ISLAM AND ANTI-COLONIAL REBELLIONS IN NORTH AND WEST AFRICA, 1914–1918*

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ABSTRACT. European empires experienced widespread anti-colonial rebellions during the First World War. These rebellions occurred for many different reasons, reflecting the diversity of context and history across colonial societies in Africa and Asia. Religion naturally played a strong role in most of the anti-colonial rebellions during the First World War, most prominently Islam. This article looks at the role Islam played in two key anti-colonial rebellions in North and West Africa: the rebellions in Batna, Algeria, and the Kaocen War in Niger, respectively. The article examines how Islam was instrumentalized by rebels, imperial collaborators, and French officers and administrators to further their own ends. Rebels called upon Islam to help inspire anti-colonial movements, to bind together diverse populations, and to contextualize their actions in wider socio-political conflicts. Imperial collaborators likewise called on religious authority to assist with European imperial recruitment efforts. French officers and administrators used Islam both as a justification and a target for collective punishment and repression after the rebellions were put down from 1917. This repression is still under-studied in a period usually portrayed as evidencing broad imperial harmony, rather than violent extraction and oppression.

‘There is no god but god – Mohammed is the prophet of god. The hearts of [our] enemies are separated [from god] due to their misdeeds. They make no distinction between the true and the false. If god gives you victory, no one will conquer you. How many small bands of men have overtaken large groups

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* This work was generously supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under the Early Career Grant AH/N0018246X20000357. The author would like to thank Abdouramane Oumarou of the Laboratoire d’Études et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local for his hospitality and assistance in facilitating the research done in Niamey for this article. The author would also like to thank Richard Fogarty, John Horne, and Miles Larmer for reading drafts of this article before submission. Their comments were enormously helpful.
with the aid of God? God is with the patient.'¹ This was the (rather lengthy) message written on the great black standard of Kaocen ben Mohammed, a Tuareg leader who besieged Agadez, Niger, for some eighty days from December 1916 to March 1917. While the siege was eventually broken by a French-led relief force arriving from Dakar, by way of Lagos and Kano, fighting continued in the Air for another four years, blooming into what is now called the Kaocen War. This would be the most significant and prolonged anti-colonial war in Nigerien history, with some arguing that it laid the groundwork for later Nigerien nationalism.² The Kaocen War, and the larger Senussi War that it was a component part of, was just one of the many anti-colonial struggles that wracked the French empire during the First World War.

Nearly every major French colony in Africa and Asia experienced some notable anti-colonial rebellion during the course of the First World War. This wildfire of rebellion hit its peak in 1916 with major anti-colonial fighting occurring in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Benin.³ These rebellions erupted for many complex reasons reflecting the widely varying histories, societies, and contexts from which they sprung, even if they were all ultimately tied to the realities brought forth by the First World War. This diversity of context and expression includes a wide range of both personal and institutional religious responses. These responses, and the religious traditions which informed them, were as varied as the people who fought against French colonialism.

Of the many religious traditions that existed in European overseas empires in the early twentieth century, none caused more concern for the French (and Europeans more broadly) than Islam.⁵ For French colonial officials, Islam

¹ Rapport d’Operations – Causes qui ont nécessité la Colonne, Annexe III, Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer (ANOM), Aix-en-Provence, France, 14 MIOM 303, D216: ‘Il n’y a de Dieu que Dieu – Mohammed est la prophète de Dieu. Les cœurs des ennemis se sont séparés à cause de leurs méfaits. Ils ne font aucune distinction entre le vrai et le faux. Si Dieu vous donne la victoire, personne ne vous vaincra. Combien de petites troupes d’hommes l’ont emporté sur de grandes troupes avec l’aide de Dieu. Dieu est avec les patients.’


⁴ At the time of writing, the only work to directly compare these disparate experiences is Frémeaux, Les colonies dans la Grande Guerre. Some major English-language publications fail to discuss them at all. Hew Strachan, The First World War in Africa (Oxford, 2004); and Lawrence Sondhaus, World War One: the global revolution (Cambridge, 2011).

represented a foreign ‘non-African’ religion whose spread among black Africans was to be closely tracked, and at times feared. In reality, of course, the history of Islam in Africa is ancient. North Africa was progressively conquered by Islamic forces from the mid-seventh century, shortly after the death of Mohammed. Contact between Muslim North Africans and non-Muslim Sub-Saharan Africans began almost immediately, with North Africans seeking West African gold from as early as 734. This is significant for two reasons. First, because it was principally through the peaceful means of trade and cultural interaction that Islam spread to the Sahel and beyond. This deep Islamic past was not reflected in French conceptions of Islam in Africa, which, in turn, influenced how French authorities engaged with African Muslims.

The long history of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa is also important because it reminds us of the ancient economic, political, religious, and socio-cultural ties linking North and Sub-Saharan Africa. These ties are too often obscured in the scholarly literature, much of which still treats these deeply interconnected regions as utterly distinct and separate. This is despite what scholars like Baz Lecocq consider the socio-political similarities between North and, at the very least, Sahelian Africa. In particular, Lecocq points to both regions being dominated by a large number of relatively small, semi-autonomous political entities with constantly shifting allegiances, and the interconnectivity that comes from a shared religion.

This article engages with the need to discuss North and West Africa in more integrated, comparative terms by analysing the role Islam played in two anti-colonial rebellions in the French empire during the First World War: the rebellion in Batna, Algeria, and the Kaocen War in Niger. These rebellions make for a good comparative study for a number of reasons. They are two of the most significant rebellions of Muslim people in the French empire during the First World War. The Kaocen War represents the largest and longest armed anti-colonial rebellion in Nigerien history, and the rebellion in Batna, Algeria, was put down by the largest French-led force assembled against Muslim rebels during the war. These two rebellions also represent two distinct types of colonial

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geographic spaces: relatively well-integrated regions that were submitted to conscription (Batna) and newly conquered territoires militaires (northern Niger) which still operated with a large degree of independence. These rebellions remain under-studied in both the First World War and regional historiographical literature; neither are usually considered places where First World War fighting took place. As such, this article expands the study of the First World War beyond its traditional geographic boundaries and ultimately provides an important example of how North and West African histories can fruitfully be discussed in a comparative manner.

This article will examine the role Islam played in these rebellions in three main senses. First, it looks at Islam’s power to inspire and justify rebellion; the dreaded Pan-Islamic jihad. For better or worse, jihad has been a major focus of European scholarship on Islam since the late 1800s. The largely ineffectual Ottoman declaration of jihad in 1914 has similarly been a centrepiece of First World War history. Focusing on the failure of the Ottoman jihad to rally a vast Pan-Islamic response, however, has obscured the way Islam was more effectively instrumentalized in parts of the non-Ottoman Muslim world, which this article addresses.

Secondly, this article looks at Islam’s role in binding diverse groups together. Whether Islam was mobilized to rally people to rebel or to collaborate, it acted as an important medium of contact and exchange across North and West Africa. The different ways that Islam was called upon by rebel and collaborationist groups gives us insight into how religion can make the global local, and the local global. This section builds upon and extends the timeframe of the work done by Julia Clancy-Smith on the pragmatism and flexibility of religious leaders and groups in the face of European colonialism.

Lastly, this article looks at how perceptions of Islam influenced the French response to and repression of the rebellions in Niger and Algeria. European conceptions of an eternal struggle between ‘Christendom’ and ‘Islam’ were, of course, nothing new in the early twentieth century. European fears of Islam were heightened in the early twentieth century by a perceived volatility in the Muslim world following the revolution in Persia in 1905, the deposition of the Ottoman and Moroccan sultans in 1912, and the various conflicts the French and Italians had with the Senussi in the early 1900s.

the Ottomans to the First World War further ratcheted up these fears. A potent mix of fear and vengeance translated into a sustained and brutal repression meted out by French imperial forces in the wake of the rebellions in Batna and Niger. In these repressions, Islam was at times a target, and at other times used as justification for collective discipline. This repression remains seriously under-studied and is absent from broader First World War historiography. Focusing on colonial violence and repression during the war makes for a contrast with the collaborationist framework that shapes most writing on colonial societies during the First World War.  

It is important to note that this article is in no way intended to offer any theological engagement with Islam, as such. Islam represents an intensely diverse religious and cultural tradition. Islam was experienced, practised, understood, and instrumentalized in many different ways, across many different aspects of life, by the African and European historical actors this article covers. ‘Muslim’ in this period furthermore had a racialized connotation, drawn from European assumptions about, and misinterpretations of, ‘the Muslim world’. The racialization of Islam was common among French colonial officials, and even had echoes in how some North and West African people saw themselves and their communities. Given the complexity and fluidity that ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslim’ connote, now and in the early twentieth century, this article, as much as possible, allows for its historical actors to use and define Islam as they saw fit. The principal focus here is not on ‘Islam’ itself, but rather on its many different historical expressions and usages. Before going any further, it is also important to take a moment to discuss sources. The vast majority of the sources extant for these rebellions are documents produced by the French colonial administration. This, necessarily, creates difficulties in assessing the mentality and motivations of various rebel groups. The situation is especially dire for Batna, Algeria, where the original voices of the rebels are mostly lost. Even court testimony gathered during the repression, as imperfect a source as it is, scarcely houses any direct quotes from Algerian rebels. Where we do have direct quotes from Algerians, they

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20 Aydin, The idea of the Muslim world, pp. 3–6.

21 For example, see the documents held in ANOM, ALG CONST B 3 209.
are filtered through French channels, and therefore need to be treated with a degree of caution.

For the Kaocen War, things are much better. A good quantity of original Senussi correspondence has survived and much of it is currently stored in the Archives Nationales de Sénégal. Most of the correspondence exists only in translation (in French, English, or Italian, depending on the archive), but some of the original Arabic letters remain. The Kaocen War also benefits from a good quantity of oral tradition, some of which was gathered by Boubou Hama in the 1960s and published in a series of source books called Documents Nigeriens. These are held at the Université Abdou-Moumouni in Niamey. In addition to this are traces of oral history gathered by historians like André Salifou, Kimba Idrissa, and others from the early 1960s into the 1980s that survive in their published books and articles. These sources provide a rich, if not always congruous, body of material to help balance against French colonial interpretations that survive in abundance in the archives in Dakar and Niamey.

I

When writing or thinking about rebellion, one cannot escape the first, and usually the dominant, question that springs to mind: why did the rebellion happen, or, perhaps more precisely, why did it happen at that particular moment? As historians, despite the countless books and articles written on rebellion in one form or another, we do not yet have any firm framework for assessing this very fundamental question. This question, ‘Why, and why then?’ has been approached in different ways by historians of Algeria. Algerian scholars have been more likely to refer to the rebels of Batna as mujahedeen or nationalist revolutionaries, seeing their rebellion as part of a 130-year-long struggle for independence. European works, especially more general ones, are more likely to take the same line as French colonial administrators; namely that the rebellion was overwhelmingly due to conscription and that any broader political motivation was either secondary or non-existent. The most notable example of this is Gilbert Meynier’s tome L’Algérie révélée: la guerre de 1914–1918 et le premier quart du XXe siècle, which notes curtly that conscription precipitated the insurrection in South Constantine. Some recent work, like that of James McDougall, takes a more nuanced view and sees the rebellions as evidence of the enduring strength of local Algerian social systems and their semi-independence from

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French authority. Religion is barely mentioned in modern European works on the subject, which misses an important facet of the movements in both Algeria and Niger.

Contemporary French reports, enthralled in a belle époque obsession with the Classical world, liked to claim that the region around Batna had never really submitted to anyone: not the French, nor the Ottomans, nor even the Romans! This caricature of the perpetually rebellious denizens of northeastern Algeria is found time and again in French documents. Several reports cite a conversation between Bouzidi Mohammed Ben Taleb, a local marabout, and an unnamed French officer at the Pasteur outpost in which Bouzidi says of Aurèsians, “These people have rebellion in their blood. They rebel, have rebelled, and will rebel.” Whether the conversation happened or not, it bears witness to the frequent ability of people living in desert or mountain peripheries to maintain a state of at least semi-independence from centralized authorities.

French reports surrounding the Batna rebellion were also rife with fears of Pan-Islamism, especially in the wake of the Ottoman Empire declaring a jihad against the Entente powers in 1914. The Ottoman entry into the war made even more real the threat of possible German intervention, which French colonial administrators always feared lay behind anti-colonial resistance during the war. Entente strategists did not quite understand the context of the Ottoman sultan calling forth his nominal religious power as caliph; the Ottoman jihad was called as much for reasons of internal stability vis-à-vis ethnic Arabs as anything else. French colonial administrators tracked Pan-Islamic anti-colonial pamphlets published in Cairo and Constantinople, and enacted strict censorship of personal correspondence and imported politico-religious documents in West Africa. These efforts ultimately could not stop the importation of Pan-Islamic texts through Tunisia and Libya into Algeria as part of a broader ideological and intellectual current flowing through the western Muslim world, from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula.

26 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, pp. 362–9, among other examples.
27 Troubles dans l’Arrondissement de Batna, 1916–1917, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218: ‘ces gens ont la révolte dans le sang, ils se sont révoltés, se révoltent et se révolteront’.
29 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, p. 4.
31 Rogan, The fall of the Ottomans, p. 48.
32 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, p. 223; and Le Gouverneur Général à Colonies Bordeaux; Dakar, Novembre 1914, ANOM, 14 MIOM 1084.
On a more local level, there were Rahmaniyya muqaddams, Sufi adepts, who held influence in the rebellion in Batna, but their power significantly blurred the lines between political, personal, and religious influence. Religion obviously played a role in their influence, but was only ever one part of a larger base of power. Popular references to Islam mostly came in the form of songs which drew on religious and historical themes, including the Crusades. In his report on the Batna rebellion Octave Depont wrote about pro-German songs sung by Algerian ‘troubadours’, which were often infused with religious subtext. In the most common form of these popular songs, Kaiser Wilhelm is often referred to as ‘Hajj Guillaume’, a reference to the kaiser’s supposed conversion to Islam and performance of the Hajj. This positioning of the kaiser as not only a temporal protector of Islam, but in fact a devoted Muslim convert, was common across North and West Africa during the First World War. Missives discovered in mosques in Nigeria and Cameroon, for example, claimed that if the kaiser died ‘he dies a Muslim’.

The popular songs sung in Algeria during the First World War provide unique insight into the strong overlap between religious and secular geopolitical discourse. Islam provides a shared language for communicating political goals (Algerian independence), and a framework tying distant geopolitical developments to more local issues. In this sense, these songs, and to some extent Islam in general, collapse global events to have local significance, and situate local conflicts in a broader, global context. For songs claiming that Germany was on the cusp of invading Algeria and taking it from the French, an invasion inspired by Kaiser Wilhelm’s supposed Islamic faith, the political and the religious contexts are all but inextricable.

What is more, the First World War was not the first time that Algerians looked abroad, in particular towards the Ottoman Empire, for an external saviour who might liberate them from France. Religion is used to explain why an unlikely military or geopolitical event may come to pass, and also to justify Algerian allegiance to yet another external colonial power. The supposed conversion of

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34 Rapport de l’Administrateur de la Commune Mixte d’Aïn-Touta sur le rôle joué par plusieurs douars de la commune dans le soulèvement de Novembre 1916 et sur la répression à appliquer, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
36 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, p. 228.
37 Asseraf, Electric news in colonial Algeria, pp. 118–24; and Baz Lecocq, ‘The Hajj from West Africa from a global historical perspective (16th and 20th centuries)’, African Diaspora, 5 (2012), p. 188. It is important to note that the Hajj was much smaller in the early twentieth century compared to today, and drew primarily from people already living in the Arabian Peninsula. For people to travel from Africa or Europe to perform the Hajj was seen as a major commitment and display of devotion.
38 Traduction d’une lettre arabe trouvée à la mosquée de YOLA le 25 Décembre 1914 (L’écrivain est reconnu être celui de Malem Abou Bokar à Garoua); ‘S’il meurt, il meurt en musulman’, ANOM, 14 MIOM 1084, 19G1, bobbin 445.
Kaiser Wilhelm explains why he might try to liberate Algeria, but undergirding this argument was the foundational belief in German military strength and prowess. We see this in the small number of direct quotations we have from Algerian deserters during the war. In their interrogation, they frequently cited the power of Germany, and their belief that Germany would eventually prevail, as laying behind their decision to desert.

This matches similar claims made across the French empire by deserters and rebels who felt that France was notably weakened by the war, and that it was an opportune moment to risk rebellion, or at least disobedience. Particularly interesting here is how individual religiosity or calls upon religious language and ties were mobilized by the rebels at Batna, in the absence of support from formal Islamic leaders or institutions. This bottom-up foundation for the movement helps explain the political moves the rebels make after their dramatic attacks in November 1916.

The Batna uprising climaxed with the capture and burning of the bordj at Mac-Mahon by Algerian rebels on 12 November 1916. In French reports on the capture of Mac-Mahon, the deaths of the administrator and sous-préfet loom large. Looking deeper into the targets of the rebels, however, is telling. First, before the bordj was attacked, the rebels sacked a number of farms that belonged to Europeans. These farms were not only the most explicit symbol of French people coming in and expropriating land for their own economic ends, but they were also a source of food, tools, and other valuable materials, all of which were sorely lacking and bitterly expensive by late 1916. In the attack on the bordj itself, the rebels took especial time to burn the administrative archives, which, among other things, contained the records related to conscription and recruitment in and around Batna. The priority given to the destruction of these documents shows how important French bureaucracy, and especially recruitment, was as a motivator for the rebels.

Even more telling than the attention given to the destruction of administrative records at Mac-Mahon was the rebels’ decision to found a nominal Algerian republic on 12 November 1916. After capturing Mac-Mahon in the early hours of 12 November, the rebels could have done any number of things that did not entail setting up an independent republic. The fact that they did so

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40 L’Administrateur de la Commune Mixte de Takitount à Monsieur le Sous-Préfet de l’arrondissement de Sétif, 14 Février 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 411.
41 For example, Royer and Saul, West African challenge to empire, p. 297.
43 For example, Rapport de l’Administrateur de la Commune Mixte d’Aïn-Touta sur le rôle joué par plusieurs douars de la commune dans le soulèvement de Novembre 1916 et sur la répression à appliquer, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
44 Rapport d’ensemble sur les causes, les origines de développement et des conséquences du mouvement de résistance à la loi et de rébellion qui s’est produit dans la Commune Mixte de Barika et les moyens d’en éviter le retour, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
45 Frémeaux, Les colonies dans la Grande Guerre, p. 252.
implies a long-term, agreed-upon plan to do so, which is striking. What is more, the rebels at Mac-Mahon were not alone; the Maghreb experienced a wave of republican sentiment during, and immediately after, the First World War. Tunisians declared their own independent republic in 1918, Moroccans did the same in Rif in 1920, as did Egyptians in Zifta in 1919. The secular force behind these movements is notable, especially in Egypt where nationalists expressly pointed to the religious diversity of Egypt, rather than couching their effort in Islamic terms. More broadly, there were new nation-states and republics born out of anti-colonial rebellion in the Arabian Peninsula (1916), Vietnam (1917), Ireland (1916), and elsewhere. Set within the context of the wave of republics borne during and immediately after the First World War, the rebels at Batna must be described as republicans rather than people motivated primarily by religion. These distinctions are more blurry when dealing with the Senussi War, of which the Kaocen War was a part, due to the war being centred on a religious sect.

The best, and most recent, English-language account of the Kaocen War was written by Kimba Idrissa in 2003. Idrissa draws two Islamic connections that must be addressed. The first is the relationship between Kaocen and Abderrahmane Tegama ag Bagari, the sultan of Agadez, with whom Kaocen had covertly planned the siege of Agadez. Tegama, born in 1880, had undertaken Koranic studies in Agadez, Borno, and Kano before being converted to Senussism, giving him some foundation on which to base claims of spiritual authority. Tegama was appointed the sultan of Agadez by French authorities in 1908, thus finding himself in a position of temporal power as a local client for the French empire. It was this influence that allowed him to declare a religious war against the French, a decision that no doubt helped win the support of people in the Aïr who had for a long time been otherwise atomized. Oral history given by Elhadj Bougounou of Agadez, among others, confirms the central importance of Islam in Tegama’s ability to bring together competing factions in the Aïr to fight against the ‘kaffirs’, the French.

The importance of religion to Kaocen personally, on the other hand, is difficult to pin down. The oral tradition consistently highlights Kaocen’s

martial prowess, but rarely puts this in a religious context. In the chronicle laid down by Mohamed Chouwa, ‘the Chadian’, Kaocen is said to have won the favour of Sid Sidi Mohammed El-Abed, an important Senussi patron, through his military exploits, rather than any religious devotion. Other oral accounts highlight the religious underpinning of these martial exploits, noting that Kaocen won the respect and trust of El-Abed by ‘clearing the land of the infidels, and because they had fought with faith for the cause of Islam’. This affinity led El-Abed, after the successes against the Italians in Libya and the French at Djanet, Algeria, to supply Kaocen with a large quantity of men and arms to push the French out of Niger. The relationships and geographic space that formed the partnership between El-Abed and Kaocen remind us of the fluidity of ‘Saharan’, North, and West African histories.

Oral history communicated by Ammane ben Ahmed Bougounou in the 1960s when he was the marabout of Agadez, focuses primarily on Kaocen’s ‘manly’ attributes, rather than his religious devotion. Young Kaocen is described as wandering the mountains and valleys of Aïr alone, single-handedly raiding Arab caravans as a young boy and ‘never returning to camp without booty’ whilst on raid. Kaocen is depicted as being sparked into action against the French primarily by in-fighting amongst the Tuareg, rather than by any sort of religious awakening (the fact that Kaocen finds himself fighting against the Italians in 1911–12 and the French multiple times from 1909 to 1919 may support claims that he fought primarily to preserve Tuareg independence). Given that these chronicles were kept by marabouts, who would undoubtedly seek to highlight the faith and devotion of Muslim heroes, the fact that Kaocen’s religious ardour is rarely mentioned suggests either that religion was not his principal driving motivation, or that the marabouts do not want to be too closely associated with a historical figure that, while often cast in heroic light, also precipitated probably the worst period of colonial repression in Nigerien history.

Kaocen’s and Tegama’s religiosity is even more difficult to pin down in their surviving papers. In their wide-ranging correspondence with Tuareg, Toubou, and Senussi leaders across the eastern Sahara Kaocen and Tegama do reference theology, the Prophet, and jihad; but it is unclear if these were rhetorical devices or heartfelt calls for religious unity. The importance of Islam and religious language in formal correspondence in the region was certainly substantial. French correspondence with Senussi leaders before hostilities erupted between them is overflowing with deeply religious language. Kaocen does reference Islam and

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52 Ibid., p. 211.
54 Ibid., p. 149.
56 Hama, Documents Nigériens, p. 149.
57 For example, untitled letter from Cercle Commander at Bilma to Sid Sidi Mohammed Abed, Mar. 1916, and untitled letter from Sid Sidi Mohammed Abed to the French
fighting against the infidel in his decrees and letters, at least in part as a means to cajole other groups into supporting his war effort. Tegama’s role as a spiritual leader was much more prominent, but Finn Fuglestad has argued that it was nevertheless nominal and symbolic; it did not necessarily denote a strong religious devotion and Fuglestad argued that it garnered little respect or power among the Tuareg.

While religious fervour may not have been the pre-eminent motivator for the Kaocen War, it is worth taking a step back and looking at the role that Islam played in the broader context in which the war began. The Kaocen War, on one level, was a component part of the broader Senussi War, which raged from late 1914 until the early 1920s. The Senussi War itself is not a monolith, but rather a loose series of relationships between Senussi groups, or groups led by Senussi adherents, who fought against the Italians in Libya, the British in Egypt and Sudan, and the French in Tunisia, Chad, Algeria, and Niger. Religion was naturally mobilized by the Senussi to hold their diverse coalition together (a coalition which included Ottoman agents), but this had its limits and did not afford the Senussi a position from which to dictate to populations in Libya, let alone in Chad, Sudan, Algeria, and Niger. In this sense, the Senussi jihad shares similarities to its better-known Ottoman counterpart.

At the same time, we should recognize the importance of religion to the wider Senussi movement, which in some ways resembles the great state-building jahds of the nineteenth century. These movements forcefully remind us that religiosity and state-building are in no way mutually exclusive. While the very loose organization was based heavily on a shared religious ideology, there are strong arguments that religion played a variable role in the individual participants in the Senussi War. This is especially true of the branch of the Senussi headed by Sid Sidi Mohammed El-Abed in Fezzan, the Senussi who supplied Kaocen with the bulk of his initial arms and men.

representative at Oued Zouar, 28 Dec. 1915, Archives Nationales de Sénégal (ANS), 6F9, among countless others.

58 There are several letters in which this is the case. The most notable example might be his open letter to the Toubou asking for their support not long after his arrival in Niger in December 1916, ‘God will reward and protect you’, Lettre de Kaossen à tous les Toubous, ANOM, 14 MIOM 862, 11G18.

59 Fuglestad, ‘Révolte et mort de Tegama’ , p. 96.


61 Ibid., p. 98; and Lettre de Mohammed Senoussi Ben Sid Abderrezag au Cheikh Mokhtar Ben Mohammed, ANOM, 14 MIOM 862, 11G18.

62 Aksakal, “‘Holy War made in Germany’?”, p. 186.

63 For more, see Lovejoy, jihad in West Africa; and also Jonathan Wyrtzen, ‘Colonial war and the production of territorialized state space in North Africa’, Political Power and Social Theory (Rethinking the Colonial State), 33 (2017), pp. 151–73, for the creation of territorialized state space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
El-Abed, according to the excellent recent work by Simona Berhe, was interested overwhelmingly in his own independent political power, and not in the Pan-Islamic ideals and goals of his older brother, the Grand Senussi.\footnote{Berhe, *Notabili libici e Funzionari italiani*, pp. 209; and John Slight, ‘British understandings of the Sanussiya Sufi Order’s jihad against Egypt, 1915–1917’, *The Round Table*, 103 (2014), p. 237.} This differing take on the importance of Islam led the Grand Senussi to ally more closely with the Ottomans, which led the Senussi in Cyrenaica to launch an utterly doomed invasion of Egypt in 1916.\footnote{Rob Johnson, *The Great War and the Middle East* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 68–70.} All this while El-Abed and his associates in Fezzan (including Kaocen’s brother Mokhtar) shook their heads at the folly of it all. If Kaocen was a real jihadist interested in promoting the cause of Pan-Islamic revolt and a unification of African Muslims under the black banner of the Senussi, he had his opportunity, and instead allied himself with the far more pragmatic and calculating El-Abed.

\section{II}

If Islam was not the primary motivation for Kaocen or his closest associates, this is not to say that it was not important, or that it did not serve any useful function. Islam is unavoidable in the correspondence circulated around the broader Senussi leaders and is a testament to how important it was culturally. Here is just one example, of many, of an excerpt from a typical letter between Senussi leaders (in this instance between El-Abed and Moussa Ag Amastane, from May 1917).

In the name of God the clement and merciful. From the part of the slave to his Master, Mohammed Labez ben sid Mohammed Sherif Essenoussi, Elkhettabi, Elhassani, Elidrissi, to the most grand, powerful, precious, [and] glorious, to our friend, to the one who delights our eyes, the Tobel Moussa, Amenokal [military leader] of the Hoggar. God protect you. May salvation be upon you, as well as the mercy of God the highest and his blessings...We praise God for granting you health and peace.\footnote{Lettre du chef Sénoussiste Mohamed Labez à Moussa ag Amastane, ANOM, 14 MIOM 862, 11 G18: ‘Au Nom de dieu le Clément et Miséricordieux. De la part de l’esclave de son Maître, MOHAMMED LABED BEN SID MOHAMMED CHERIF ESSENOUSSE, ELKETTABI, ELHASSANI, ELIDRISSE, Au très grand, au puissant, au précieux, au glorieux, à notre ami, à celui qui réjouit nos yeux, le Tobel MOUSSA, Aménokal des Hoggar. Que dieu le protège...Que le salut soit sur vous ainsi que la miséricorde de dieu le très haut et ses bénédictions...Nous louons dieu de vous avoir accordé la santé et la paix.’} Almost the entire body of the letter proper is full of religious haranguing, with the practical components of the letter only coming at the very end (namely, El-Abed disavowing Kaocen and claiming, farcically, that Kaocen had acted entirely without his help or knowledge). There is no doubt that Islam provided some sense of a shared cultural and spiritual identity for the various Senussi

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factions. It was a binding agent related to, and spread by, commerce, that maintained relationships spread out over vast distances, and often amongst groups and individuals with divergent, and at times diametrically opposed, political objectives. The fact that the Senussi War fractured irreparably as soon as the Grand Senussi’s invasion of Egypt failed shows both the power, and the fragility, of relying on religion.

Oral history sees Kaocen frequently turning to religion to bolster his coalition or admonish his enemies. In the account of Malam Douhary Tanode from Agadez, Kaocen is remarked as having written to the French ordering them to give up Christianity or perish: ‘Dear Captain, I am writing to you to say, in your own interest, abandon Christianity and idolatry. If not, grave things will pass between us.’ Given the fact that Kaocen’s army achieved near-total surprise when it suddenly appeared at the gates of Agadez, and the fact that the French have no records of direct correspondence with Kaocen, this exchange is almost certainly apocryphal. More convincingly, some oral history points to Islam as a key force in unifying Kaocen and Tegama with both men agreeing to a ‘war on the kaffirs’, even if Idrissa suggests this was perhaps a somewhat cynical mobilization of religion to win supporters by Kaocen and Tegama.

Tanode’s account goes on to stress the largely secular nature of the planning and relations between Kaocen and Tegama, amongst Tegama and his advisers, and between both men and other Tuareg groups, including the Hoggar. The role of religion in mediating the relations between different Tuareg groups is especially interesting. In one letter from Ahmoud, the sultan of Ghat, to Kaocen from March 1918, Ahmoud, after warmly greeting Kaocen (‘Praise be to the one god. It is to him that we implore for relief. To our friend and brother, the venerated Kaocen ben Mohammed, may god protect you’), goes on to denounce the ‘vile usurpers of Islam’, the Hoggar, a Tuareg group from Algeria who had ultimately sided with the French in the broader Senussi War. The division of Muslims into true believers and heretics of course has a long and important history in the high politics of the Sahel and Sahara; in particular these divisions, usually invented, served as casus belli for the state-building jihads of Usman Dan Fodio a century earlier. That said, these divisions still undermine claims that the Tuareg and Senussi were united in Pan-Islamic struggle. Can a movement truly be Pan-Islamic if

\[68\] Berhe, *Notabili libici e Funzionari italiani*, p. 207.
\[71\] Hama, *Documents Nigériens*, pp. 170–1.
Muslims fight against it? At the same time, some oral tradition places Islam at the centre of the motivation for most participants in the fighting, showing the power Islam might have as a binding agent for followers even if it is deployed somewhat cynically by faction leaders. If Islam provided a cultural basis for mutual understanding among Tuareg leaders in Libya, Algeria, and Niger, it seemed to play no such role in Batna. Whereas French administrators were fearful of instrumentalized Islam in West Africa from 1914, French reports surrounding local religious leaders around Batna are effusive in describing the loyalty of religious figures in the conscription effort. This is a common theme in war-time French documents, with surveillance reports very rarely mentioning any religious personages as being even suspect of disloyalty. While it is true that French reports often lament that some marabouts did not go out of their way to warn the French of the impending attacks at Mac-Mahon and elsewhere, this does not necessarily mean that the marabouts acted out of any disloyalty to France or along religious lines. Collaborationist leaders need to be able to take a middle ground and appease both French colonialists and the local indigenous population; this is rarely an easy task.

While the vast majority of religious figures sided, overtly or tacitly, with the French, there were some rebels who drew power and influence from religion. Of these, the most prominent was the sheikh of Seggana. As a sheikh, he operated with the tacit approval of the French, not entirely unlike Tegama in Agadez, but relied primarily on pre-existing power structures, some of which were religious. He was noted not only for his wealth, but also for his religiosity, and his having taken multiple pilgrimages to Mecca. Unfortunately, whatever specific exhortations he made to his followers have since been lost, but at least some of the rebels at Batna did see themselves as taking part in wider events that had some rooting in religion. Octave Depont quoted, accurately or not, Algerians saying things like ‘[our sons will not go and] die in conditions contrary to the Muslim religion’. Both French and Algerian actors noted that

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74 Idrissa, ‘The Kawousan War reconsidered’, p. 213.
75 Rapport d’ensemble sur les causes, les origines de développement et des conséquences du mouvement de résistance à la loi et de rébellion qui s’est produit dans la Commune Mixte de Barika et les moyens d’en éviter le retour, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
76 For example, untitled report, Douar Ksour, 22 Août 1914, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 411, among many others.
78 The sheikh, his family, and his retainers maintained close relationships with the French right up until the attack at Mac-Mahon. Rapport d’ensemble sur les causes, les origines de développement et des conséquences du mouvement de résistance à la loi et de rébellion qui s’est produit dans la Commune Mixte de Barika et les moyens d’en éviter le retour, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218, and Clancy-Smith, Rebel and saint, p. 5.
79 Les troubles de l’Aurès en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
80 Meynier, L’Algérie révélée, p. 559.
the rebels’ ‘co-religionists’ were rebelling across Northern Africa, although the movements largely remained separate from one another and tended to follow nationalist, rather than Pan-Islamic, lines.\(^{81}\)

While religious language and exhortations would have been a part of the glue that held the Algerian rebel movement together, the core structures and goals of the Batna rebellion were overwhelmingly practical and political.\(^{82}\) The rebellion was a calculated political move that had been meditated for months, at least.\(^{83}\) The French suspicion that the rebellion had been pre-planned of course undercuts their assertions that the rebellion was exclusively about conscription, a common rhetoric used to deflect critiques of the French imperial project and its consequences. For many French military and colonial authorities, it was much easier to frame the rebellions in Algeria and Niger as being fuelled by extremely proximate (and therefore short-lived) stresses like recruitment, and exacerbated by what they often saw as religious fanaticism.

III

To understand the full role of Islam in the rebellions in Algeria and Niger in the First World War, one must look at the effect that an imagined Islam had on French administrators and officers operating in Africa. Islam held an odd, and at times contradictory, place in the imagination of French colonial officers and administrators who often found themselves treading a careful ideological and political line on the subject.\(^{84}\) On the one hand, a surprising number of French officers and administrators had positive things to say about the religion,\(^{85}\) even if only within the context of their more virulent disdain and condescension for black Africans and polytheistic religious beliefs (‘fetishism’ in contemporary French parlance).\(^{86}\) Parallels to these fraught imaginations of Islam in European thought are of course nothing new, and persist in different forms today.

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81 L’Administrateur de la Commune Mixte de Khemchela à Monsieur l’Inspecteur Général des Communes Mixtes, Gouvernement Général de l’Algérie, Khemchela, 27 Mars 1917, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
82 Depont points toward rebel leaders using religion to influence followers, but his assertions also needed to be taken sceptically, given his attitude towards Islam. Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219.
83 Gheziel, L’éveil politique de la société algérienne, p. 208.
85 This was not true of all officers, of course. Some (like Edouard Maguet, administrator of Dedougou) instituted severe programmes of repression against Muslim populations, including wanton imprisonment and torture. Royer and Saul, West African challenge to empire, pp. 92–100.
Whether their individual opinions of Islam tended to the more or less favourable ends of the spectrum, most French administrators maintained a deep-seated fear of the illusory Pan-Islamic uprising that would unite the diverse populations of North and West Africa against them (populations the French had actively sought to fragment and supplant through their *politique des races*). The middling path often taken by French authorities was perhaps best summed up in a report from May 1914:

To persecute Islam would be still more dangerous: it would be to unavoidably provoke not a direct revolt; Muslims are too intelligent for that. [Rather, it would exacerbate] the natural state of mind of the population of all races worried about their faith, the thirst of persecution, the exasperation of faith, and [incite] a more acute proselytism.

In short, persecuting Islam would not make the French safer, but would only further advance the prerequisite conditions that would make the all-dreaded Pan-Islamic uprising all the more likely. While the French neither encouraged the spread of Islam (despite building *médérsas* and sponsoring loyal Muslims’ pilgrimages to Mecca) nor discouraged it (despite periodically persecuting Muslim leaders and maintaining a tight control on incoming Islamic literature in Dakar), the French presence ultimately hastened the spread of Islam by fostering greater regional connectivity across West Africa. This connectivity, which was both physical in the construction of roads and rail networks as well as conceptual in the setting up of administrative nodes across the region, was spurred by the French desire to easily maintain liaison between far-flung outposts and facilitate European economic activity in West Africa.

One end of the broad spectrum of beliefs held by the French on the question of Islam can be represented by individuals like Octave Depont. In 1916, Octave Depont, then inspector-general of the Communes Mixtes of Algeria, was tasked with writing a report which sought to explain why and how a serious rebellion had erupted in Batna earlier that year (this after Depont had already published a lengthy, if unreliable and condescending, report on Islam in Africa). To his credit, Depont often saw rebellion as coming from a very broad range of

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88 Jugement d’Ensemble sur l’Islam, Mankono, 11 Mai 1914, ANOM, 14 MIOM 1084 19G1: ‘Persécuter l’Islam, serait encore plus dangereux; ce serait provoquer immanquablement non la révolte directe; les musulmans sont trop intelligents pour cela, l’état d’esprit naturel aux populations de toutes races inquiétées dans leur foi, la soif de la persécution, l’exaspération de la foi, et un prosélytisme plus aigu.’

89 Miles, ed., *Political Islam in West Africa*, p. 82.

90 Untitled cabinet paper, governor general of Algeria, 23 Nov. 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 208.
stressors, primarily economic (the arrival of locusts, for example) and political, even if his analysis overtly failed to assign any blame whatsoever to the faults of French administration or governance. Principal among these causes, for Depont, was anger over French attempts to recruit Algerians to serve in the French army and to fight in the bloody killing fields of Europe and the Middle East. In addition to this practical concern, however, Depont recognized another, more insidious threat: Pan-Islamic jihad.

For Depont, the Ottoman declaration of holy war constituted a ‘very oriental duplicity’ in only targeting Muslims living in the empires of France, Britain, and Russia. This declaration was not to be overly feared, however, for in Depont’s mind, ‘the poison of holy war...did not, in general, have effects that were too serious’. This does not mean that Depont felt that Islam had little role to play in the rebellion; far from it. He repeatedly mentions the nefarious workings of marabouts, or indigenous chiefs who, feeling that the French were weak, chose to place themselves ‘on the side of Allah’, and other similar statements. For Depont, and others like him, Islam represented a persistent and mysterious threat to French dominance in North and West Africa. This sentiment may have informed French behaviour during the repression in Batna in 1917.

The repression meted out against Algerians living in and around Batna was felt wide and deep. French authorities targeted not only the rebels and deserters themselves, but their families and their communities more broadly. Hundreds were killed by roving French-led columns, largely made up of ‘Senegalese’ (West African) troops. By 1917, the forces of repression would balloon to some 13,892 men and 217 officers. In the wake of rebellion, 805 Algerians were arrested, tried, and condemned. To these are added roughly 400 more that were seemingly tried by local disciplinary commissions, and thus never had proper trials to begin with. Depont justifies this level of violence *ex post facto* in his report stating, among other things, that:

We have too often forgotten that in indigene lands, especially in times of war, an authority is not real, active, strong and obeyed, as it should be, but that it escapes the critiques of which the Muslims cannot not conceive neither the sense, nor the finesse, nor the reach and who always finish, in their spirit, by weakening power when they do not annihilate it completely.

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91 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, pp. 7–8.
92 Ibid., p. 4: ‘le poison de la guerre sainte…répondant à l’appel du Chef de la Colonie, le poison n’eut pas, en général, d’effets trop fâcheux’.
93 Ibid., p. 11.
96 Les Troubles Insurrectionnels de l’Arrondissement de Batna en 1916, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 219, p. 7: ‘Nous avions trop oublié qu’en pays indigène, surtout en temps de guerre, une autorité n’est réelle, agissante, forte et obéie, comme il convient, que si elle
And later:

The methods of peace, with their formality, their hesitations and their scruples over legality, that we always end, before taking them up, by paying too much, have given up their place for the methods of war, the only ones applicable in many territories, as they combine at one the initiative, promptness of decision-making and speed of execution, all necessary qualities, indispensable even, to better administrate indigenes and avoid, in troubled times, the insurrectional movements which have long menaced us. It was these same methods of war that we followed in Batna, where the actions were graver than those related above, and where it was important to not allow things to degenerate into an insurrection.97

Livestock, probably the most important vehicle for storing wealth for most people in the region, were heavily targeted. Ouanassa Tngour estimates that Aurès lost around 165 cows, 2,563 sheep, and 1,238 goats, plus about 58,428 francs (a mixture of both cash and stolen goods).98 To this was added a series of collective fines and punishments which grew the overall cost to some 726,835 francs, a staggering sum for the already impoverished residents of Aurès.99 Using rebellion to justify a wholesale theft of Algerian wealth was an established tactic of French colonial authorities by 1917. It had already been used after the rebellion in 1871, after which substantial sums of money and tracts of land were expropriated by French officials under the cover of collective punishment.100

To justify wide-ranging collective discipline, the governor general’s office produced an extensive document building a legal justification for levying fines on people not implicated in the rebellion to pay for the cost of damage done to French administrative buildings and also to French-owned farms.101 Part of the justification included ‘the traditions of Islam’, which the author claimed had a legal tradition of collective punishment. Thus, while Islam was not at the absolute forefront of French justifications for their broad-based repression of Aurès in 1917, it formed a notable part of the justification for both the

échappe à des critiques dont les musulmans ne peuvent concevoir ni le sens, ni la finesse, ni la portée, et qui finissent toujours, dans leur esprit, par affaiblir le pouvoir, quand elles ne l’annihilent pas complètement.’

97 Ibid., p. 9: ‘Les méthodes de paix, avec leur formalisme, leurs hésitations et des scrupules de légalité, que nous finissons toujours, avant de les lever, par payer fort cher, avaient fait place aux méthodes de guerre, les seules applicables à de nombreux territoires, parce qu’elles comportent à la fois initiative, promptitude de décision et rapidité d’exécution, toutes qualités nécessaires, indispensables même, pour bien administrer les indigènes, et éviter, en temps troublés, les mouvements d’insurrection dont nous serons encore longtemps menacés. Ce sont ces mêmes méthodes de guerre qui vont être suivis dans l’arrondissement de Batna, où les fait sont autrement graves que ceux plus haut relatés, et où il importait de ne pas laisser dégénérer en une insurrection.’

99 Ibid., p. 258.
100 Asseraf, Electric news in colonial Algeria, p. 77.
101 Note sur la responsabilité collective, ANOM, ALG CONST B3 218.
military and civil force levied against innocent Aurèsians in the wake of the rebellion of 1916.

Similarly, in Niger the fear of Islam, and the French sense of being betrayed at a vulnerable time of war, led to absolutely brutal repression. Multiple accounts note that the French massacred Muslims upon lifting the siege at Agadez; with massacres occurring at several other junctures during the repression of 1917–19. André Salifou’s *Kaousson ou la Révolte Sénoussiste* is especially detailed here, thanks to oral history that Salifou gathered in the 1960s with survivors of the French repression. Akililik Ag Tabia of the Igamayan Tuareg recalled how I was accused of having participated in the revolt. A White by the name of Bourges condemned us to death at In Gall and grouped us up about twenty steps from the current Administrative Post. A Kel Fadey Tuareg, Bacha, asked Bourges for mercy for all the young people of my age [which was granted]. Then, in my presence, Bourges gave the order to the soldiers to start the execution by bayonet and by coupe-coupe [machete]. My uncles and cousins fell before me, bayonets thrust in their back, and their heads [chopped nearly off] were left dangling on their breast or their back, held in place [only] by a flap of skin.

Stories of French massacres are also found in the oral tradition. The chronicle of Ammane ben Ahmed Bougounou, marabout of Agadez, in particular notes the massacre of Muslims, especially preachers or wise men, in the aftermath of the siege at Agadez. Looking on from Nigeria and Egypt, even the British were horrified at the French behaviour. Frederick Lugard, British governor general of Nigeria, noted that French activities ‘appeared to be little short of extermination’. Lugard had feared ahead of time that the coming French repression would be unusually brutal, and was unenthusiastic about assisting the French in southern Niger. British troops based in Nigeria had occupied posts in southern Niger to free up French garrisons to take part in the Kaocen War, placing them in a position to discover and transmit information regarding the French repression. Their limited deployment, however, and the fact that they began withdrawing as early as April 1917, limits the scope of their intelligence, especially since the war dragged on for a further two years. Nevertheless, Lugard’s perception of French activities in the

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104 Hama, *Documents Nigériens*, p. 163.
107 Télégramme Officiel de Territoire Niger à Gouverneur Général, Général commandant supérieur Dakar, 23 Avril 1917, ANS, 1D218.
Senussi Wars was confirmed by post-war British reports, which benefited from insights derived from British officials in Egypt. One report, admittedly focusing on Tripolitania and Fezzan rather than Niger, suggests that the population of these regions fell from 650,000 to 250,000 (61.5 per cent) during the height of the Senussi Wars and subsequent repression, from 1916 to 1919.\footnote{Slight, ‘British understandings of the Sanussiyya Sufi Order’s jihad against Egypt, 1915–1917’, p. 236.} It is not hard to imagine that the Aïr shared a similarly gruesome fate.

The scale of the horror inflicted by the French repression in Niger is hard to measure, but some historians have suggested that the population of Aïr fell by roughly half during the period of the French repression (primarily from 1917 to 1919).\footnote{Idrissa, ‘The Kawousan War reconsidered’, p. 214.} Such an arithmetic is, however, extremely hard to verify, even in the best of circumstances. Population figures, even for the better-documented southern region of Niger, are suspect, and even if they were soundly accurate it would not be easy to distinguish between the population losses due to migration, famine-related death and disease, and people who were killed outright by French-led troops.\footnote{Finn Fuglestad has discussed the substantial decrease in Niger’s population from 1912 to 1921, but also had a hard time disaggregating the various causes. Fuglestad, A history of Niger, pp. 88–92.} Simply put, the exact death toll of the French repression is unknown, and probably unknowable. The massacres that took place at Agadez, In Gall, and elsewhere are nowhere to be found in the official correspondence between Mourin, commander of the Column of Agadez, and his superiors. This is, of course, unsurprising.

The ferocity of the French repression, while hardly out of line with other colonial repressions, must at least in part come back to French fears about an imagined Islam. The direct association of Kaocen with a specific Islamic sect (the Senussi) that was waging war against Europeans across a wide span of the eastern Sahara was undoubtedly enough to convince French officers that Islam was, at least in part, to blame. This also helps explain why the killing of imams is so heavily noted in oral histories and tradition.

IV

Religion, in its many forms, has always played a central role in the lives of people and their societies. For the rebels in Batna and Niger, Islam offered a larger vision of community and history. In a rhetorical sense, it tied together their local struggles with the grand struggles of Muslim people all over the world during the First World War. This rhetoric did in some way translate into reality for rebels from Morocco to Niger who received small quantities of military supplies from the Germans and Ottomans at different times during their rebellions.\footnote{Correale, La Grande Guerre des trafiquants, p. 147.} Islam could, even if only briefly, paper over long-standing
divisions to bring people together for the pursuance of a singular, united goal: in this instance, the establishment of new, independent states free from European control. This should caution us against seeing ‘all religion [a]s pre-modern and antirational while the state is both modern and rational’.112

Islam provided a shared language that communicated a sense of identity and community among disparate groups, be they the Tuareg factions scattered across the Sahara, or the rebels, patriots, and intellectuals producing revolutionary or Pan-Islamic pamphlets that found their way into the hands of people living in north-eastern Algeria. Islam was used as a rhetorical device before and after the rebellions of 1916 to highlight the most immediately obvious difference between Algerians and Nigeriens and their French colonizers.113 It could, in a word, stand in for opposition to the French politico-economic programmes in North and West Africa that undermined pre-existing social structures and expropriated huge tracts of land for European development and exploitation.

For the French, Islam presented both a spectre to be feared and repressed, and also justification for their policy of brutal collective discipline.114 European relationships with Islam across Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s had been nuanced and fluid, moving between persecution, surveillance, and facilitation based on changing circumstances and changing colonial leadership.115 The strain of war and ramped-up fears regarding Islamic ‘fanaticism’ saw the French pursue brutal repression in Algeria and Niger from 1917. This repression was targeted at Muslims in Niger, and justified by thin appeals to French misperceptions of Islamic law in Algeria. This should cause us to reconsider how common violent repression was in European empires during the First World War. The colonial recruitment campaigns, especially those of the French empire, were often based explicitly on coercion; in West Africa, they were even modelled, consciously or unconsciously, on the old transatlantic slave trade.116 These recruitment practices helped spur anti-colonial rebellions from Senegal to Saigon. The brutal repression that followed most of the rebellions has not yet been integrated into the broader historiography of European empire during the First World War, which has tended to begin the history of colonized populations in the war with their recruitment into European militaries. At the very least, the experiences of Batna, Algeria, and the Aïr in Niger prompt us to reconsider the breadth to imperial-colonial experiences and repercussions stemming from the realities of the First World War.

113 Fogarty, *Race and war in France*, p. 169.
114 Peterson, *Islamization from below*, p. 2.