

Camille Lefebvre

Histories of a Conspiracy, Zinder, 1906: Rethinking Colonial Occupation

By tracing the history of what French colonizers considered a conspiracy against them, this paper seeks to reconstruct the complexity of the first phase of colonial occupation in Zinder (Niger) during the early twentieth century. It draws on three types of source, corresponding to three successive moments and to three different perspectives on the event: the archives of the colonial investigation, carried out by French officers to justify their action; the personal journals and notes of the interpreter Moïse Landeroin, who did not believe the accusations and opposed his superiors; and finally the letters written in Arabic by one of the defendants, Malam Yaro, to plead his innocence. These letters enable a new reading of what took place in 1906 by highlighting the social intricacies of Zinder society. Using more diverse sources thus makes it possible to reconstruct the different timelines of the occupation and to reveal the blind spots of a purely colonial interpretation of the event.

Benedetta Rossi

Periodizing the End of Slavery: Colonial Law, the League of Nations, and Slave Resistance in the Nigerien Sahel, 1920s–1930s

When, how, and why—if at all—did slavery end in the Nigerien Sahel? What processes facilitated the emancipation of enslaved persons? What were the strategies of colonial administrators, slave-owners, slave-traders, slaves, and slave descendants? In the first two decades following France's occupation of the Central Sahel, legal abolition did not lead to the suppression of slavery, because laws were not at first enforced. But in the 1920s the internationalization of abolitionism that followed the creation of the League of Nations resulted in the activation of anti-slavery laws. This article argues that emancipation was initially propelled by the establishment of international surveillance mechanisms with the power to (de-)legitimize colonial rule at a time when no one was actively seeking to end slavery in this region. The first section highlights the ambiguities of European abolitionism and reveals the web of connections between the League of Nations, the French state, and French administrators on the ground. The second section develops a microanalysis of slave resistance, showing how some enslaved and trafficked persons, especially young women, profited from global institutional transformations to incriminate their owners and traffickers. The final section considers the contemporary recollections of an elderly woman, who in her youth experienced circumstances analogous to those described earlier in the

article. Her perceptions, and those of others like her, exist today in a context marked by tension between circumscribed proslavery discourses and national grassroots abolitionism.

Isabelle Grangaud

Fragment(s) of the Past: Archives, Conflicts, and Civic Rights in Algiers, 1830–1870

The first thirty years of the French conquest of Algeria witnessed the large-scale destruction of Algiers’s cultural heritage. Researching the processes by which this came about leads us to consider the conditions of production of two sources that refer to the period before the conquest: *Les édifices religieux de l’ancien Alger (The Religious Edifices of Old Algiers)*, by Albert Devoulx, and the “Ottoman collection” of archives initially established by the same figure. This dual archaeology, based on the reconstitution of Devoulx’s activities during his lifetime, reveals a virulent struggle over civic rights and particularly over the appropriation of endowments established by the city’s religious institutions. The sources considered here were part and parcel of this struggle. By paying attention to the claims they set out and the interactions between them, it becomes possible to retrace the disappearance of the mosques of Algiers and to appreciate the true nature of these sources.

M’hamed Oualdi

Imperial Legacies: The Historical Layers of a Maghrebi Society (1860–1930)

A close study of the trans-Mediterranean legal conflicts prompted by the death of a former Tunisian minister in Florence in 1887, this article calls for a new interpretation of the history of modern North Africa. Rather than focusing on a close reading of colonial primary sources or depending on a single colonial temporality, this new interpretation must incorporate other analytical frameworks. It must also consider the overlap of French and Ottoman imperial temporalities that persisted across the Mediterranean until the 1920s, as well as the increasing number of litigations initiated before the French colonization of Tunisia—legal cases that were still influencing the rationales of North Africans during the colonial period. Analyzing these litigations not only in terms of their colonial context but also according to other temporalities, as well as diversifying our sources, allows us to nuance the commonplace, often reiterated in scholarly works on colonial North Africa, that there is a dearth of so-called “local” documentation. North African men and women involved in litigations contributed alongside Europeans to the writing of a huge amount of legal evidence and literary tracts, including in Arabic. Such sources were not always filed in the colonial archive. They are, however, of paramount importance for conceiving the modern history of North Africa in new ways.

Sacha Bourgeois-Gironde and Éric Monnet

Natural Experiments and Causality in Economic History: On Their Relations to Theory and Temporality

A recent and influential research methodology, mainly endorsed by economists, proposes to renew historical analysis based on the notions of natural experiment and causality. It has the dual ambition of unifying various disciplines around a common understanding of causality

in order to tackle major historical questions (such as the role of colonization, political regimes, or religion in economic development) and of making the analysis of history more scientific. The definition of causality it promotes—of the “interventionist” type—tends to liken historical events to laboratory experiments. This is articulated with a neo-institutionalist perspective aimed at measuring the long-term effects of past institutional changes, which are considered exogenous. In the first part of this article, we present the ambitions, contributions, methods, and hypotheses (implicit and explicit) of this approach, showing how it differs from more traditional quantitative economic history and placing it in the context of the recent empirical and neo-institutionalist “turns” of the economic discipline. In a second stage, we consider the criticism—often scathing—voiced by historians or economists against this method and its objectives. Finally, we emphasize the many difficulties posed by this approach when it comes to taking into account the historicity of phenomena, to producing general statements based on particular cases, and to providing a complete and coherent definition of causality in history.

Michael Kopsidis and Daniel W. Bromley

Explaining German Economic Modernization: The French Revolution, Prussian Reforms, and the Inevitable Continuity of Change

The centuries-long path to German industrialization must be understood as a gradual institutional evolution in response to new circumstances, new opportunities, and new scarcities. Efforts to identify a single *deus ex machina*—whether Napoleon, Prussian reformers, or some other exogenous driver—do not lead to convincing results. Gradualism offers a plausible account of how a market economy and capitalism took root in German society. Only those German regions that had successfully launched gradual institutional reforms in the eighteenth century were well situated, by the early years of the nineteenth century, to move quickly to an identifiable market economy. Against this background we discuss the role of Prussia and Napoleon in modernizing the institutional framework of the German economy. The Prussian model of agrarian reforms and economic freedom represents a profound event in the history of economic development. A comparable strategic approach was absent in all French-controlled territories before or after 1815. Prussian reformers were the first in history to embrace a multi-sectoral strategy of rural development, enabling them to successfully combine growth with equity.