

The Amîr ‘Abd Al-Qâdir and the “Good War” in Algeria, 1832-1847

American writer Nicholson Baker concludes *Human Smoke*, his recent book on the events leading up to the Second World War, with a question. “Was it a ‘good war’?” he asks bluntly.¹ The preceding pages, a montage-like construction of quotations and historical anecdotes that deflate some commonly held understandings of the war, ensure that the reader already knows that Baker’s answer is no. He argues that the Second World War’s years of apocalypse and holocaust brought nothing that can be legitimately called “good,” especially not for the millions who lost their lives. Coming in 2008, the book provokes negative reactions from many Americans (and several British reviewers) who contemplate with weary bitterness the ever-receding end of what they were told would be their generation’s “good war” in Afghanistan and Iraq, sequels to their country’s earlier “good wars.”² Although this polemic is of primary interest to people considering American history and memory, Baker’s

1. Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 473.

2. Negative American reviews include Stanford historian James J. Sheehan’s, “How Good a War?,” *Washington Post* (30 March 2008) and journalist William Grimes’s, “Say What? It Wasn’t a Just War After All?,” *New York Times* (12 March 2008). For the negative British reactions see David Cesarani, “A Novel View of History,” *The Independent* (25 April 2008); and Max Hastings, “Human Smoke by Nicholson Baker,” *The Sunday Times* (4 May 2008).

question itself is of value to researchers in many fields. Even if he is not an academic and his attack on the trope of the “good war” is not made as a historian, Baker poses in a straightforward way fruitful questions that we rarely ask: What are “good wars”?; what are the implications for history and historiography when a given war becomes “good”?; and the most important question, what historical forces make war “good”?

I. The “Good War”

Political philosophers and historians have already asked what legitimate or just wars are in a debate that goes back to Thucydides.³ But the good war is not a just war. The latter is evaluated by moral and legal arguments, abstract principles which measure the legitimacy of the occasion of war. (Similar arguments concern the rules governing the conduct of war, or *jus in bello*.) A separate logic determines whether a war becomes good. This logic is bound to the dynamic of history and memory, politics and ideology, narrative and aesthetics, all of which weigh on the historical imagination. At the most basic level, the good war is any conflict that leads to an outcome that a particular society, political party, or given author finds desirable. Therefore the fact that politics has something to do with making certain wars good is hardly surprising. Winners have an obvious investment in viewing their past armed conflicts in a positive light; the particular way they do so, however, remains an interesting historical question, one that engages problems of politi-

3. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th edition (New York: Basic Books, 2006); James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007). See also Charles E. Butterworth, “Al-Fārābī’s Statecraft: War and the Well-Ordered Regime,” in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition*, edited by James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp. 79-100.

cal culture and social self-understanding. Just as interesting is the fact that losers have narrated lost wars as good wars. One example relevant to the study of European imperialism is when Rudyard Kipling referred to the "savage wars of peace," in the third stanza of "The White Man's Burden" (1899). In this he reevaluated the violence done by Europeans in the world as both a noble struggle ("Fill full the mouth of Famine, And bid the sickness cease") and a futile one bound from the outset to failure.

Generally, however, the good war is a successful contest where soldiers' violence leads to "liberation," or where war lifts society to a new state of human development representing "progress." In these cases, the violence of war (including "social war" or revolution) serves as the motor force of positive change and is responsible for moving society along the path of history, as a generation of students who studied Hegel with Alexandre Kojève in Paris learned between the World Wars.⁴ At the same time, the good war is one that helps a community that has lost its bearings reconnect with a better, original state, typically understood as some variation of a socially-integrated *Gemeinschaft*. Part of this particular process may include war's putative ability to reconcile a disorienting and ever-changing present with the stability and authenticity of the values of ancestors.⁵ In some cases, like the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the good war articulates itself in the guise of ritual sacrifice, as Roxanne Varzi argues in a recent book.⁶

At another level, the good war serves as a narrative technique. It tells the story of war by taking the broken bits of the truth that come out of armed conflicts and placing them in a life-giving plot. From the ruptures, discontinuities, and trauma of war, the good war

4. Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre: quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979); Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

5. Mostefa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société* (Paris: Maspero, 1965).

6. Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

produces an understandable series of events linked by meaningful relations and bound by a redemptive denouement. This narrative affirms the noble aspects of humanity, and war thereby becomes an occasion for greatness, rather than one of loss. Such greatness includes expression of typically masculine-coded values, like strength and courage, but it also embraces values like sacrifice, perseverance, solidarity, and an unswerving belief in an ideal.⁷

This is all very far from the “*menis*” or fury that the *Iliad* describes surrounding the walls of Troy, a treacherous and morally uncertain place.⁸ “No comforting fiction intervenes” in the *Illiad*, as Simone Weil commented in 1940, “no consoling prospect of immortality; and on the hero’s head no washed out halo of patriotism descends.”⁹ Therefore, whereas Homer shows war’s “monotonous desolation” and obliges readers to confront the confusing and base aspects of battle, as well as its sublime horrors, the good war tends to sentimentalize or sensationalize war.¹⁰ It provides the schematic moral terms—the good and the bad, the tragic and the valorous—to yield a satisfying story. At this point, the narrative of the good war produces effects at the level of ideology, legitimating and normalizing otherwise questionable practices and institutions thus producing a false clarity from the inherently imprecise moral meaning of war. And, in a more general way, it obscures suffering and the lasting repercussions of trauma by retelling a history marked by destruction as a story of regeneration and rebirth. Thus, where one finds the good war proclaimed in the wake of war, one will also find the “inability to mourn.”¹¹

7. George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

8. Leonard Mueller, *The Anger of Achilles: Menis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

9. Simone Weil, “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force,” in *War and the Iliad*, translated by Mary McCarthy (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005), p. 4. My thanks to Heinrich von Staden for bringing this essay to my attention.

10. Weil, “Poem of Force,” p. 27.

11. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles*

II. The Good Wars in Algeria

The good war has appeared at many points in the last two centuries of Mediterranean history, and it has been especially important in projects to build empires. Mussolini is perhaps best known as an advocate of the good war: he saw nearly any war as good, as long as deaths were numerous and spectacular.¹² But while fascism's aestheticized violence is a model that has inspired many, its appeal as the representation of good war has been limited. (The atrocities of the Spanish Civil War, such as the bombing of Guernica in 1937, helped turn world opinion against this model.) A more enduring example is Bonaparte in Egypt. When the French general debarked here in 1798, he promised liberating change to the Egyptian people even if they had to first endure the violence of conquest and the social upheaval of revolutionary political and economic change.¹³ Another example of the good war figuring into imperial expansion comes fifty years later in the west African Sahel, a borderland linking the Mediterranean world to Africa. Here supporters of al-Hâjj 'Umar ben Sa'îd ben 'Uthmân Tâl (d. 1864) followed him into the good war to build a Muslim empire out of the pagan and what they saw as apostate Muslim states in the region.¹⁴ Fighting against both the French and his African enemies, 'Uthmân Tâl's army pursued a jihad that yielded him control of the rich middle Niger River region. A final example worthy of mention is the *Seven Pillars of Wis-*

of Collective Behavior (New York: Grove, 1975).

12. Simon Etta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

13. Henry Laurens, *L'expédition d'Égypte: 1798-1801* (Paris: A. Colin, 1989). See also Laurens, "Volonté de réformes et changements, le modèle de Bonaparte à Bush," in *La démocratie est-elle soluble dans l'islam*, edited by Abdelah Hammoudi, Denis Bachard, and Rémy Leveau (Paris: C.N.R.S. éditions, 2007), pp. 59-76.

14. David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

dom in which T. E. Lawrence reassured a reading public in Europe, thoroughly disillusioned with the mud, rats, and stench of war of the trenches, that war was indeed still good--“rather splendid and barbaric”--and a theater for great human achievements.¹⁵

In Algeria, the colonial period began and ended with classic examples of good wars. In 1830, Charles X fought the good war against what he presented as the forces of lawlessness and obscurantism represented by the Ottoman regency in Algiers, a “poignée de brigands” according to French war planners.¹⁶ Of course, this rhetoric of the good war expressed narrow political interests: the crisis faced by the Bourbons ensured that within Charles X’s council the good war was any foreign war that promised an easy victory, silencing political opposition in a popular wave of nationalism and militarism.¹⁷ But in public proclamations, the French government presented the expedition as a war of progress and emancipation that French soldiers fought on behalf of all Europeans and even all Algerians. The latter dimension of the war emerged in the French commander, General Bourmont’s proclamation to Algerians that preceded the landings. Putting his name to a Arabic document prepared by translators, Bourmont told Algerians that this was a war to liberate them from Dey al-Husayn ibn al-Husayn (d. 1838) and the “ends of his power and his bad nature” (“ghâyât tahkîmihi wa qabh tab‘ihi”).¹⁸ This argument also confirmed the government’s claim

15. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: Penguin, 1962), 144; Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On literary expressions of this disillusionment see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

16. “Le rapport du marquis de Clermont-Tonnerre, ministre de la guerre, sur une expédition à Alger (1827),” edited by Paul Azan, *Revue africaine* 70 (1929): p. 215.

17. Gabriel Esquer, *La prise d’Alger 1830* (Paris: Larose, 1929), p. 75.

18. “Proclamation en arabe adressée par le général de Bourmont aux habitants de la ville d’Alger et des tribus, en juin 1830,” translated by M. Bresnier, in A. Berbrugger, ed., “La première proclamation adressée par les Français aux Algé-

that France invaded Algeria not for national gain but as the world's policeman, bringing order and stability to the lawlessness along the so-called Barbary Coast.¹⁹ The Revolution of 1830 swept the Bourbons out of power just weeks after their victory in Algiers, but this version of the good war held sway for more than a century.²⁰ At the beginning of the end of French Algeria in 1954, an opposing good war confronted it, the war of national liberation led by the F.L.N. This year found "les armes retournées," and Algerian nationalists led a long and bitter, but popular and ultimately successful struggle for independence.²¹ At its end in 1962, the French army had buried about 27,000 of its own troops, Algerian families mourned hundreds of thousands of lost loved ones, and the F.L.N. counted more than 1.5 million Algerian "martyrs."²² Even if the nationalists' figure was exaggerated, the loss of life was staggering. Nevertheless, 1954-1962 has come to be seen as a good war for many, including those

riens, 1830," *Revue africaine* 6 (1862): p. 151 (French), p. 154 (Arabic).

19. This argument presented the expedition as conforming to conservative terms of the good war as defined by the Congress of Vienna, and it helped reassure neighbors that the invasion was not an expression of a resurgent France. Moreover, Charles X had to argue that the regency of Algiers was a sort of rogue state, not part of the Ottoman Empire, to avoid provoking Britain and Russia, signatories like France, to the Treaty of London (6 July 1827), which barred territorial acquisitions in Ottoman lands.

20. The fact that French men and women of many political shades endorsed this vision is borne out in the numerous texts throughout the colonial period that expressed the belief that good government and justice would win Algerians over to the French side. See for example Alexis de Tocqueville's discussion of "bon gouvernement" in "Rapport sur l'Algérie (1847)," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, edited by André Jardin (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 814.

21. André Nouschi, *Les armes retournées: colonisation et décolonisation françaises* (Paris: Belin, 2005); Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du F.L.N. 1954-1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); Mohammed Harbi, *La guerre commence en Algérie: 1954* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1984).

22. In his demographic history of colonial Algeria, Kamel Kateb concludes that it is impossible to establish a precise figure, but he suggests Algerian losses in 1954-1962 numbered between 400,000 to 600,000. Kamel Kateb, *Européens, "Indigènes," et Juifs en Algérie (1830-1962)* (Paris: Editions de l'Institut national d'études démographiques, 2001), pp. 307-319.

not immediately involved in the war. Most important in shaping this view is Gillo Pontecorvo's film "The Battle of Algiers" (1966), which brilliantly enshrined an enduring good war meaning of the Algerian war for audiences around the world. (At the same time, films that focus on the costs of the war, like Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina's beautifully haunting, "Rîh al-Awras" (1966) have been virtually ignored internationally.)

But Algeria's good war par excellence was that which took place in the years between 1832 and 1847, when the Amîr 'Abd al-Qâdir ibn Muhyî al-Dîn (d. 1883) led a coalition of Algerian forces against the French army. There is a strong and longstanding consensus that the conflict between 'Abd al-Qâdir and the French amounted to a good war. In France, Algeria, and around the world, people saw this as one of the great struggles of the modern era, pitting a powerful French army that had recently conquered most of Europe, against a small but highly motivated and heroic force of "indomitable mountaineers" and "horsemen of the desert," as a nineteenth-century British historian put it.²³ 'Abd al-Qâdir himself emerged as the fulcrum of this good war, a courageous and principled leader. In 1883 *Le Figaro* wrote, "L'histoire d'Abdelkader est donc l'histoire même de la conquête de l'Algérie"²⁴; and a writer for a British publication stressed in 1873 that "the history of the French conquest of Algeria is in substance the record of the conflict which Abd-el-Kader waged almost single-handed against the foremost military nation of Europe."²⁵ This tendency to amalgamate Algerian resistance in the single name 'Abd al-Qâdir continues. For example, in Algerian popular memory today, 'Abd al-Qâdir has achieved metonymic status, a substitute for a more varied anti-colonial movement.²⁶

23. Archibald Alison, *History of Europe, from the Fall of Napoleon in 1815 to the Accession of Louis Napoleon in 1852*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood, 1858), pp. 539 and 554.

24. Henry d'Ideville, "L'Emir," *Le Figaro* (26 mai 1883).

25. Anonymous, *Every Saturday* (13 December 1873), p. 669.

26. Bruno Etienne and François Pouillon, *Abd el-Kader le magnanime* (Paris:

The general agreement on the amîr is striking even if he has played different roles for different groups at different moments in history.²⁷ Certainly 'Abd al-Qâdir had his enemies among French authors. In 1841, Alexis de Tocqueville for one called him a "Muslim Cromwell," a treacherous intriguer who used religious hatred to rally "fanatical" armed groups against the French.²⁸ But many French authors gave positive accounts of him. At the end of the struggle, 'Abd al-Qâdir was described as the "Jugurtha moderne," a positive reference to the leader of North African resistance to the Romans.²⁹ He thus symbolized the highest French value of the nineteenth century, self-sacrifice and struggle for the love of one's country. As Larousse's *Grande dictionnaire* of 1866 put it, "Le nom d'Abd-el-Kader est acquis à l'histoire, où il occupe une place glorieuse à côté... de tous ceux qui ont lutté vaillamment pour l'indépendance de leur pays."³⁰ Likewise, in the twentieth century Algerian nationalist authors adopted 'Abd al-Qâdir as the foremost figure in the story of popular struggle against French domination.³¹ For example, in *Abdelkader et l'indépendance algérienne*, a semi-

Gallimard/Institute du Monde arabe, 2003), pp. 85-95.

27. Smaïl Aouli, Ramdane Redjala, and Philippe Zoummeroff, *Abd El-Kader* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), pp. 513-520.

28. Alexis de Tocqueville, "Travail sur l'Algérie (1841)," in *Œuvres*, p. 697.

29. The Jugurtha comparison appeared with considerable frequency in French texts of the nineteenth century. Notable usages include: "Abd-el-Kader," in Ferdinand Hofer ed., *Nouvelle biographie universelle*, vol. 1 (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1852), p. 67; Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, *Lettres inédites du Maréchal Bugeaud duc d'Isly (1808-1849)*, edited by Capitaine Tattet et Féray-Bugeaud d'Isly (Paris: Emile-Paul, Frères, 1923), p. 243. It figured on the reverse side of a French-stamped commemorative medal from 1862, see Etienne and Pouillon, *Abd El-Kader*, p. 74.

30. Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel* (Paris: Administration du *Grand dictionnaire universel*, 1866). The problem posed by this version, which ran counter to colonial thinking that systematically denied Algerian national sentiment, was resolved by Paul Azan in his 1925 biography of 'Abd al-Qâdir, wherein he had the amîr convert from his early anti-colonial "fanaticism" to French "patriotism." Paul Azan, *L'émir Abd El Kader, 1808-1883: du fanatisme musulman au patriotisme français* (Paris: Hachette, 1925).

31. Mahfoud Kaddache, *L'émir Abdelkader* (Alger: S.N.E.D., 1974).

nal text given at a 1947 conference, Algerian writer Kateb Yacine claimed ‘Abd al-Qâdir as the founding father of the nationalist movement. It was this “héros hégélien,” Kateb announced, who “a commencé à défendre l’indépendance algérienne contre les Turcs avant de la défendre contre les Français.”³² Writing in the same nationalist vein, later historians cast him as “le symbole du colonisé luttant contre un colonialisme irrésistible.”³³

In all these cases, ‘Abd al-Qâdir was central to the representations of the war in Algeria as a good war. Narrating the years 1832-1847 through his story gave the conflict a recognizable chronology—battles, treaties, long marches, and betrayals—and endowed events with meaning and emotion. This made the history of the French conquest of Algeria—a period lying under the shadow of some 1.6 million Algerian lives lost in wars and war-induced famines and epidemics, along with the deaths of 120,000 French soldiers—a good war.³⁴ Faced by General Bugeaud, the hero of several generations of European settlers in Algeria, ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s story became something of an archetype of the global confrontations that came with modern European expansion. Like in the Americas, Australia, and Asia, ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s resistance in Algeria was inspired, tenacious, and popular, but the forces fielded by a technologically superior, industrially-outfitted European army made it ultimately doomed. This yielded a compelling David versus Goliath story, but one where the giant was not only more powerful but destined to win.

32. Kateb Yacine, *Abdelkader et l’indépendance algérienne* (Alger: S.N.E.D., 1983), pp. 17 and 35. This text was first published in 1948 (Alger: les éditions algériennes en-Nahdha); and it is republished in Kateb Yacine, *Minuit passé de douze heures: écrits journalistiques, 1947-1989*, edited by Amazigh Kateb (Paris: Seuil, 1999), pp. 11-33.

33. Abdelkader Boutaleb, *L’émir Abd-El-Kader et la formation de la nation algérienne: de l’émir Abd-El-Kader à la guerre de libération* (Alger: Editions Dahlab, 1990), p. 22.

34. Kamel Kateb, *Européens, “indigènes,” et juifs en Algérie*, pp. 47 and 67; French losses in Kateb, p. 39.

As the conflict in Algeria itself unfolded, some resisted the good war version of events, however. In the 1830s and 1840s, a vocal French opposition led by people like Amédée Desjobert and Deputy Joly expressed bitter opposition to the "guerre atroce" in Algeria.³⁵ Some French officers agreed and wrote letters back to France complaining that they were engaged in a cruel and undignified "partie de chasse sur une grande échelle."³⁶ For their part, many Algerians wished to distance themselves from the amîr's costly struggle. During the hajj of 1841 (1256 A.H.), a group of Algerian pilgrims called a meeting in Mecca with religious notables led by Sayyid Mahmûd al-Kîlânî, *shaykh* of the Qâdiriyya Sufi order of Baghdad.³⁷ They wanted to know if 'Abd al-Qâdir's jihad was legitimate, and a cause that they were obliged to follow. Al-Kîlânî knew 'Abd al-Qâdir well, having hosted him and his father for several months in Baghdad in the 1820s when the two came to pay homage at the tomb of 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî (founder of the Qâdiriyya Sufi order to which both men were affiliated). Nevertheless, he issued a *fatwâ* condemning the amîr's struggle and absolving Algerians of the obligation to make war on the French.³⁸ In the Bagdad *shaykh*'s reasoning, the jihad had to have the possibility of success for it to be legitimate, and he did not see this hope for Algerians against the French.

35. M. Joly, séance du 5 juin, débat sur les dépenses imprévues de l'Algérie, crédit extraordinaire in *Le Moniteur universel*, 6 juin 1844. See also Marwan R. Buheiry, "Anti-Colonial Sentiment in France during the July Monarchy: The Algerian Case," PhD. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1973.

36. Lettre du chef de bataillon de Lioux du 53^e ligue, camp de Tixeraïm, 11 février 1841, in Marèchal de Castellane, *Campagnes d'Afrique, 1835-1848*, edited by Ruth Charlotte Sophie comtesse de Beaulaincourt-Marles (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie., 1898), p. 221.

37. Alfred Le Chatelier, *Les confréries musulmanes de Hedjaz* (Paris: E. Le-roux, 1887), pp. 34-48.

38. Letter of General Bedeau, Mostaganem, 30 novembre 1841. Archives nationales d'Outre mer, 2 EE 15. This matched the better known 1841 *fatwâ* solicited by Leon Roches at Qayrawân. See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya, a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 69-70.

III. ‘Abd al-Qâdir and the Jihad, a Good War?

For his part, ‘Abd al-Qâdir had a complex reaction to the war, one that does not match the good war scenario of later commentators. The armed struggle he led enjoyed all the legitimacy of jihad, a war that was both just and holy. The tribes of western Algeria declared the jihad in the spring of 1832, and when they elected ‘Abd al-Qâdir as their leader in November of this year, he assumed power as the leader of their jihad.³⁹ He used this especially esteemed form of war to strengthen his authority among Algerians, who were as diverse and jealous of their autonomy as they were unsure of the best strategy to oppose the French occupation.⁴⁰ Jihad legitimized his state-building effort in particular, giving it a privileged status within shared Islamic norms. Moreover, jihad helped resolve matters of leadership and legitimacy in the amîr’s favor, providing the tools he needed to forge political loyalties and assert his hegemony among Algeria’s notables. Finally, jihad served the important function of defining relations between ‘Abd al-Qâdir and the Ottoman leaders remaining in Algeria like Ahmed Bey of Constantine (‘Ahmad ibn Muhammad Sharîf, 1784-1850) by stressing that ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s struggle was not to restore the Sublime Porte’s control.

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, ‘Abd al-Qâdir vigorously defended the righteousness of his cause and used jihad to legitimate his

39. Among several extant original sources on Abd al-Qâdir’s jihad is the *Kitâb al-mujâhid fî rabb al-‘âlamîn* a manuscript of 88 handwritten-pages located in the Islamic Manuscripts Collection (Third Series 84) in Firestone Library, Princeton University.

40. Maḥmūd al-Kilânî’s fatwâ was part of an ongoing struggle Algerians waged over the proper response to the French occupation. See Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980), pp. 53-62; Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

claims to political authority. This entailed impressing upon Algerians their religious obligations in the face of French colonialism and emphasizing that he was the one best prepared to help them meet these obligations. In most cases, 'Abd al-Qâdir stressed that *hijra* (emigration) and military jihad were the most appropriate responses.⁴¹ Thus, he called on Algerians living in French-controlled areas to emigrate towards his territory, pay taxes, and join his military forces. Those who refused faced armed retaliation along with legal censure and sanctions. As part of this effort in the 1830s, 'Abd al-Qâdir solicited *fatwâ*-s from Morocco and Egypt allowing him to wage war on those who would not join him against the French.⁴² These were people, he wrote, who "devoil[ent] aux infidèles tous les secrets des Musulmans... et si on leur demande leur aide, ils ne bougent pas."⁴³ He also wrote a lengthy missive on the duty of *hijra* in 1843, which rejected most any sort of arrangement wherein Algerians might live under French rule. The following year, as the prospect for a military victory dimmed, he prepared a grand plan for Algerians to emigrate en masse eastward, bound for the Hejaz.⁴⁴ Refusing this *hijra*, he concluded, constituted an act of unbelief. In 1844, after Moroccan sultan 'Abd al-Rahmân signed a peace treaty with France and

41. Eugène Daumas, *Correspondance du capitaine Daumas, consul à Mascara (1837-1839)*, edited by Georges Yver (Alger: A. Jourdan, 1912).

42. Bennison, *Jihad*, pp. 92-93, Peters, *Islam and Colonialism*, pp. 56-61. Text of these documents can be found in Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Qâdir, *Tuḥfat al-zâ'ir fî târîkh al-Jazâ'ir wa-al-amîr 'Abd al-Qâdir*, edited by Mamdûh Ḥaqqî (Bayrût: Dâr al-Yaqzâh al-'Arabîyah lil-Ta'lîf wa-al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1964). E. Michaux-Bellaire has published a French translation of 'Abd al-Qâdir's 1837 query and the text of the Fez *fatwâ*, "Traduction de la Fetoua du Fiqh Sidi 'Ali Et Tsouli contenant le 'Souâl' du Hadj Abdelqader ben Mahi ed Din et la réponse," *Archives marocaines* 11/1 (1907): pp. 116-128; continued in *Archives marocaines* 11/3 (1907): pp. 395-454.

43. "'Souâl' du Hadj Abdelqader," p. 119.

44. *Tuḥfat*, pp. 268-276, summarized in Pessah Shinar, "'Abd al-Qadir and 'Abd al-Krim: Religious Influences on their Thought and Action," *Asian and African Studies* 1 (1965): p. 155. The 1844 *hijra* plan is discussed in Colonel Charles Henry S. Churchill, *The Life of Abdel Kader, Ex-Sultan of the Arabs of Algeria* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), pp. 238-239.

declared the amîr an outlaw, ‘Abd al-Qâdir successfully solicited a *fatwâ* from the Egyptian mufti Muhammad ‘Illysh (d. 1882) that condemned the sultan for having prohibited a lawful jihad, and it permitted ‘Abd al-Qâdir to fight against the Moroccan leader if such a confrontation was necessary to expel the French from Algeria.⁴⁵

‘Abd al-Qâdir’s actions reflected longstanding Maghrebi traditions of state building founded on jihad. As historian Amira Bennison shows for pre-colonial Morocco, these traditions were based upon state-led confrontations with European neighbors (in particular the Spanish enclaves at Miliana and Ceuta) as well as corsair activities in the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean (*jihâd al-bahr*). These practices produced a particular form of political institution, what she calls the “sharifian jihad state.” Jihad served two primary functions. On one hand it was a disciplining tool: the ongoing war allowed the state to denounce those who resisted its centralizing efforts as *bughât* (rebels) or even *kuffâr* (unbelievers) who spread *fasâd* (corruption). And on the other hand, it served as a powerful ideological tool, theologizing what were in fact historical processes of state centralization. In this sense, the sharifian monarchy’s jihad represented an example of the good war. It relied on positive images of war and deployed shared norms and idioms about war towards separate political ends. Titles assumed by the Moroccan monarchs (later used by ‘Abd al-Qâdir in Algeria) like *‘amîr al-mu‘minîn* reinforced this, assimilating the state’s particular goals to a universal Islamic project. This served to build consensus among diverse social actors in the Maghreb for whom the obligation of jihad represented a point of political accord and the basis on which power would be distributed in society.⁴⁶ Thus jihad as good war became an essential

45. Peters, *Islam and Colonialism*, pp. 60-61; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 334-335; Moulay Belhamissi, “L’émir ‘Abd al Qâdir et le Sultan Moulay ‘Abd al Rahman: De la solidarité islamique à la guerre fratricide,” *Revue d’histoire maghrébine* 25 (1998): pp. 285-297.

46. Bennison, *Jihad*, pp. 15-41.

part of political power in Morocco, following the example of other Muslim states that had used jihad as a “foundational myth.”⁴⁷

Despite the legitimacy of ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s jihad in Algeria and the importance of the good war version to his struggle, documents show the amîr holding equivocal feelings about the war. This article cannot exhaust all the archives, including the impressive body of texts authored by the amîr himself, a prolific writer with an oeuvre spread out in manuscripts, correspondence, and published sources. However, in some of the most widely-cited sources (the same sources cited by the historians who make the good war narrative of the amîr’s struggle) we find ‘Abd al-Qâdir discussing his actions in equivocal terms alien to those of the good war. For example, in letters the amîr addressed to French officials between 1837 and 1838, he repeatedly stressed the pragmatic aspects of peace. Commerce, agriculture, and the free circulation of people all depend on peace, he argued, and this is “à l’avantage de l’un et de l’autre.”⁴⁸

An especially interesting source is a series of letters ‘Abd al-Qâdir sent to French officials in the months leading up the outbreak of a final round of war in November 1839. These included a number of letters to Governor General Valée, three separate letters to King Louis-Philippe, one to his wife, Queen Marie Amélie Thérèse, and one written in June 1839 addressed to “les Grands du gouvernement de France.”⁴⁹ These letters impressed upon their readers the value of reigning in their most ambitious plans for the Algerian colony and solicited them to reconsider revising the Treaty of Tafna, a settlement signed in 1837 that normalized relations between the French and ‘Abd al-Qâdir and brought several years of stability to the

47. Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 174.

48. Abdelkader Hani, *Correspondance de l’Emir Abdelkader, 1833-1883* (Alger: Editions Dar El Gharb, 2004), p. 66.

49. Hani, *Correspondance*, pp. 110-124; Alexandre Bellemare, *Abd-el-Kader, sa vie politique et militaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1863), pp. 248-257; Azan, *L’émir Abd El Kader*, pp. 150-153. Azan notes that these letters went without response.

country. Like in the previous correspondence, the amîr stressed the value of peace in these letters, in particular the pragmatic dimensions of the stability and order that came with peace. ‘Abd al-Qâdir wrote as a statesman seeking order and prosperity. For the “Arabes” peace brought “progrès et bonheur,” and to the French it brought the “gloire d’avoir amené ce résultat,” he wrote.⁵⁰ And in his letter to Louis-Philippe, a personal appeal to the French sovereign to avoid war, ‘Abd al-Qâdir stressed, “je veux la paix, rien que la paix.” War threatens “le bonheur des deux peuples,” and should not be entered into lightly, he warned.⁵¹

Other texts express ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s ambivalence about the war. For example the amîr’s “autobiography,” *al-Sîrah al-dhâtîyah*, a multiple-authored, composite text written during ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s imprisonment in France, there is none of language of the good war, quite the opposite.⁵² The different authorial voices heard in this text, including those editors have identified as ‘Abd al-Qâdir, rarely make positive references to war and avoid legalistic arguments common to other contemporary explanations of jihad.⁵³ A chronicle of events comprises the main body of the pages of *al-Sîrah* that deals with the war years, but the text rarely addresses the major battles, including the amîr’s victories. Most descriptions deal with indecisive engagements where “il n’y avait eu ni vainqueur, ni vaincu.”⁵⁴ Martyrdom, physical strength, and courage make few appearances, and examples of what historian Michael Bonner calls the “swashbuckling derring-do” characteristic of many poems and popular writings

50. Letter to Adolphe Thiers, cited in Bellemare, *Abd-el-Kader*, pp. 254-255.

51. ‘Abd al-Qâdir to Louis Philippe, ca. March 1839, *ibid.*, p. 250.

52. ‘Abd al-Qâdir ibn Muḥyī al-Dīn, *al-Sîrah al-dhâtîyah* (al-Jazâ’ir: al-Sharikah al-Waṭanîyah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzî’, 1983), partially translated as *L’émir Abdelkader: autobiographie*, translated by Hacène Benmansour (Paris: Dialogues éditions, 1995).

53. Knut S. Vikør, “*Jihâd*, ‘ilm and *taṣawwuf*: Two Justifications of Action from the Idrîsî Tradition,” *Studia Islamica* 90 (2000): pp. 153-176.

54. *L’émir Abdelkader: autobiographie*, p. 89.

relating to jihad are nonexistent.⁵⁵ Moreover, the text makes no attempt to give meaning or historical significance to the struggle, and the redemptive aspects essential to the good war narrative make no appearance in *al-Sîrah*. The most poignant expression of ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s feelings about the war come at the end of the text when in November 1847 he ended his struggle. Recounting these events, the amîr reflected simply, “J’ai combattu pour ma religion et mon pays... J’ai rempli mon devoir envers Dieu. Et maintenant que je suis impuissant, je n’y peux rien. Je veux me reposer de la fatigue de la guerre... de ce fardeau.”⁵⁶

Like any historical source, these documents present challenges. For example, some of the letters ‘Abd al-Qâdir sent to French leaders were drafted by Léon Roches, who served as the amîr’s secretary in the 1830s posing as a Muslim, and he wrote them in specifically French political idioms. And *al-Sîrah*, an “autobiography” drafted in Arabic during the amîr’s time in French prisons, is also problematic.⁵⁷ Working on the manuscript, specialists have identified as many as eight different hands that wrote the text and several authorial voices are represented, including that of ‘Abd al-Qâdir. Moreover, its conditions of production, written by a prisoner hoping for release, make it a particular sort of source. Nevertheless, these texts cannot be dismissed out of hand. When someone like the colonial-era military historian Paul Azan casts doubt on the authenticity of the 1830s letters written by Roches, he does so to support a specific thesis that ‘Abd al-Qâdir was a “fanatic,” eager to go to war.⁵⁸ (Compared against the letters drafted in Arabic by ‘Abd al-Qâdir himself, the gist of the correspondence is strikingly similar.) And with regards to *al-Sîrah*, there is no evidence that supports the suggestion of some

55. Bonner, *Jihad*, p. 8.

56. *L’émir Abdelkader: autobiographie*, p. 117.

57. See AeK’s letters during this period of captivity in Abdeljelil Temimi (ed and trans.), “Lettres inédites de l’émir Abdelkader,” *Revue d’histoire maghrébine* 10-11 (janvier 1978): pp. 158-202.

58. Azan, *L’émir Abd El Kader*, p. 151.

commentators that the text's non-confrontational tone is a result of 'Abd al-Qâdir's "peur" of his captors, nor anything that corroborates the suspicions of other contemporary commentators that "les services français" may have forged parts of the text to "tromper l'émir," as they did to F.L.N. leaders between 1954-1962.⁵⁹

After his release from French prisons, 'Abd al-Qâdir made his way east, arriving in Damascus in 1856, where he spent twenty seven years—the last one-third of his life. During this time, he articulated a decidedly critical view of armed struggle in determining the place of jihad among Islamic practices. These views are expressed in the *Kitâb al-mawâqif* (translated as *Le livre des haltes*), a text comprising 'Abd al-Qâdir's commentaries and explanations of the Qur'ân and the Traditions that he presented to his students beginning in 1856.⁶⁰ *Mawqif* 73, "Le combat mineur et le combat majeur," deals with the question of jihad.⁶¹ Here 'Abd al-Qâdir marks a sharp distinction between the minor, external or military jihad (*al-jihâd al-saghîr*) and the major, internal or spiritual jihad (*al-jihâd al-akbar*).⁶² In a series of commentaries on why one form of struggle is given precedence over the other, 'Abd al-Qâdir deflates the position of the individual engaged in jihad as war. It takes no great courage for "ceux qui se ruent et qui plongent dans le combat," he suggests.⁶³ Moreover, in war the ranks of fighters include all sorts, and heroism in battle does not help mark a distinction of piety or worthy

59. Hacène Benmansour, "Introduction du traducteur," *L'émir Abdelkader: autobiographie*, p. 6; and Mohamed Esseghir Bennani, "Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 17.

60. 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Djazâ'ri, *Le livre des haltes*, 3 vols., translated and edited by Michel Lagarde (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Arabic edition: *Kitâb al-mawâqif fî al-taşawwuf wa-al-wa'z wa-al-irshâd*, 3 vols. (Dimashq: Dâr al-Yaqzah al-'Arabîyah lil-Ta'lîf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1966-1967).

61. *Le livre des haltes*, pp. 191-194; *Kitâb al-mawâqif*, pp. 144-146.

62. John Renard, "Al-Jihad al-Akbar: Notes on a Theme in Islamic Spirituality," *Muslim World* 78/3-4 (October 1988): 225-242; Alfred Morabia, *Le Ğihâd dans l'Islam médiéval: le "combat sacré" des origines au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: A. Michel, 1993), pp. 330-344.

63. *Le livre*, 192.

intentions. “En effet, endurer contre l’ennemi est le fait du pieux comme du libertin et même l’hypocrite et du mécréant,” he argued.⁶⁴ Finally, the redemptive aspects of military jihad are downplayed, and ‘Abd al-Qâdir gives a decidedly un-glorified picture of the jihad fighter. “On s’y ruine soi-même, avant tout en perdant l’avantage de la vie présente, étant donné que ce qui arrive le plus souvent à ceux qui plongent dans les lignes ennemies, en s’y jetant corps et âme, c’est la mort, sauf pour un petit nombre.”⁶⁵ All this is why, ‘Abd al-Qâdir concludes, military jihad is considered a lesser form of struggle. Spiritual struggle on the other hand is “réservé à l’élite spirituelle,” a person who is “conduite à la lumière de la guidance et précédée par la sollicitude divine.”⁶⁶ Here is where the individual might achieve true mastery over the baser self, the primary site of contest for the Sufi.

‘Abd al-Qâdir’s argument in *mawqif* 73 moves from one that seeks to carefully mark necessary and useful distinctions towards an attack on jihad as war *tout court*. In the following passage that appears near the end of his discussion, the amîr cedes very little positive space for military struggles.

L’Envoyé a qualifié de mineur le combat contre les mécréants, parce que combattre et éliminer physiquement les mécréants n’est pas le but proprement dit recherché par le législateur. Effectivement, le but du combat n’est pas de détruire les créatures de Dieu et de les anéantir, de démolir ce que le Seigneur a construit et de dévaster Son pays. Tout cela va contre la sagesse divine. Le but du Législateur est uniquement d’éliminer le tort des mécréants et de couper court au dommage qu’ils causent aux musulmans.⁶⁷

64. *Le livre*, 192.

65. *Le livre*, 191.

66. *Le livre*, 192.

67. *Le livre*, 193.

‘Abd al-Qâdir concludes, “ne parlons donc pas du fait d’être rapproché du Réel grâce à ce meurtre.”⁶⁸

That ‘Abd al-Qâdir embraced such an understanding of jihad at this time is in some ways unsurprising. Although a distinguished military leader, in Damascus he pursued different forms of spiritual expression and had largely withdrawn from political struggles.⁶⁹ Some Europeans had hoped that the amîr might make a suitable governor for Syria, a loyal actor in larger imperial struggles, but he refused this role and refrained from politics except to encourage figures who he thought led exemplary lives like Shâmil (d. 1871), who led the Caucasus’s struggle against Russian expansion,⁷⁰ or to act in humanitarian crises like his famous 1860 intervention on behalf of the Christian community of Damascus.⁷¹ There is also the fact that the *mawâqif* are a specific sort of source. In them, ‘Abd al-Qâdir recounts to his adepts the stations progressively marking the spiritual path. The “striving” engaged here is that of the soul searching for God, an undertaking far from the battlefield.

Nevertheless, at this point in the amîr’s life, it is clear that ‘Abd al-Qâdir saw the good war as the *jihâd al-nafs*, the Sufi’s non-violent, spiritual struggle with the self. Making this point is not to present an “apology” for ‘Abd al-Qâdir and others who led anti-colonial struggles as jihad, contrary to the accusations of some critics.⁷² Nor is my argument made to support those who offer a “humanist” interpretation of the amîr’s life, however plausible and useful it might be.⁷³

68. *Le livre*, 193.

69. Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 193-224.

70. Hani, *Correspondence*, pp. 169-172.

71. Bruno Etienne, *Abdelkader: Isthme des isthmes* (Bazakh al-barazikh) (Paris: Hachette, 1994), pp. 290-306.

72. See for example David Cook who devotes much of his discussion in *Understanding Jihad* to debunking “contemporary Muslim apologists” and their defense of spiritual jihad. David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 39-48.

73. Bouamrane Cheikh, *L’Emir Abd-el-Kader, résistant et humaniste* (Alger: Editions Hammouda, 2001); Kebir M. Ammi, *Abd el-Kader* (Paris: Presses de

Rather the central issue raised by ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s variable relationship to jihad is how it shows that jihad has been subject to critical reinterpretation like any other intellectual tradition. Therefore, as both social practice and doctrine, jihad has to be historicized to be properly understood.⁷⁴ Historicizing ‘Abd al-Qâdir relationship to jihad and placing it within the political movements of his time reveals a particularly interesting figure from among Muslim thinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century who, faced with the onslaught of European colonialism, came to stress non-military interpretations of jihad and pursued non-military responses to European hegemony.⁷⁵ (In this case, such work was undertaken as part of the amîr’s effort to adapt dimensions of Ibn ‘Arabî’s thought to the realities faced by Muslims during the nineteenth century.⁷⁶) Even if he saw war against the French as necessary and right, ‘Abd al-Qâdir did not see it as good.

IV. ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s Good War Produced from Abroad

From Islamic traditions of jihad, I now turn to another site of analysis. A separate set of discourses produced a powerful good war understanding of the amîr’s conflict with the French, and they have had an especially lasting effect in both popular memory and historiography. Many of these discourses of the good war occurred far from the struggle in Algeria, produced by authors who had little to do with the war. Notably, English-speaking readers were fascinated by ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s life and the war he led. This range of this interest can best be judged in the United States, thanks to the vast variety of sources made accessible in new digitized databases.⁷⁷ These

la Renaissance, 2004).

74. Bonner, *Jihad*; Paul L. Heck, “*Jihad Revisited*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31/1 (2004): pp. 95-128.

75. Rudolph Peters *Islam and Colonialism*, pp. 121-135.

76. Itzhak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*.

77. Database, “America’s Historical Newspapers including Early American

sources show that during the nineteenth century newspapers across the country reported on the war in Algeria as part of their regular bulletins from abroad. This coverage began early. In 1837, the *Baltimore Gazette* (Maryland) reported on the experiences of prisoners held by ‘Abd al-Qâdir,⁷⁸ and in 1838, a daily in St. Louis, Missouri reported on military maneuvers in Algeria. “A new expedition is proposed against Abd El Kader, the Arab chief who harasses the French colonies in Africa,” its readers learned.⁷⁹ In 1837 a periodical in Philadelphia refuted rumors and announced, “Abd-el-Kader is not dead.”⁸⁰ This coverage continued apace throughout the war years, when American newspapers routinely published updates on the conflict, reporting on battles, diplomatic developments, and major events such as the massacre of French prisoners in 1846. Some of this attention came from American military specialists who had a particular interest in the war and studied closely the tactics of General Bugeaud. By the time of the Civil War (1861–1865) the war in Algeria entered into American military training. In 1863, officers in the Southern Confederate army received a handbook in which they read about Bugeaud alongside other great military theorists like Baron Jomini.⁸¹ And the Union officers of the North could also learn about Bugeaud’s tactics in a manual on cavalry organization published in New York City the same year.⁸²

Newspapers (AHNEAN) Series 1 - 7, 1690-1922,” Readex Microprint Corporation, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX> (accessed June 2008).

78. “The Prisoners of Abd-El-Kader or Five Months Captivity among the Arabs,” *The Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (21 August 1837). AHNEAN.

79. *Daily Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register* (6 April 1838), p. 2, AHNEAN.

80. *The National Atlas and Tuesday Morning Mail: A Weekly Periodical for the Parlour* (12 September 1837), p. 112, AHNEAN.

81. Thomas Robert Bugeaud and Antoine Henri Jomini, *The Practice of War: Being a Translation of a French Military Work Entitled Maxims, Counsels and Instructions on the Art of War or Handbook for the Practice of War* (Richmond, Virginia: West & Johnston, 1863).

82. Jean Roemer, *Cavalry: Its History, Management, and Uses in War* (New

But it was ‘Abd al-Qâdir himself who attracted most of the Americans’ attention. At Harvard College, Charles Christopher Follen, a student and the son of Harvard’s first German professor, presented a treatise on ‘Abd al-Qâdir to faculty and students in 1849, perhaps the first time the Algerian leader was studied in an American university.⁸³ This interest extended into the press, where the tenor of discourse was overwhelmingly positive. In 1846 a newspaper in Massachusetts reported, “The success with which Abd el Kader has contended against the armies of the French in Algeria, excited the admiration of all Europe,” a positive comment that well expressed the tone of American views of ‘Abd al-Qâdir.⁸⁴ He was an inspired and courageous leader who stood his ground against superior forces, newspapers reported. The *New York Times* devoted several pieces to the amîr, including a detailed 1873 article lauding his “prodigies of valor.”⁸⁵ And in 1846, the founders of a frontier town in what was then the Territory of Iowa were so moved by the Algerian drama that they named their settlement “Elkader” in honor of the amîr.⁸⁶ ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s reputation became such that Americans interested themselves in many dimensions of his life and works even after the war was over. For example, the *State Gazette* of Trenton New Jersey

York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863).

83. “Abd-el-Kader, a Disquisition by Charles Christopher Follen,” reported in Harvard College, “Order of performances for exhibition, Tuesday, May 1, 1849,” in *American broadsides and ephemera*, series 1, no. 7350. Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, “Two Early Harvard Wives: Eliza Farrar and Eliza Follen,” *The New England Quarterly* 38/2 (June, 1965): pp. 147-167.

84. *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, Massachusetts) (9 December 1846), p. 1, AHNEAN.

85. *New York Times* (12 November 1873), p. 5.

86. Boutaleb, *L’émir Abd-El-Kader*, pp. 275-276; Pauline Cook, “Iowa Place Names of Foreign Origin,” *The Modern Language Journal*, 29/7 (November, 1945): pp. 617-628. The name remains to this day for the Iowan farming town of 1,600 inhabitants, and in July 2008 it organized a joint celebration of Algerian and American independence days, which included a visit by the Algerian ambassador to the U.S. “Elkader Community Guide,” http://www.elkader-iowa.com/Community_Guide.html; and “Elkader Sister City Events,” http://www.elkader-iowa.com/Sister_Cities/events.html (accessed July, 2008).

printed an 1853 column entitled “From the Household Words” dealing with the amîr’s writings on horses.⁸⁷ And the *Georgia Telegraph* of Macon, Georgia published a translation of a letter ‘Abd al-Qâdir sent to Ottoman general, Ömer Pasha telling him of his recent dream wherein the Prophet told him of an Ottoman victory over Russia (“The day of Expiation is arrived for the *giaours* of Moscow. My blessing on you my brother,” people in Georgia read.)⁸⁸

Fully accounting for the various forces at work in these representations is outside the scope of this essay. But this sampling of American views of the amîr’s supports historians who have broadly called for a more nuanced appreciation of Western images of the Middle East.⁸⁹ The American reaction to ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s struggle suggests that although the country already had an imperial history in the Mediterranean—two of the of the young republic’s first foreign wars occurred here (the Tripolitan War, 1801-1805, and the Algerine War, 1815-1816)—it was less imperialism that determined American views of the amîr than memory of the country’s own recent good war, the Revolutionary War (1775–1783).⁹⁰ In this case, American authors imbricated ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s story with their own national self-conception and saw his war against the French as the continuation of their fight against British domination. In this respect, the amîr’s good war appears to have served Americans as an allegory for what they saw as a universal historical movement, the struggle

87. *State Gazette* (30 May 1853), p. 1, AHNEAN. First published as Eugène Dumas and Abdel-Kader, *Les chevaux du Sahara*, 2^e édition (Paris: Schiller aîné, 1853). This proved to be a highly successful book, going into at least nine editions with an American translation published in 1968. *The Horses of the Sahara*, translated by Sheila M. Ohlendorf (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

88. *Georgia Telegraph* (29 August 1854), p. 1, AHNEAN.

89. Lucette Valensi, *Venise et la sublime porte: la naissance du despote* (Paris: Hachette, 1987); François Pouillon, “Les miroirs en abyme: cent cinquante ans de peinture algérienne,” in *Les sociétés musulmanes au miroir des œuvres d’art*, edited by Hachemi Karoui (Tunis: C.E.R.E.S., 1996), pp. 61-91.

90. Richard B. Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004).

for freedom from foreign oppression, something that, at this particular historical moment, some in the United States believed in. Conversely, they may also be an example of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “anti-conquest” narrative, or a representational strategy by which European authors (in our case Americans) pronounced their innocence of the violence of colonial expansion even as they reaffirmed the legitimacy of Western hegemony in the world.⁹¹ For Euro-American settlers in the United States, like the founders of Elkader, celebrating ‘Abd al-Qâdir may have served them to fetishistically conceal their own role in the forced displacement of American Indians from the land they occupied.⁹²

In any case, much of the American discourse echoed writings from across the Atlantic in Britain, a country with a highly developed imperial project for the Mediterranean. Here several texts are noteworthy. The British poet Robert Browning penned “Through the Metidja to Abd-El-Kadr,” with its memorable refrain “As I ride, as I ride” in the early 1840s. And a decade later, after ‘Abd al-Qâdir had ended his struggle, two other British authors joined the chorus of praise of the amîr. Viscount Maidstone honored “the Numidian Emir” in a long poem, and William Makepeace Thackeray wrote the heroic lament, “Abd-El-Kader at Toulon,” condemning French treachery towards the amîr.⁹³ Both were unabashed in their admiration of the Algerian leader whom they represented as a brave hero leading a patriotic but ultimately doomed struggle to resist the

91. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 69-85.

92. See the discussion of “narrative fetishism” in Eric L. Santner, “History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution,”* edited by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 143-154.

93. Viscount Maidstone (George James Finch-Hatton, Earl of Winchelsea and Nottingham), *Abd-el-Kader: a poem in six cantos* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851); William Makepeace Thackeray, “Abd-El-Kader at Toulon; or, The Caged Hawk,” in *Works*, vol. 24 (New York and London: Harper and Bros., 1903), pp. 56-57.

French invasion. British nationalism and hostility to France were important forces informing these positive representations of the amîr.⁹⁴ As Hédi Abdel-Jaouad argues, for British writers like Thackeray, who had grown up in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, “anyone subjected to Napoleonic or French violence, such as the Algerian Emir, would be entitled to his sympathy.”⁹⁵

Out of this British tradition came the most important good war representation of the amîr’s war with the French, Colonel Charles Henry Churchill’s 1867 biography, *The Life of Abdel Kader, Ex-Sultan of the Arabs of Algeria*.⁹⁶ One-hundred and forty years after its publication, this book remains one of the most influential texts on ‘Abd al-Qâdir, translated into both Arabic and French and figuring into the primary source material used by several recent biographies of ‘Abd al-Qâdir.⁹⁷ Arguably, Churchill’s impact is deepest in Algeria. Algerian editors have published at least six separate editions of the French translation of Churchill’s book (the most recent in 2006), and there are two Arabic-language editions, one published in Algiers and another in Tunis.⁹⁸ These multiple editions have made the book a mainstay of readings on the amîr in Algeria today and make it a text of special significance.

Colonel Charles Henry Churchill, (1807-69) aka “Churchill Bey,” landed in Syria with the British army during the Eastern Cri-

94. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, “The Sands of Rhyme: Thackeray and Abd al Qadir,” *Research in African Literatures* 30/3 (1999): pp. 194-206; Nora Achrati, “Following the Leader: A History and Evolution of the Amir ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairi as Symbol,” *Journal of North African Studies* 12/2 (June, 2007): pp. 139-152.

95. Abdel-Jaouad, “The Sands of Rhyme,” p. 195.

96. Charles Henry Churchill, *The Life of Abdel Kader, Ex-Sultan of the Arabs of Algeria* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867).

97. Smaïl Aouli et al., *Abd El-Kader*; Bruno Etienne, *Abdelkader*.

98. The six Algerian editions of Michel Habart’s French translation, *La vie d’Abdel Kader*, are Alger: S.N.E.D., 1971; Alger: E.N.A.L., 1971; Alger: S.N.E.D., 1974; Alger: S.N.E.D., S.T.E.T. 1981; Alger: E.N.A.L., 1991; and Alger: E.N.A.G., 2006. The two editions of ‘Abū al-Qâsim Sa’d ‘Allâh’s Arabic translation, *Ḥayât al-Amîr ‘Abd al-Qâdir*, are Tunis: al-Dâr al-Tūnisīyah lil-Nashi, 1974; and al-Jazâ’ir: al-Sharikah-al Waṭaniyah, 1982.

sis in 1840. He remained in the region afterward and rose to serve as Britain’s vice consul in Damascus. Churchill married locally and owned a farm outside of Beirut where he earned a reputation for meddling in intercommunity affairs, sparking violence between Druze and Christian communities on one occasion.⁹⁹ He met ‘Abd al-Qâdir twice after the amîr left France in 1852, first at Bursa in 1853 and two years later in Beirut when he hosted ‘Abd al-Qâdir who was in route for Damascus.¹⁰⁰ Impressed by this personality, whom he found to be “one of the most remarkable men whom the Arab race has ever produced,” Churchill decided to write a book on him.¹⁰¹ During the winter 1859-1860, he arranged to meet ‘Abd al-Qâdir in Damascus to conduct daily interviews, and he drew the remainder of his source material from the French works available to him at the time such as the widely read books written by Eugène Pellissier, Alfred Nettement, and Alexandre Bellemare.¹⁰²

The Life of Abdel Kader runs to 331 pages, covering the period from ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s birth up to 1864. In it, Churchill discussed the amîr’s youth and early education, but it was the war itself that most interested the English author, and the book’s chapters are overwhelming devoted to the period 1832-1847. Churchill’s book differed significantly from other biographies of the day. Alexandre Bellemare, a French author who once served as ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s translator and went on to a career in the in the Ministry of Algeria and the Colonies and in the Governor General of Algeria’s office,

99. Derek Riches, “Some British Connexions with the Levant,” *Asian Affairs* 61/2 (1974): pp. 165-175.

100. Letter of ‘Abd al-Qâdir to Churchill, Damascus, 6 Décembre 1855. Abdeljelil Temimi (ed and trans.), “Lettres inédites de l’émir Abdelkader,” *Revue d’histoire maghrébine* 12 (juillet 1978): p. 320.

101. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, dedication, not paginated.

102. Eugène Pellissier, *Annales algériennes*, nouvelle édition, 3 vols. (Paris: J. Dumaine, 1854); Alfred Nettement, *Histoire de la conquête d’Alger, écrite sur des documents inédits et authentiques, suivie du tableau de la conquête de l’Algérie* (Paris: J. Lecoffre, 1856); Alexandre Bellemare, *Abd-el-Kader, sa vie politique et militaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1863).

published his biography of ‘Abd al-Qâdir only four years earlier. Although Bellemare and Churchill both provided a positive image of ‘Abd al-Qâdir, their works differ significantly in terms of the war itself. Bellemare wrote his biography in the spirit of reconciliation, and it reflected the author’s attempt to push forward certain dimensions of Napoleon III’s still inchoate “Arab Kingdom” policy that came to be known as one of liberality toward Algerians.¹⁰³ To this end, Bellemare downplayed a good war representation of events and instead emphasized themes that would familiarize ‘Abd al-Qâdir to French readers, rendering him someone who embraced a “politique habile,” and who was forced into war by “la fatalité.”¹⁰⁴ (This task gained momentum after ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s 1860 intervention to save the Christian community in Damascus from popular violence, an act that greatly raised his stature in France.)

Churchill was not bound by such concerns. Although in Damascus ‘Abd al-Qâdir was a figure of no small influence in a region that had great geo-strategic importance to Great Britain, Churchill enjoyed considerably more latitude writing for an English-speaking audience than a French writer did. And by the 1860s, with ‘Abd al-Qâdir free from prison, Churchill had no occasion to write the sort of literary laments produced by earlier British writers. Instead the book is organized around two simple themes: military conquest and empire building. These themes tie together Churchill’s story of a man who used military force to subdue the lands and people of Algeria and defend these conquests from outside threats.

Thus Churchill presents the amîr as one of the great conquerors of history. “Abdel Kader now saw himself the founder of an empire,” Churchill wrote, recounting the moment in 1838 when ‘Abd al-Qâdir completed the foundations of his capital at Tâgdemt.¹⁰⁵ “The strength and versatility of his genius had given cohesion and

103. Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Le Royaume arabe: la politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1861-1870* (Alger: S.N.E.D., 1977).

104. Bellemare, *Abd-el-Kader*, pp. 43 and 257.

105. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 139.

compactness to elements the most adverse and discordant. Hundreds of tribes bowed beneath his warlike scepter.”¹⁰⁶ Churchill’s ‘Abd al-Qâdir is not a dispassionate state-builder, a Conte di Cavour, Lord Palmerstone, or even Muhammad ‘Alî Pasha, contemporaneous figures who constructed the institutions of a modern state in their countries. His power is that of the sword, or a “warlike scepter”: Churchill’s ‘Abd al-Qâdir is first of all a fighter and a good one at that. There are many battle scenes in the book, and Churchill strings them together to give a history of amîr’s rise as conquest. In this respect, battle drives the narrative forward and serves to explain larger historical movements.

Churchill gives gripping accounts of these battles. Narrating one of the first military engagements with the French, a clash outside Oran in 1832, he wrote that ‘Abd al-Qâdir,

rode fearlessly and harmlessly wherever danger menaced; now breaking through the line of the enemy’s skirmishers; now charging up to a square, and sweeping the bayonets with his saber; now standing unmoved and pointing contemptuously at the cannon balls as they whizzed by his head, or at the shells as they exploded at his feet.¹⁰⁷

Churchill used ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s battlefield exploits to account for the rise of his political fortunes. Out of the crucible of battle emerged the amîr’s valor, and this valor was the source of his authority. “On this and many similar occasions of peril and enterprise, in which he fleshed his maiden sword, Abdel Kader’s courage and bravery drew forth not only praises, but rapturous admiration,” Churchill claimed, and “the Arabs began to look with superstitious reverence on one, who as with a charmed life, rode fearlessly and harmlessly wherever danger menaced.”¹⁰⁸ By 1832, ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s martial quali-

106. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 139.

107. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 22.

108. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 22.

ties had convinced local people that “a master spirit had arisen to conduct them in their struggle against the infidels.”¹⁰⁹ In short, ‘Abd al-Qâdir was a warlord.

Of course, we know that Algerians of the Oran region were impressed by other aspects of ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s character when they elected him their leader in November 1832. They were attracted by his piety and his religious learning, and he came from a family wielding considerable social and cultural capital, as other biographers have noted. Churchill generally ignores these aspects and reduces ‘Abd al-Qâdir’s story to elements revolving around the force of power and the political dividends of military courage. This militarist narrative obscures or marginalizes other dimensions of the story. For example, the traditional taxes of Muslim states like the *‘ushûr* and *zekât* levied by ‘Abd al-Qâdir become “war-tribute” for Churchill, and the amîr’s attempt to reach a negotiated settlement with France become “diplomatic garniture.”¹¹⁰ Only when, “the gladiators again stood face to face,” does the movement of history resume in Churchill’s book.¹¹¹ My point in making these observations is not that Churchill was a bad historian—he wrote an engrossing and even useful book. But it produced a specific set of meanings for events, one that reveals a great deal about the relationship between the text written by this English author and its larger historical context.

The violence in many these battles is described in graphic scenes. After the battle of Macta in 1834, the amîr’s victorious troops participated in a grisly victory rite that Churchill describes in detail.

The Arabs knew no bounds to their exultation. Shouts of joy resounded, and the glare of torches flashed to and fro in the defile all through the night. An aerial spectator might have seen one part of it occupied with busy

109. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 23.

110. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, pp. 57 and 180.

111. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 180.

architects. Drawing near, he would have seen something growing up from the ground, like a pyramid. Bending down and listening, he would have heard frantic cries of 'more heads, more heads!' A closer inspection of this work of art would have revealed to the astonished gaze hundreds of French heads, piled up promiscuously.¹¹²

The fact that Churchill gives a bird's-eye-view of this event, slowing drawing the reader from above into the carnage on the ground in an almost cinematic fashion, amplifies the scene's intensity with a sense of heightened reality. Like the phantasmagorias that captivated nineteenth-century audiences in London and Paris with their optical exhibitions and illusions, the seeing-eye narrator in Churchill's book gives readers a privileged place from which to observe the war. It becomes spectacle or what critic Walter Benjamin called "*divertissement*," a site of popular distraction that affirmed the status quo.¹¹³ Moreover, Churchill's readers have the feeling of taking in the totality of the war in a passage like this one, lending them the impression that they possess the full meaning of events, events that by their sheer horror might otherwise elude understanding. Another noteworthy example of Churchill's technique is his account of an ambush 'Abd al-Qâdir led on a French column in 1833. Here 'Abd al-Qâdir directly engages his enemy in hand-to-hand combat. The encounter is described in detail. "One Chasseur made a thrust at him with his spear. The weapon passed under his ['Abd al-Qâdir's] arm. He held it firmly between his left arm and side as in a vice, and with a swing of his saber cut off the Frenchman's head."¹¹⁴ This image, vivid and explicit, produces a specific effect in the text, the

112. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 77.

113. Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Arcades Project* edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaghlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 14-26.

114. Churchill, *Life of Abdel Kader*, p. 34.

pleasure mixed with horror that constitutes vertigo. And from it, a simple meaning imposes itself on events. In the first example of the pyramid of heads, the amîr's troops turn into a necrophilic mob driven not by politics but blood lust. While in the second, the amîr's decapitation of the French cavalryman, Abd al-Qâdir's fight is made for the sheer pleasure of battle, his war against the French is reduced to the simple agon of individual combat.

V. Conclusion

During the course of the nineteenth century, some would admit that the conflict between the French and the Algerians was a brutal war. Indeed, as Francois Maspéro, Mostefa Lacheraf, and others have shown, for many French officers fighting in Algeria, the brutality of the war was exactly what made it good.¹¹⁵ This essay has tried to open another chapter in this debate, rather than decide an exact understanding of 'Abd al-Qâdir's anti-colonial struggle or to establish the amîr's historical legacy as a statesman, military leader, or religious thinker. To this end, I have shown how a good war understanding of the violence in Algeria formed around the figure of 'Abd al-Qâdir. This allowed the violence of French colonialism to be revaluated in a narrative focused on the amîr's life, a narrative that stressed conventional values like personal valor and courage. While French authors participated in the tendency to use the amîr's life to produce of positive narrative of the war, it was English-speaking writers who produced the most compelling and enduring good war versions of the amîr's struggle. Journalists and poets in the United States and Great Britain followed the war closely and produced stirring accounts of 'Abd al-Qâdir's battlefield exploits for their nineteenth century readers. And translations and multiple editions have ensured that a book like Churchill's *The Life of Abdel Kader* remains on book "sellers": shelves to our day, a true page

115. Mostefa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société*; François Maspéro, *L'honneur de Saint-Arnaud* (Paris: Plon, 1993).

turner in which readers learn about the military essence of the Algerian leader’s struggle against the French. Churchill’s ‘Abd al-Qâdir is like Beowulf or the “swift-footed Achilles,” a man whose primary vocation is battle, and who was driven solely by an ethic of valor and love of freedom. ‘Abd al-Qâdir himself, as I argued, had a complicated and varied relationship to the war. He considered armed resistance to the French as jihad to be legitimate and necessary and presented a good war understanding of his struggle to Algerians in order to consolidate his power, contested from so many sides. His commitment to armed resistance even earned him an 1841 condemnation by an influential Qâdiriyya *shaykh* in Baghdad. Later in life, ‘Abd al-Qâdir turned against jihad as war, giving his students in Damascus a sharply critical reading of the practice of military forms of jihad. In the end, however, the story of ‘Abd al-Qâdir as a warrior was the most compelling one. It provided a rare occasion to express positive images of war and reaffirm martial values in a long-running and brutal conflict that claimed nearly half of Algeria’s pre-colonial population, a war that was anything but “good.”

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