

Colonial Conflict in Maupassant's Mes Voyages en Algérie

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In 1881, the Parisian newspaper *Le Gaulois* dispatched Guy de Maupassant to Algeria to report on the revolts led by Cheikh Bouamama.¹ Roaming the country, the French writer composed not only the reports requested from him but also chronicles about the places and the people he discovered. Published under the title *Au Soleil* [In the Sun] and recently republished as *Mes Voyages en Algérie* [My travels in Algeria], these articles reveal much about their author's representation of the colonized Algerians and, more importantly, his stance with regard to the colonial conflict. The following essay seeks to examine Maupassant's stance, showing it to be ambivalent. On the face of it, Maupassant seems to be scathingly critical of the colonial enterprise, disapproving of both the arrogance of its representatives and of their ineffective methods: "nous sommes restés des conquérants brutaux, maladroits, infatués de nos idées toutes faites" [we have remained brutal and clumsy conquerors, full of our preconceived ideas] (16),² as he affirms in one of his early articles. A more careful reading, however, betrays a strong support for colonization, a support that underpins the discursive strategies deployed throughout the chronicles. Drawing on Ranajit Guha's analysis of "the prose of counter-insurgency" in colonial India, I will argue that the French writer belittles the revolts led by Bouamama and his followers, presenting them not as well-thought-out rebellions against injustice and domination, but as primitive manifestations of wanton hunger or of the Arabs'

supposedly inherent thirst for blood. Where Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that the violence of the colonized is nothing but a legitimate reaction to the original aggression that defines the act of colonization itself (31), it is native violence, stripped of its political dimension, that Maupassant decries.

Less explicitly, it is the Orientalist clichés pervading *Mes Voyages en Algérie* that point to the writer's colonialist mindset—Orientalism being, as Edward Said famously argues, the discursive corollary of colonialism. Maupassant unwittingly illustrates the strategies of colonialist discourse analyzed by Edward Said and David Spurr: he both eroticizes and debases the Algerian natives. As Frantz Fanon ("Algeria Unveiled" 44 and 48-49) and Ann McClintock (3-5) explain, the sexual possession of the colonized woman heralds the possession of the colonized country itself. Following this thesis, I contend that the French writer's eroticization of the female North African invites the actual penetration of the land, of which it functions as a symbol. In addition, Maupassant denigrates the Arabs, whom he animalizes, infantilizes, and associates with moral depravity in order to justify the French encroachment on their lands. He presents them as backward and immature creatures who are unable to rule themselves and therefore need the intervention of enlightened and benevolent Westerners. Finally, I emphasize Maupassant's participation in the colonial divide-and-rule policy through his hierarchization of Algerian racial components: Maupassant places the Arabs at the very bottom of a racial pyramid; he reserves a hardly better treatment to the Jews, presented as unscrupulous usurers who maintain their Muslim compatriots in a state of inescapable misery. The portrait drawn of Berbers is more positive. If Kabyles are lauded for their sedentariness and their pacific temper, the Mozabites—the intelligent and hard-working desert-dwellers—are undoubtedly Maupassant's most admired Algerians. In the essay that follows I will argue that these racially biased representations contribute to weakening the colonized—and any possible rebellion on their part—by setting them against each other.

Rebellion or Banditry?

Numerous critics have observed that Maupassant is scathingly critical of colonial malpractice in his Algerian chronicles. While Benjamin Broyer holds that the writer's romantic expectations about North Africa turned to virulent criticism against the colonization that disenchanted this part of the world—the Sahara in particular (2)—Patricia Lorcin maintains that he poignantly renders the reality of oppression in parts of colonized Algeria like Kabylia, and that he displays sympathy for the Kabyles, accusing the settlers of being too arrogant and hostile toward them (176). Even critics who, like Ahmed Bedjaoui, censor the writer for being a champion of colonization, acknowledge his denunciation of the French colonial methods. As a matter of fact, in articles like "Bouamama" and "La Kabylie—Bougie," Maupassant repeatedly suggests that native rebellions are the unavoidable result of a colonial system that harasses the natives, strips them of their land, ruins them, and leaves them starving (17, 45-46). When an administrator attempts to implement a more effective and humane policy, he is removed from his position before he has even had time to know how he should proceed (47). Famished and resourceless, the natives are left with no other alternative than revolt. Maupassant argues that it is hunger, and hunger alone, that accounts for their insurrections: "Ces gens ne se sont battus que pour vider les silos ou piller les convois. Ils ne semblent avoir agi ni par haine, ni par fanatisme religieux, mais par faim." [these people (Bouamama's followers) have fought us only to empty the silos or loot the convoys. They seem to have acted neither out of hatred nor out of religious fanaticism, but out of hunger] (17).

This condemnation of colonial injustices seems to corroborate Lorcin's argument that Maupassant was sympathetic with the natives and is to some extent reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's famous argument that the violence of the colonized is nothing but the unavoidable answer to an even greater violence—that of colonization itself (*The Wretched* 31). Simultaneously, however, reducing the natives'

rebellion to no more than a manifestation of hunger is obviously belittling and denigrating and departs from the Fanonian vision, which sees in the revolts of the colonized a manifestation of political maturity. For Fanon, such revolts are the expression of their initiators' full awareness that violence is the only language that the colonizer understands, and that violence only bends in the face of a yet greater violence (*The Wretched* 47-48). By contrast, for Maupassant, the violence of the colonized is no more than an instinctive reaction of "animals" seeking to overcome hunger.

This de-politicization of rebellion is by no means atypical in colonial writings. In "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," Ranajit Guha explains that Western historians strip Indian peasants' insurgencies of their political meaning by showing them to be unplanned spontaneous actions by assigning them to causes that are unrelated to the rebels' agency. Describing the peasants by resorting to epithets rather than verbs, the chroniclers privilege "the functionality of being" (metaphor) over "the functionality of doing" (metonym)—a rhetorical strategy that emphasizes the natives' supposed lack of agency by transforming their gestures of resistance into "wanton atrocities" (Guha 56-57). It is precisely as "wanton atrocities" that the Algerians' violence is represented in Maupassant's texts, as made obvious by the phrase "looting the convoys" in the short passage quoted above. Bouamama himself is referred to as "le chef d'une bande peu nombreuse" [the leader of a small gang] (17), and similar associations between "Arabs" and banditry abound in the articles under study: "Qui dit Arabe dit voleur, sans exception" [who says Arab says thief, without exception] (73); "Les Arabes, par toute l'Algérie, se volent les uns les autres" [All over Algeria, the Arabs rob each other] (50); "ils passent [leur vie] à se voler entre eux, à se tromper, et à se tirer des coups de fusil" [they spend their life robbing, cheating on, and firing at each other] (79). These statements obviously mock the sympathy that Maupassant seems to display toward the natives, since they refute his own argument that it is the instinct of survival that is behind their

rebellions. Instead, it is another instinct that is now indicted—call it African innate savageness or the Oriental atavistically dishonest and violent nature. Thus, while being a good illustration of “the prose of counter-insurgency,” the French writer’s representation of native resistance also embodies the cliché of the barbaric Orient (and Africa) recurrent in colonialist texts. Interestingly, however, Maupassant’s stance is complicated by the fact that Arabs are not the only “race” he presents as violent: the Spanish esparto grass growers he introduces in his account of the confrontations between the French and Bouamama’s men are no less cruel and bloodthirsty. But while this might be thought to contradict the Orientalist bias detected in previous descriptions, the opposite argument is also plausible. Indeed, that the Spaniards, of all other Westerners, should be said to be violent might well relate to the Arab constituent of these Europeans, thus confirming, rather than belying, the author’s anti-Arab prejudice. Moreover, through this denigration, Maupassant seems to construct one racial hierarchy within another: if Europeans by and large are superior to Arabs, the French are the most entitled to rule these savages because they are better civilized than other inhabitants of their continent.

Because the Algerians’ rebellions are gratuitous manifestations of dishonesty and inherent violence rather than the “cries of hunger” that he initially shows them to be, Maupassant insists no less on the importance of punishing unruliness than on the necessity of rethinking colonial policies. While condemning the abuses of the colonial system, he is equally critical of what he sees as the colonizers’ too lenient attitude toward the “brutal” native insurgents. Commenting on a rare instance of such brutality, he explains that Bouamama’s men, not content with attacking a convoy of Spanish settlers and murdering many of them in a most savage fashion, also raped several of their victims, men and women alike, and took a lot of prisoners—whom they would kill later, “sans raison” [without reason] (20). Yet, under the pretext that reprisals would exacerbate rebellion, this massacre—the obviously scandalized writer notes—went unpunished, and glaring

evidence of the criminals' guilt was grotesquely declared insufficient (18). Elsewhere, he notes with no less disapproval that Ksar El Boukhari, known as one of the most dangerous areas of the colony, is "plus libre qu'une ville en France" [freer than any town in France] (30) and that its Arab inhabitants are allowed to circulate unbothered, when no Frenchman can venture to the military territories of the South without being escorted by some influential personage (30).

Oriental Vices

One practice in which Maupassant sees a sign of the weakness of the colonial administration is the newly set tradition that consists of firing a bullet at sunrise and sunset to signal the beginning and the end of the fasting day, respectively. This practice irritates him all the more because of the distaste he repeatedly voices throughout his chronicles for the Islamic religion, which he associates with narrow-minded stubbornness. Muslims are presented as "sauvagement fanatiques et stupidement fervents" [wildly fanatical and stupidly fervent] (24) and as being exclusively guided by their religion, without which they would be utterly unable to display morality of any sort (34). And it is precisely this religious "stupidity" that—the writer explains in another self-contradictory statement—is behind their hostility toward the French: "et ils se répètent que, s'ils tuent un de ces roumis pendant le Ramadan, ils vont droit au ciel" [and they repeat to themselves that if they kill one of those French during Ramadan, they will go straight to Heaven] (24).

Other derogatory statements about the natives and their religion are recurrent in the articles. Taking up one of the major colonial narratives about the Orient, Maupassant stigmatizes the Islamic religion for the oppression to which it subjects women. In two separate instances, he notes, with as much irony as in the above quotation, that women are allowed to attend the prayer at the mosque, but that they never do, for "Dieu est trop loin, trop haut, trop imposant pour elles" [God is too far, too high, too commanding for them] (40). To make it

clear that it is their own culture rather than Maupassant looking down on them, he adds on the very next page that women who pass by "vous jettent, entre le voile qui leur couvre la face, un regard noir et triste, un regard de prisonnière" [throw at you, from beneath the veil that covers their face, a black and sad look—a prisoner's look] (41). As authors like Frantz Fanon ("Algeria Unveiled"), Julia Clancy-Smith, and Gayatri Spivak, among others, have noted, this "chivalric" compassion for the colonized woman was a central characteristic of colonial discourse. The colonial enterprise, which disguised itself as a civilizing and enlightening mission, designed woman as a measure of the degree of civilization and moral elevation of a given society: the more woman was judged to be oppressed, the more the culture to which she belonged was backward. Highlighting the subjection of the Oriental woman was, therefore, important inasmuch as it legitimized the presence of the colonizer, whose duty it was to "save brown women from brown men," as Spivak's famous quip goes (192).

Clancy-Smith further explains that this concern with the fate of the subjected colonized woman went hand in hand with a sexual commodification of this very same woman, through textual and visual exposure of her body (156), a tendency masterfully illustrated by the highly suggestive postcards of Algerian women collected by Malek Alloula in his now classic *The Colonial Harem*. This double tendency is certainly illustrated in Maupassant's travel accounts. Like so many contemporaries and predecessors, the reporter devotes pages to the famous Ouled Nail women, who traditionally worked as dancers and prostitutes before eventually settling down as wives and mothers.³ If the detailed description given of their lascivious dance might be to some extent justified given their "profession," it is worth noting that Maupassant's eroticization is not limited to prostitutes:

La femme arabe en général n'a de pudeur que pour son visage. On rencontre celles du peuple allant au travail la figure voilée avec soin, mais le corps couvert seulement de deux bandes de laine tombant l'une par

devant, l'autre par derrière, et laissant voir, de profil, toute la personne.

[Generally speaking, the Arab woman's modesty is limited to her face. One can meet women of the lower classes going to work with a carefully veiled face but a body covered only with two strips of wool, one falling on the front and the other behind, making it possible to see, in profile, details of the whole person.] (94)

A similar, albeit more aestheticized, description is provided in another article, in which the writer describes native women washing clothes by the Boussaada River. Head-veiled but bare-legged, they are said to dance gracefully above the linen they are washing (99).

The women thus eroticized are rarely aestheticized, however. Except for a few of them, the Ouled Nail dancers Maupassant describes "ne sont point jolies" [are not pretty] (34); in fact, most Arab women are too worn out by the exhausting chores assigned to them to keep any beauty or freshness beyond the age of ... fifteen! (95). Marks of exhaustion put aside, it is not clear whether Maupassant considers "Arab" women to be beautiful or not. The most explicit physical description he gives of them is summed up in the following sentence: "La femme arabe, en général, est petite, blanche comme du lait, avec une physionomie de jeune mouton." [In general, the Arab woman is small, as white as milk, with a young sheep's physiognomy] (94). To what extent this sheep-like physiognomy is supposed to be advantageous to its owners is not certain; what is certain is that the obvious association between the colonized and animals is part of the process of debasement that David Spurr identifies as a typical discursive strategy (76-91).

Maupassant actually makes extensive use of this strategy. If a sheep-like quality is also bestowed on the muezzin, whose voice, as he calls to prayer is said to be "vieille, douce, bêlante et très monotone" [old, soft, bleating and very monotonous] (25)—a confirmation, if need be, of the writer's hostile vision of Islam—the young native shoe-

cleaners are all "malins comme des singes" [sly like monkeys] (14), while native opponents are, as they are hit by the French enemy's guns, compared to an "oiseau blessé qui aurait du sang sur les plumes" [an injured bird whose feathers are stained with blood] (22). This last example illustrates not only the colonialist impulse to animalize the colonized, but also what Spurr has termed the technique of surveillance. No less than the example through which Spurr illustrates this technique—and in which the natives are compared to rabbits and wild animals (20-21)—Maupassant's metaphor is evocative of colonial relations that simultaneously trigger predation and a problematic liberation: while bird imagery is traditionally associated with freedom, the fact that the bird in question is injured renders this freedom hypothetical, an ambivalence that sums up well the condition of the Algerian resisters, whose struggle for liberation is constantly made uncertain by the hostility of a technically more powerful colonizer.

This is not to say that Maupassant never acknowledges the rebels' strength. The Arabs are courageous, he admits (22), and so quick and discrete that one can never locate them when they have opted for escape. This puzzling ubiquity is particularly striking in the case of their leader, Bouamama, who is spotted in six different places at the same time, by officers who think they have captured him at last. Bouamama is, in short, an "insaisissable farceur" [an elusive joker] (17). Thus formulated, however, Bouamama's description is far from laudatory. Although he is, elsewhere, described as heroic and manly,⁴ the word "joker" strips him of this manliness, as it were, replacing it with a childlike quality. A few other instances of the colonial thrust to infantilize the natives can be found in Maupassant's accounts, as when he evokes the "goût enfantin des femmes (arabes) sauvages" [wild Arab women's childish taste] (44).

While Maupassant's eroticization and infantilization of the Orientals seem to have gone almost unnoticed so far, one particular aspect of his derogatory vision of North Africa has been most disapprovingly noted: his focus on homosexuality, which the writer

claims may be encountered “à chaque pas” [at every step] and that is “entré si profondément dans les mœurs que les Arabes semblent les considérer comme aussi naturel que l’autre” [so deeply entrenched in the country’s mores that the Arabs seem to consider it as natural as the other (sexual orientation)] (35). The Algerian critic and intellectual Mostefa Lacheraf writes virulently about what he sees as the French writer’s humiliating representation: Maupassant, he indignantly comments, is a “fier-à-bras” and a “policier-indicateur” [a bully and a policeman-informer], while his depiction of Algeria is no less than an “ignominie” [ignominy] (77).

As Clancy-Smith, again, notes, homosexuality was a common motif in colonial accounts of the Orient in general and Algeria in particular (152, 159), a motif often explained by hardly convincing arguments that include the hot climate and the seclusion of women (159-60), which Maupassant readily takes up (35). However, more than a confirmed fact, this legend of Oriental homoeroticism is, like the other discursive strategies discussed so far, likely to serve the purpose of denigrating the East. On the one hand, it partakes in the typically Orientalist strategy of feminizing that part of the world. Indeed, one of the instances of homosexuality Maupassant provides in the long pages he devotes to this Oriental “phenomenon” is that of the native lieutenant who gives instructions to his subalterns to take great care of a new and strikingly handsome recruit. This male recruit, he explains, “doit [*sic*] rien faire, parce que c’est la femme du lieutenant” [must do nothing because he is the lieutenant’s wife] (37). On the other hand, focus on these “amours antinaturelles” [unnatural love] is supposed to underscore the moral and civilizational gap between the depraved colonized and the refined Westerner: “ces hommes de tempérament violent [n’ont pas] la délicatesse, la finesse, la propreté intellectuelle qui nous préservent des habitudes et des contacts répugnants.” [these wild-tempered men do not have the delicacy, fineness, and intellectual cleanliness that keep us away from loathsome habits and contacts] (35). Most ironically, however,

Maupassant inserts this sentence just after noting that the "vice" he decries was recommended by Socrates and practiced by Julius Caesar (and indeed Greeks and Romans in general), the French king Henri III, and many other "grands hommes" [great men] (35). Blind to his glaring self-contradiction, Maupassant simultaneously dismantles his own assumption that "les amours antinaturelles" are a North African specificity, and his claims of European moral superiority.

Dividing to Rule

Edward Said famously argues that Orientalist discourse acts as a pillar that reinforces the colonialist enterprise. By deploying the typical Orientalist strategy of feminizing, infantilizing, and debasing the Algerians, Maupassant seems to justify the colonial intrusion: presenting those intruded upon as weak, backward, and immature creatures implies that they need Western benefactors to lift them up to the status of enlightened human beings. However, a possibly less insidious manifestation of the French writer's discursive support of the colonial project is his hierarchization of the North Africans along racial traits. While Algerian Arabs and Jews are associated with the worst vices, the Berbers—the Mozabites in particular—are presented in a much more favorable light.

Maupassant voices as much distaste for the Arabs' supposedly inherent moral traits as for their lifestyle. As shown in the previous sections, the members of this racial group are described as "un peuple primitif" (75) and "querelleur" (77) [a primitive and quarrelsome people], inclined to violence, looting, and sexual perversion. Thus the chronicler criticizes their beliefs and mode of living and reproduces the myth of the Islamic Orient as a land of unbridled sexuality and, as such, a menace to the West's moral righteousness. Devoting several pages to the enumeration of the endless flaws of these detestable people and illustrating his statements with anecdotes, he takes pains to demonstrate that Muslim cadis' decisions depend on who bribes them the most rather than on any sense of justice; that the Arabs prefer these

corrupt judges to the fairness and moral rectitude of the French administration; and that, being the most unscrupulous creatures that ever lived, these people hide their worst misdeeds—or that of their fellow tribesmen—by assigning them to God, a god who accomplishes the strangest feats, the writer amusedly comments (80).

This immoral people is “étrange, enfantin, demeuré primitif comme à la naissance des races” [strange, childish, and as primitive as at the birth of races] (75). In a revision of the traditional colonial classification that places the Blacks at the bottom of the racial pyramid, Maupassant suggests that this primitiveness surpasses even that of the most backward people, like the Inuits or the Blacks. Sneering at the Arabs’ nomadic lifestyle, he writes:

Les nègres ont des cases, les Lapons ont des trous, les Esquimaux ont des huttes, les plus sauvages des sauvages ont une demeure creusée dans le sol ou plantée dessus; ils tiennent à leur mère terre. Les Arabes passent, toujours errants, sans attache, sans tendresse pour cette terre que nous possédons, que nous rendons féconde, que nous aimons avec les fibres de notre cœur humain; ils passent au galop de leurs chevaux; inhabiles à tous nos travaux [...]. Leurs coutumes sont restées rudimentaires. Notre civilisation glisse sur eux sans les effleurer. Ils boivent à l’orifice même de la peau du bouc; mais on présente l’eau aux étrangers dans une collection de récipients invraisemblables [...]. S’ils s’emparaient, dans quelque razzia, d’un de nos chapeaux parisiens à haute forme, ils le conserveraient assurément pour offrir à boire dedans au premier général qui traverserait la tribu.

[The Negroes have cabins, the Lapps have holes, the Eskimos have huts, the wildest savages have a dwelling dug in the ground or planted on it; they are attached to their mother earth. The Arabs move

onward, always wandering, without bonds and without tenderness for this land which is ours, which we make fertile, which we love with the fibers of our human heart; they gallop off on their horses, unfit for all our work [...]. Their customs have remained rudimentary. Our civilization slides over them without touching them. They drink from the very hole of their goat skin; but they present water to foreigners in a collection of incredible containers [...]. If they seized, in some raid, one of our Parisian top hats, they would certainly keep it to offer a drink in it to the first general who would encounter the tribe.] (75)

It is difficult to find texts in which Arabs are more Othered and vilified. Where nomadism is sometimes romanticized as synonymous with freedom and unconventionality,⁵ and where numerous Orientalists aestheticize the Arabs, portraying them as noble if sometimes fanatic knights, bestowing on them a sense of grandeur and dignity,⁶ Maupassant presents them as comic figures who foolishly mistake hats for glasses and who surpass the most primitive people in backwardness by proving incapable of change and progress and indeed of any form of architecture, however basic. Not content with excluding it from the realm of civilization (as made explicit by the sentence "Our civilization slides over them without touching them"), the quotation actually questions the very humanity of this race, a race deprived of the human natural and healthy instinct of loving Mother Earth.

Almost as strong as this hatred for Arabs is the writer's anti-Semitism. Although he does concede that Jewesses can be superbly beautiful, paying homage to their looks in a lyrical passage filled with flattering metaphors,⁷ he often draws a repulsive physical and moral portrait of this racial group, going as far as justifying anti-Semitic crimes: "Dès qu'on avance vers le sud, la race juive se révèle sous un aspect hideux qui fait comprendre la haine féroce de certains peuples contre ces gens, et même les massacres récents." [As soon as we begin

moving southward, the Jewish race is revealed in a hideous aspect that makes one understand the fierce hatred of some populations toward these people, and even the recent massacres] (100). The Jews he claims to have met in the Algerian South seem to be even more depraved than the vile Arabs: “on les voit, assoupis en des tanières immondes, bouffis de graisse, sordides et guettant l’Arabe comme une araignée guette la mouche” [one can see them, dozing in filthy lairs, puffed up with fat, vile, and watching the Arab as a spider would watch a fly] (101). As in the passage describing the Arabs’ primitive lifestyle, this quotation accumulates debasing epithets that dehumanize Jews and Arabs alike. The animalization of the former, which begins with the word “lair,” is completed with the metaphor of the spider and the fly.

The spider and fly metaphor—and indeed the whole description—of course hints at the activity with which this race is traditionally associated. In taking up the cliché of the Jews as perfidious and insatiable usurers who take advantage of the vices of the Arabs, their fellow countrymen, Maupassant makes himself the accomplice not only of the anti-Semitic feelings that infested the settler community in Algeria but, perhaps more importantly, of the divide-and-rule colonialist policy that seeks to weaken the colonized by setting them against each other. In this connection, it is worth reminding the reader that North African Muslims and Jews lived in harmony prior to French colonization, whose segregationist treatment nurtured hatred between these two constituents (Taieb 199).⁸

This strategy of division is further illustrated through the glaring contrast between the Algerian Semites and their Berber compatriots. Perpetuating the so-called Kabyle myth, Maupassant describes the Djurdjura mountain-dwellers as “tranquilles” (46), “sédentaires et travailleurs” (45) [quiet, sedentary, and hard-working], implicitly praising these qualities that oppose them to the nomadic, warlike, and fanatic Arabs.⁹ While applauding the Westerners’ appropriation of the Arabs’ lands (despite his disapproving of the methods deployed in the

process) and cheerfully announcing what he sees as the unavoidable demise of this primitive race (59), Maupassant laments the fact that Kabyles are stripped of their properties, which they are obliged to give up for derisory amounts of money, arguing that such unjust practices push these otherwise pacific Berbers to rebel against the French (45-46). More than to the Kabyles, however, it is to the Mozabites that the writer's sympathy, and indeed admiration, goes. Although these Berbers of the Algerian South are as much involved in trade and money-making as the Jews—they are even nicknamed "les Juifs du désert" [the Jews of the desert] (102)—his portrayal of Beni Mzab puzzlingly contrasts with his repellent evocation of Beni Israel. The Mozabites, he affirms, are "intelligents, actifs" [intelligent and active], two virtues which earn them their compatriots' jealousy (102). To justify his statement, Maupassant explains that almost all the members of this community can read and write, that they all watch over the peacefulness and security of their town, and that they have implanted a sophisticated system of dams, thus transforming the arid desert into a prosperous area whose inhabitants live happily. Intriguingly, the writer who vehemently decries the oppression of the female Arab does not say a single word on woman's predicament in this community, known for its rigidly androcentric religious and moral code. Although Mozabite women do receive a rudimentary (religious) education, they are requested to abide by a very strict code that regulates their appearance and behavior and prevents them, among other things, from leaving their native region, attending the mosque, or even showing their hand to a shopkeeper when paying for what they have bought (Alport 41-42). But Maupassant chooses to keep silent about all this.

Maupassant's racial bias is obvious in his divergent responses to similar traits and situations. The greed of which he draws a most gross image when referring to the Jews suddenly becomes the manifestation of an intelligent mind and a necessary condition of welfare, in the case of Beni Mzab. Similarly, the sympathy he voices for the subjected Arab woman is denied the even more oppressed female Mozabite.

Finally, the Western appropriation of the natives' lands is decried or welcomed, depending on whether the natives in question are Arab or Kabyle. These contradictions reveal a blind subscription to the racial myths that flourished in the writer's time and that were often employed as a justification of the colonial enterprise. More importantly, and as already explained, such discriminatory attitudes serve the colonial project by fuelling resentment and hostility between the different human groups of the colonized land. Through racial division and classification, the French colonial administration sought to weaken anticolonial resistance by voicing preference for Berbers over Arabs, and for Jews over Muslims. It is this very hierarchization that marks *Mes Voyages en Algérie*. Maupassant's unreserved lauding of the Mozabites becomes even less surprising when one learns that, in the early 1880s when he was in Algeria, this community paid allegiance to the French colonizers and welcomed their institutions, provided that they respected their lifestyle and religious practices (Alport 41). The writer's sympathy (or lack thereof) for a given Algerian population thus depends on the degree of docility displayed by this population toward his own Western people.

Conclusion

The contradictions urged by racial prejudice are not the only ones that have been detected in Maupassant's account. The above discussion provides more than one example of the writer's ambivalent positioning with regard to French-Algerian relations. While he is at pains to legitimize colonization by emphasizing the ignorance, immaturity, moral deviance, inherent violence, and overall lack of refinement of the (Arab) Algerian, his simultaneous description of colonial injustices belies the assumption of the Europeans' moral superiority. In fact, regardless of whether the French civilization is superior or not, Maupassant acknowledges its inadequacy in Africa:

Dès les premiers pas, on est saisi, gêné, par la
sensation du progrès mal appliqué à ce pays, de la

civilisation brutale, gauche, peu adaptée aux mœurs, au ciel et aux gens. C'est nous qui avons l'air de barbares au milieu de ces barbares, brutes il est vrai, mais qui sont chez eux, et à qui les siècles ont appris des coutumes dont nous semblons n'avoir pas encore compris le sens.

[From the first steps, one is seized and embarrassed by the sensation of the progress that is inadequately applied to this country and the brutal and clumsy civilization which is ill-adapted to its manners, its sky, and its people. It is we who look like barbarians in the midst of these barbarians—barbarians who are certainly brutes but who are at home, and to whom centuries have taught customs of which we seem not to have understood the meaning yet.] (15)

Notwithstanding Maupassant's discursive buttressing of the colonial mission that this essay highlights, the oxymoron "brutal civilization" and the inadequate assessment of the actual barbarians' identity in this passage betray anxious interrogations regarding the utility and the fate of the French presence in Algeria. These contradictions have led the critic Catherine Du Toit to argue that Maupassant knows that colonialism is wrong, but that he constructs a heterophobic attitude to justify that by which he is not convinced. Thus, he eases his conscience while siding with his own people (86-87). I would slightly depart from this argument by suggesting that Maupassant doubted not so much the righteousness of the French occupation as its ability to implement itself durably in Algeria. Indeed, if the "Arabs" are, in military terms, weaker, they have an obvious advantage over the intruders: they are "les fils du pays" [the country's sons] (31) and can resist hunger, thirst, discomfort, and the harshness of the climate and the land. Despairing of the possibility of a victory over the resilient, wild-living natives, Maupassant wishes nothing less than their complete disappearance—although he disapproves of the

extreme methods employed by the colonial authorities to effect that purpose. Yet not even the disappearance of the colonized would guarantee the victory of colonization. Indeed, no less than its inhabitants, the land is, together with its climate, itself an enemy, as evidenced by the case of an Alsatian woman who emigrated to Algeria after the annexation of her region to Germany in 1870, but who saw three of her sons die one after the other under the effect of the Algerian unbearable sun (64). Colonization, Maupassant seems to warn despite all his efforts to support and legitimize it, is doomed to be a lost cause.

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Notes

¹ Cheikh Bouamama was one of the leading figures of anticolonial resistance in southwest Algeria. Having succeeded in putting an end to intertribal conflicts in that region, he won several battles against the French in the period running from 1881 to 1908.

² My translations throughout.

³ For more on these women, see Berkahoum Ferhati, “La Danseuse prostituée dite ‘Ouled Nail,’ entre mythe et réalité. Des rapports sociaux et des pratiques concrètes,” *Regards complémentaires* 17 (2003): 101-113, accessed 07/06/2019. <https://journals.openedition.org/clio/584#xdcof=ODdlZjE4NDYtMzhlNi00OGVmLTgxZjEtNTBmMjVhN2MxODQ0~>

⁴ Bouamama, for example, disapproves of the sexual abuse to which his men submit their prisoners. When one of them forces a young woman to engage in physical intercourse, “the *marabout*,” as he is referred to, views this with disfavor and refuses to give the man his benediction (21).

⁵ One of the best known theoretical texts in this connection is assuredly Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s essay “Treatise of Nomadism” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,

trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988). Deleuze and Guattari celebrate nomadism as a free lifestyle that stands in opposition to what they term "the State"—power structures and their set of conventions and codes.

⁶ Two examples of such aestheticization of the Arabs are Isabelle Eberhardt's writings and Knud Holmboe's travelogue, *Desert Encounter* (1931). For an analysis of this representation, see respectively: Lynda Chouiten, *Isabelle Eberhardt and North Africa: A Carnavalesque Mirage* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 22-26; and Lynda Chouiten, "Manifestations of Western Authority in Knud Holmboe's *Desert Encounter*," in *Commanding Words: Essays on the Discursive Constructions, Manifestations, and Subversions of Authority*, ed. Lynda Chouiten (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2016), 75-88.

⁷ "Elles sont ici d'une beauté superbe, sévère et charmante [...]. Elles vont, les bras nus depuis l'épaule, des bras de statues qu'elles exposent hardiment au soleil ainsi que leur calme visage aux lignes pures et droite. Et le soleil semble impuissant à mordre cette chair polie." [They are here of superb beauty (at once) severe and charming [...]. They go by, their arms bare from the shoulder down—arms of statues that they boldly expose in the face of the sun, along with their quiet, pure and regular-lined face. And the sun seems powerless, incapable of biting that polished flesh.] (Maupassant 107).

⁸ The most obvious example of this segregationist treatment is the Décret Crémieux that in 1870 granted French citizenship to Algerian Jews and European settlers, while depriving Algerian Muslims of this right.

⁹ This myth further has it that the only superficially Muslim Kabyles hated their Arab compatriots and that they were much closer to the French than the latter. For more, see Mahfoud Kaddache, "L'Utilisation du fait berbère comme facteur politique dans l'Algérie coloniale," Accessed 06/07/2019. <http://institutfrantzfanon.org/lutilisation-du-fait-berbere-comme-facteur-politique-dans-lalgerie-coloniale-par-mahfoud-kaddache/>

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