his later academic publications, which is for Said, the key to what defines someone as participating in “the explorer” form of Orientalism.¹⁴⁰ And what of the example of Maurice Delafosse? As an administrator, educator, and scholar, he transcended the ideological divides which were so supposedly inflexible at the end of the nineteenth-century. Although Houdas and Coppolani broadly conformed to two different types of Orientalism, the boundaries between the two were actually quite permeable. As has been constantly reemphasized throughout the course of this study, historical figures don’t so easily fit into the stereotypical boxes to which they are assigned.

Houdas and Coppolani make an intriguing pair for a comparison based on the effects and influences of geographical and ideological surroundings on personal development. Both men were born within Europe, then moved to Algeria at a young age.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-133.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 191.

Interestingly enough, it was this early exposure to Islam through their childhoods and daily lives within the strongly-Muslim culture of their Algerian homes which seemed to interest each of them in a later career in Islam.

They were also both educated in *lycées* in Algeria and were later trained in Arabic and Islamic culture. Despite their similar early educations, childhoods within Algeria and shared vocations as Islamists, it is here that comparisons between the two men end. Their early similarities led to disparate paths within their future Orientalist endeavors. While Houdas pursued a career in teaching and translation, eventually basing himself permanently in Paris, Coppolani spent the majority of his life within Africa working as an employee for various government ministries. Similarly, Houdas used his growing prestige within Orientalist circles to gain unprecedented access to newly discovered texts, writing successful translations which are still well-respected today. In contrast, Coppolani used his growing fame to convince the French government that it would benefit from a supposedly peaceful invasion of Mauritania, enabling the territory to geographically join the African colonies of Senegal and Algeria. This career-defining move made Coppolani's name notorious within French colonial circles, as it was this mission that led to his violent death at the hands of a disgruntled Mauritanian Muslim.

Perhaps the most interesting element of the differing lives and career paths of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani is the fact that although they had so much in common on a superficial level –education, early exposure to Islam, childhoods in Algeria, and careers as prominent Islamists, there is no historical record of any shared knowledge of the other's existence. Coppolani and Houdas never met and there is no real mention of the works of one another in any surviving documents. By the late nineteenth-

century, the Orientalist paradigm had become so deeply embedded in European colonial culture that it was entirely possible for two people to practice similar vocations, achieve notoriety for their exploits and never have their paths cross.

As befits the prevailing Orientalist obsession with the examination of texts, what can be gathered from the textual records left behind by Houdas and Coppolani? Houdas, ever the scholar and educator, has left behind a large variety of academic texts with regards to Islam and Africa. The breadth of his studies is truly impressive, covering a wide variety of subjects and formats but always undertaken with the larger intention of increasing cultural understanding amongst the members of the larger populace. However, there is next to no existing information on his personal life beyond a few short mentions in biographies of his son in law, which effectively reduces Houdas solely to his academic role at the expense of his personal life. In contrast, Coppolani composed a comparatively small number of published works. His contribution to *Les Confréries Religieuses Musulmanes* and a number of government reports are the only real sources he left behind, yet his personal magnetism and somewhat salacious life have inspired a surprising number of biographies, articles, and conferences solely devoted to the study of his life and legacy. The above comment is not intended to diminish the importance of what Coppolani did achieve within his short lifetime but instead to draw attention to the fact that the vast amount of literature on the personal biography of Coppolani seems somewhat incongruous with the sum total of his accomplishments. This particular state of affairs quite accurately elucidates a difficulty in modern historical scholarship: how exactly do existing source records color our appreciation of historical figures? At least in the case of Coppolani and Houdas, the existing source material would seem to quite

accurately display their overriding individual preoccupations (Houdas' interest in the scholarly dissemination of knowledge and Coppolani's in self-promotion).

Throughout the course of this paper I have attempted to argue that the life and works of Xavier Coppolani and Octave Houdas were significant enough to merit serious historical discussion beyond the essentialized mentions of their accomplishments which they have typically received. By presenting a broader perspective of their personal lives and scholarly output, one is able to create a more nuanced view of their eventual accomplishments. That is not to say that these single characteristics are unworthy of discussion. Octave Houdas *was* the father in law of Maurice Delafosse! And Xavier Coppolani *was remarkably* self-absorbed! My goal in such an undertaking is not to argue that these talking points are inaccurate or do not merit discussion – they undoubtedly do. However, the relatively common practice of reducing all historical figures to a few supposedly key events or facts does their memories and legacies a tremendous disservice as it ignores the human complexities which inspire these seminal occasions. For example, the knowledge that as a young boy, Octave Houdas ate a radish which inspired a lifelong commitment to atheism and religious tolerance forces a re-examination of his fascination with Islam.¹⁴¹ Would Houdas have developed into the Islamist scholar he eventually became if not for this odd childhood story? By reducing and ignoring the humanity of our historical figures, we concurrently ignore the emotions, insecurities, and enthusiasms which are the true forces shaping our world and its historical development. I have attempted to portray a more complex depiction of my chosen historical figures, Houdas and Coppolani to draw attention to this conundrum currently facing the modern

¹⁴¹ Delafosse, *Le Berrichon conquis par l'Afrique*, pp. 188-189.

historical establishment. How can we truly understand the forces of history without a strong grasp of the humanity behind it?

What then does it mean to live African history? As evidenced by the lives of Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani, it required a sustained and lifelong commitment to Africa and its colonies. On a practical level, both Houdas and Coppolani were vocal figures in the evolving understanding of Islam within the French colonies and made great contributions to the establishment of new policy and awareness of academic issues surrounding Islam and the African colonies. However, they can also be seen to have lived African history because they actively inserted themselves within it. Even when he moved to Paris, Houdas still maintained strong ties to his Algerian home, visiting annually, inspecting the *medersas* throughout the country, visiting family, and meeting with friends. The colony and the deep role it played in his development never truly left him, as evidenced by his sustained commitment to the pursuit of Orientalist knowledge. Furthermore, the dynamics of their individual lives were greatly affected by changes within the African continent and the policy of its colonies. When French colonial theory made its slow shift from practicing a policy of assimilation to one of association, both Houdas and Coppolani were living within Algeria and experienced the repercussions of this change firsthand. When France began its pacification of Mauritania, Coppolani was there to lead the charge. Thus, to live African history is to ingratiate oneself within its dynamics – taking part in, inspiring, and experiencing the gradual evolution of its history.

Conclusion :

The majority of this paper has focused on an examination of the French colonial endeavor as presented through a distinctly European lens. It is intended to fill a historical void by providing a comprehensive examination of two influential colonial figures, Octave Houdas and Xavier Coppolani, and to encourage a balanced and enhanced understanding about their roles in the development of Franco-Islamic relations. As valuable an end goal as that is, this paper also attempts to use their very specific and distinct approaches to the study of Islam in West Africa and Algeria to discuss the larger paradigm of nineteenth-century Orientalism in which their works were necessarily complicit. It is argued that such an avenue to approaching the larger and far more formidable issue of French colonialism provides a unique, almost micro-perspective of the questions and controversies which constantly challenged the continued perpetuation and hegemony of the French colonial enterprise while simultaneously shedding light on the lives of underappreciated historical figures.

One very obvious vexation inherent within such an approach is that it almost completely discounts the history and agency of the indigenous peoples who were colonized by the French. Despite the long history of agency and action on the part of the indigenous peoples forcibly colonized by the French, their triumphs and tragedies are relegated to mere side notes of history in a paper exclusively focused on the European perspective such as this. Within the research of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, exploration and inquiries into the Oriental world took place deeply entrenched within the Orientalist paradigm elucidated by Edward Said. That is, scholars, researchers and

explorers approached the study of the historical Orient within the confines of European scholarly institutions. This included an overwhelming focus on the written word, the ability of the European to experience the Oriental and then truly know and speak for it to a larger European audience, while essentializing the characteristics of the Orient, emphasizing its exoticism. One has to look no farther than Hegel's chapter on India in his celebrated *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* to see proof of a great intellectual figure deeply entrenched within the prevailing Orientalist paradigm. It begins with reflections of India as dreamlike and akin to female beauty and then moves onto a discussion of "India the land of desire to conquerors," including an extensive discussion of the conquests of both Alexander the Great and the more contemporary English.¹⁴² Thus the majority of printed sources from the nineteenth century were written by Europeans, from the European perspective, in a European format.

Although the definitions of what qualifies as valid scholarship have been both discussed and dramatically expanded within the past fifty years, the traditional confines of the academic discipline of history make it difficult for the understanding of what constitutes history to evolve. In other words, the very definition of what makes research *historical* research – a reliance on texts from the time period – is chaotically intertwined with the type of historical relationship of subjugation and authority which can be characterized as Oriental. If Oriental cultures contain no serious history of text-based scholarship or records, the undertaking of a dogmatically historical study of the non-Western world becomes infinitely more difficult. Although this is obviously not a characterization of the entirety of the Orient, communities such as the Muslim intellectual centre of Timbuktu had a written tradition, many aspects of Oriental histories were

¹⁴² Hegel, pp. 146-150.

ignored because their cultural models were seen as incongruous with proper Western forms of scholarship. Of late, definitions of what constitutes acceptable source material have slowly evolved to include media such as oral history but for the majority of these last two centuries, this paradox shaped the types of historical studies which were undertaken by Western scholars. Intellectual luminaries including Dame Marjery Pelham argued that prior to colonialism, Africa as a whole had no true history which could be told because there were no written sources which could be cited documenting the chronological evolution of society.¹⁴³

The modern wake of postcolonial studies has challenged the entrenched nature of such epistemes, providing a much-needed balance to the study of the formerly “Oriental” history. Within an African context, this is probably best evidenced by the works of men such as V.Y. Mudimbe, Terence Ranger, and the members of the Ibadan School of history. The Ibadan school especially used history as an almost political tool, reconstituting traditional notions of the civilizer and the civilized to afford Africans more power and agency than they had traditionally been relegated within history, and using such narratives as a means of increasing African pride.¹⁴⁴ Most famously, within Algeria, Frantz Fanon was a pioneer of anti-colonialist discourse in his condemnations of French imperialism, providing the theoretical framework which would serve to shape both post-colonial theory and anti-imperialism.¹⁴⁵ There has also been a move to increasingly utilize oral histories within historical contexts which has been relatively successful and contributed to the changing definitions of history. However, there have also been some very real challenges to such an approach to history. The highly nationalist character of

¹⁴³ Jan Vansina. *Living with Africa*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, pp. 40, 123.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. .

the majority of these studies serves almost a propagandist function and thus it could be alleged that facts often take the back seat to pride in a number of these studies. Through the utilization of some rather dubious source material, a number of works from the Ibadan school in particular have since been discredited as merely a propagandistic reaction to the inequities of prevailing Orientalist scholarship.¹⁴⁶ Although the historical validity of many of the post-colonial histories has been called into question, in aggregate, these studies have proven to be groundbreaking, within the realms of scholarship and national discourse, as evidenced in the works of Fanon.

Notwithstanding the contribution of these works to the establishment of a more balanced African national discourse, their larger examples are still not fully emulated by the modern historical intelligentsia. That is, the difficulties of undertaking an historical study through an African as opposed to a European perspective are still far too daunting for a number of scholars. Although there are notable exceptions to this rule, by and large colonial history is still shown through the history of the colonizer – his records, his methods, his objectives. Even this paper, an examination of the lives of two prominent Orientalist figures, intended to illustrate the dynamics of nineteenth-century Orientalism using the lives of two underappreciated political figures, continues the Orientalist legacy in its own way. In an effort to be as authentic as possible, various sources for this paper were original source documents which were viewed in France and in French as part of an effort to bring historical scholarship to understanding the lives and contributions of Houdas and Coppolani which are deeply embedded in the Orientalist paradigm. In part,

¹⁴⁶ Olusoji Samuel Oyeranmi. "Teaching History and National Development in the Third World: The Nigerian Experience." *World History Connected*.
<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/whc/5.1/oyeranmi.html>. Accessed on 23 December 2009.

due to such pure methodology, this paper must also be seen as an extension, albeit a more balanced expression, of the Orientalist paradigm.

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