

# **Reinventing Empire in the Wake of the Great War: Imperial Citizenship and the “Wilsonian Moment” in Colonial Algeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Anfang 1919 beriefen sich in Algerien sowohl die Anführer der europäischen Siedler als auch die Wortführer der indigenen Gruppen auf ihre jeweiligen Kriegstoten, um bei der Pariser Friedenskonferenz eine Interessenvertretung anerkannt zu bekommen. Obwohl die politischen Projekte, für welche sich diese zwei politischen Eliten einsetzten, diametral entgegengesetzt waren, glaubten doch beide ihren Machtspielraum erweitern zu können, indem sie vor dem starken Mann der Stunde, Woodrow Wilson, ihre Ansprüche geltend machten. Dieser Artikel untersucht, inwieweit der Rückgriff auf die Ideen Wilsons durch Akteure in Algerien tatsächlich einen Versuch darstellte, die koloniale Ordnung radikal zu verändern. Er zeigt, dass die Koketterie mit dem Selbstbestimmungsrecht seitens der politischen Anführer der Siedler als auch der indigenen Bevölkerung kurzlebig und frei gestaltbar war. Vielmehr wird hier angenommen, dass die Hauptzielrichtung der Neuerfindung der imperialen Ordnung in der Nachkriegszeit auf die Entwicklung einer neuen, imperialen Form von Staatsangehörigkeit abzielte.

In May 1919, a new wave of popular contestation swept the colonial world. From Egypt to Korea, as Erez Manela has eloquently shown us, political actors in the colonies embraced the principle of self-determination, giving rise to a “Wilsonian Moment.”<sup>1</sup> As the leaders of the old imperial powers met in Paris to divvy up the world among themselves yet again, the American President held out the promise of a new world order in which the voices of the colonial peoples would no longer go unheard. After all, had he not com-

1 E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford, 2007.

mitted in the fifth of his famous Fourteen Points to ensuring that the “interests” of colonial populations “must have equitable weight” with the interests of their colonial masters.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the principle of self-determination, the essential foundation block of Wilson’s vision of a just postwar order, offered hope to those who sought to legitimize mass campaigns to cast off resented forms of imperial power. Finally, the emergence of a new international politics that was committed, in theory, to the equal recognition of the rights of national groups seemed to offer a new and powerful forum to those challenging the imperial status quo.<sup>3</sup>

The sense of excitement about Wilson and his declaration among colonial peoples, a “largely unintended but eager audience for this rhetoric”,<sup>4</sup> had a certain resonance in France’s most important colony, Algeria. Prominent actors from both of the colony’s communities, the settler “Europeans” and the indigenous “Algerians”, saw that the future of the postwar world and their place in it was being decided in their imperial capital. Both sides actively sought to secure a place, or, at the very least, a sympathetic ear at the conference table. Nevertheless, as this article will show, their efforts to renegotiate Empire through the framework of Wilsonian concepts of self-determination were ephemeral. If there was a “Wilsonian Moment” in postwar Algeria, it was short-lived. This was largely because the political actors in the colony focussed not on disputing sovereignty but rather on conquering new rights within the existing power structure of Empire. For those seeking to reconfigure the imperial polity in French Algeria in the years immediately following the Great War, the quest for a new imperial citizenship was far more important than embracing Wilsonian self-determination.

In order to understand this strategic choice on the part of political actors in the colony, this article will begin with an introduction to the history of sovereignty and citizenship in French Algeria. It will subsequently trace the transformative effect of the Great War on the colony and, in particular, on the relationship between citizens, subjects and the colonial authorities. The main body of the article will focus on the postwar campaigns to restructure the colonial relationship, acknowledging the influence of Wilsonian self-determination yet asking why it proved so fleeting compared to the drive for a new form of imperial citizenship.

## Citizenship and Subjecthood in Colonial Algeria

Algeria was always a colony apart in the French Empire. The conquest of the colony, a long and bloody process, took place in the 1830s, making Algeria a sort of bridge between the first colonial empire in the New World and the second soon to be established in sub-Saharan Africa, across the Maghreb and in South-East Asia. This intermediary

2 W. Wilson, President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, 8 January 1918 in: The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) (accessed 17 January 2017).

3 Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 4.

4 Ibid.

position was also evident in the political status accorded to its inhabitants. While the residents of the 'old colonies' enjoyed the rights of citizenship and the populations of the new colonies were colonial subjects, the situation in Algeria was more complex. Since 1848, Algeria had been legally integrated into the administrative framework of the metropole as an integral part of the French Republic. The *sénatus-consulte* of 1865 set about clarifying the legal status of the colony's inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> Those settlers who came from France obviously retained their citizenship when they moved to the colony, while other European settlers would have to go through the complex process of applying for naturalization. The indigenous Algerians (Jews and Muslims) were classed as French nationals but not French citizens, governed by their personal status as subjects of Koranic or Mosaic Law. Strict criteria were imposed to regulate the naturalization process for indigenous peoples, including the requirement to renounce their personal status, a policy that in practice rendered naturalization both almost practically impossible and culturally repugnant to the vast majority of the indigenous Muslim population.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the French authorities would naturalize the colony's Jewish population *en masse* (1870) and facilitate the accession to citizenship of non-French European settlers through the new Nationality Code (1889). This expansion of citizenship rights in the colony did not, however, apply to the vast majority of the population, the indigenous Algerians, whose personal status as Muslims supposedly excluded them from participation in the imperial polity. The law secured the position of non-French Europeans within the power structure of the colonial regime by drawing a clear line between those considered worthy of French citizenship and those whose cultural, religious and/or racial identity was deemed incompatible with the exercise of French citizenship. Thus, the dichotomy between citizen and subject became the defining feature of both politics and daily life in the colony.

### The Great War and the Boundaries of Citizenship in Algeria

The shadow of an impending conflict, which increasingly loomed over politics in France and its Empire in the years before the Great War, gave rise to an important debate in Algeria over the impermeability of the boundary between citizen and subject. Unsurprisingly, given the context of the increasing militarization of French society, this debate crystallized around questions of military service and conscription. France, more than any other European country, had a long tradition of tying citizenship to military service, going all the way back to the *levées-en-masse* of the revolutionary period.<sup>7</sup> If military action to defend the integrity of the national borders was the ultimate act of sovereignty, participating in defence as a citizen-soldier was, at least in France, the essential act of

5 See P. Weil, *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making Since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter, London: Duke University Press, 2008 (First published in French 2002), pp. 152-167.

6 J. McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 91.

7 J. Horne *L'impôt du sang: Republican rhetoric and industrial warfare in France, 1914-1918*, in: *Social History* 14, (1989), pp. 201-223, p. 215.

citizenship. Thus, the debate around the application of conscription in the colony would offer rival groups the opportunity to define the boundaries between subject and citizen in their favour.

The distinction between citizen and subject initially resulted in a relatively simple application of the metropolitan conscription regime to the colony. Colonial citizens were required to carry out military service under the same conditions as their metropolitan equivalents, while indigenous subjects were exempted from obligatory service. However, senior figures in both the French military and in the colonial service had long discussed the possibility of applying conscription to the indigenous population of Algeria in line with the broader effort to build France's military capacity through recruitment in the Empire. It would take the climate of international tension in the years before the Great War for the issue to enter wider public discourse. The defenders of the imposition of conscription in the colony found vocal allies in the *Jeune Algérien* movement, an informal grouping of educated elite Algerians. Convinced that conscription would inevitably lead to the extension of citizenship rights, these intellectuals sought to persuade a sceptical, and in some cases openly hostile,<sup>8</sup> indigenous public, that conscription would bring many benefits and automatically enhance the political rights of the indigenous elite.<sup>9</sup> At the heart of their claims stood the argument that France had always tied military service to citizenship. This same assertion was also central to the bitter opposition of the leadership of the European community to any extension of conscription to cover the indigenous population. They too believed that conscription would open the door to citizenship for at least part of the Algerian population and thus, fundamentally breach the essential boundary between citizenship and subjecthood.<sup>10</sup>

The policy ultimately adopted by the French government would prioritize the maintenance of European hegemony in the colony over any attempt to recognize the political rights of the indigenous population within the imperial polity. The 1912 law applying conscription to indigenous Algerians imposed conditions of service that marked them out as notably different from other conscripts. Military service was to be rewarded with money, not extended political rights, and indigenous Algerians would enter the army as subject-soldiers, with no enhanced prospect of acquiring citizenship.<sup>11</sup> As a result, indigenous Algerians serving in the French Army on the eve of the Great War occupied a somewhat ambiguous position, "between hired mercenaries and full French citizens".<sup>12</sup> The boundary between subject and citizen survived the introduction of conscription intact, but how did it fare when faced with the mass mobilization of a colonial society at war?

With the French Empire's entry into the Great War in August 1914, theoretical debates over the political status of Algeria's inhabitants became less important than ensuring the

8 B. Recham, *Les musulmans algériens dans l'armée française 1919–1945*, Paris, 1996, p. 19.

9 G. Meynier, *L'Algérie Révélée: La guerre de 1914–1918 et le premier quart du XXe siècle*, Geneva, 1981, p. 95.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 92–94.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

12 R. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918*, Baltimore, 2008, p. 53.

colony's contribution to the war effort. A specifically colonial *Union Sacrée* came into being in Algeria, with the tacit understanding that political disputes over colonial reform would be suspended until the future of the Empire had been secured on the battlefields of Europe with the help of Algeria's inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the war, about 73000 Europeans served as French citizens on the battlefields of France and the Eastern Front, a proportion roughly equal to that of metropolitan France.<sup>14</sup> In total, some 173000 indigenous soldiers had served in French forces by the end of war, with slightly more than half of these enlisting as "volunteers",<sup>15</sup> though this term is questionable given the recruitment practices employed by colonial administrators.<sup>16</sup> Of these subject-soldiers, 125000 saw action on the European battlefields over the course of the war.<sup>17</sup> Estimates for European deaths range between 12000<sup>18</sup> and 22000<sup>19</sup> while the number of indigenous deaths is generally put somewhere around 26000.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, thousands of indigenous workers took up positions in factories in France, freeing up men to serve at the Front and playing an important role in maintaining the supply of essential military and industrial equipment.<sup>21</sup> This mass mobilization of colonial manpower would have important implications for how Algeria's inhabitants understood their place in the imperial polity and how they would seek to improve it in the years following the war.

For the colony's European community, participation in the Great War placed their entitlement to the privileges of French citizenship beyond doubt. Any question around the loyalty of the newly assimilated settler populations of non-French origins were dispelled by their sacrifices on the battlefields of Europe. For the political leaders of the European community, their sacrifice in defence of the Empire sacralised the special relationship between the colony and the metropole giving rise to a "blood pact" that bound the two together for eternity. In the eyes of the European political class, this relationship of "reciprocal national obligation", a defining feature of the social contract underpinning wartime service across the belligerent countries,<sup>22</sup> obliged the metropolitan government to maintaining European hegemony in the colony. Indeed, as we shall see, the most vocal European leaders believed that their communal contribution to the war effort merited an expansion of European hegemony that could only be realized through a reconfiguration of the imperial polity.

13 J. Jansen, Une autre "Union Sacrée"? Commémorer la Grande Guerre dans l'Algérie colonisée (1918–1939), A. Jommier (trans.), in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 61-62 (2014) 2, pp. 32-60, p. 34.

14 J. Frémaux, *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre : Combats et Epreuves des Peuples d'Outre-Mer*, Paris, 2006, p. 55.

15 Stora, *Algeria 1830–2000*, p. 18.

16 For a detailed account of the abuses involved in the recruitment process see Meynier, *L'Algérie Révélée*, pp. 393-404.

17 Frémaux, *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre*, p. 63.

18 Ibid., p. 202.

19 Stora, *Algeria 1830–2000*, p. 18.

20 Frémaux gives the figure 26000 while Stora offers the figure 25000, Frémaux, *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre*, p. 202 and Stora, *Algeria 1830–2000*, p. 18.

21 Frémaux, *Les Colonies dans la Grande Guerre*, pp. 73-74.

22 John Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914–1918*, Oxford, 1991, p. 351.

For Algeria's indigenous population, the experience of the war crystallized the ambiguity of their place in the French national community. Military policy towards indigenous troops was shaped by "conflicting impulses" blending racial prejudice, paternalism, respect for difference and a rhetorical commitment to republican equality.<sup>23</sup> The Army, though it was permeated by racist discrimination, was a "relatively egalitarian social order" compared to colonial society in Algeria, and this limited equality would leave a lasting impression on those who survived the war.<sup>24</sup> This was also true for the interaction of indigenous Algerians with the metropolitan French, whether in the trenches or behind the front lines. While some soldiers reported incidents of racial discrimination, others celebrated the respect and friendship with which they were treated by their officers and by French civilians.<sup>25</sup> These experiences demonstrated to indigenous Algerians and their political leaders both the possibilities and the limits of a potentially more egalitarian post-war order. In the years that followed the Armistice, they would brandish the wartime contribution of their community in an effort to secure new rights within the imperial polity. At the heart of their campaign stood the contention that their wartime service granted them the right to a new form of citizenship that could simultaneously reconcile French republican equality with the cultural and racial difference that defined Empire.

### Rival Visions of Colonial Reform

While the leaders of both the European and indigenous communities would seek to impose their own visions of a just post-war colonial order, the immediate task of passing colonial reform fell to the metropolitan government in Paris. Georges Clemenceau, the fiery Prime Minister who had led France to victory in the war, had long harboured scepticism, if not a certain hostility, towards the colonial enterprise. During the war, he had strongly advocated rewarding the military service of imperial subjects with expanded political rights.<sup>26</sup> His reappointment of noted reformer Charles Jonnart to his former position as Governor General of Algeria reinforced the impression that the government was committed to fundamental colonial reform. Nevertheless, this zeal for reform would be tempered by a combination of political pressure from the colonial lobby and the decline in prominence of colonial issues following the Armistice. The final project, known as the *Loi Jonnart*, extended a limited form of franchise at the local level to certain categories of the indigenous population, including veterans. As a result, some 421000 indigenous men now enjoyed the right to vote, albeit in a restrictive system that never called into

23 Fogarty, *Race and War*, pp. 126-130, p. 272.

24 Ibid., 7.

25 G. Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée : la guerre de 1914-1918 et le 1er quart du XXe siècle*, Lille, 1984, Thesis defended 1979, p. 421 and p. 436.

26 Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*, Annexe CLXXV-CLXXVI.

question European hegemony in the colony.<sup>27</sup> While Jonnart presented the project in terms that deliberately blurred the lines between citizen and subject, suggesting that the new law created an "intermediary status", the essential distinction underpinning the power structure of the colonial regime remained intact.<sup>28</sup> Faced with the competing interests of Algeria's different communities and their rival claims for legitimacy grounded in their wartime service, the metropolitan government opted for a reform designed to placate the indigenous political elites without provoking the ire of the political leaders of the European community. Ultimately, this balancing act would fail to satisfy political elites from both sides of the ethnic divide in the colony. Both would seek to articulate their own visions of colonial reform, hoping that the unique opportunity offered by the post-war moment would allow them to restructure the Empire in their favour.

For the defenders of further reform in favour of the indigenous, the *Loi Jonnart* was a minor sign of progress but went nowhere near compensating the mass sacrifice the indigenous community had made for the defence of France. Gathered around the charismatic figure of the Emir Khaled, grandson of the leader of resistance to the French conquest, the Emir Abd-el-Kader, and the only non-naturalized indigenous soldier to reach the rank of captain, the supporters of indigenous reform showed little enthusiasm for the government's efforts. While *L'Ikdam*, the group's newspaper, initially referred to the *Loi Jonnart* as "a step forward"<sup>29</sup> and claimed it was testament to the goodwill felt by the Algerian administration to the indigenous community,<sup>30</sup> it soon began to clamour for a more expansive reform package. The Emir and his supporters sought a reconfiguration of the imperial polity that could recognize the political rights of indigenous Algerians won on the battlefields of the Great War without alienating them from their Islamic identity. This quest for a form of "equality in difference" translated, in concrete policy terms, into the demand for indigenous representation in Parliament, the abolition of all measures of exception in the colony and, most importantly, the naturalization of indigenous people as French citizens without the renunciation of their personal status.<sup>31</sup> This programme and the campaign around it attracted much popular support among the politically aware sections of the colony's population. But where does this mobilization fit in the broader schema of the 'Wilsonian Moment' and to what extent did the Emir and his followers embrace Wilsonian self-determination?

Before we attempt this question, we must also consider the European community's efforts to promote its vision of a new post-war order in Algeria. The reforms of the *Loi Jonnart*, focused solely on the political status of the colony's indigenous population, did nothing to answer the calls for a new political dispensation that would recognize and reward the European community's contribution to the war effort. Indeed, some of the

27 Ch.-R. Ageron, *Une politique algérienne libérale sous la troisième République (1912–1919): Étude historique de la loi du 4 février 1919* in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 6:2 (April–June, 1959), pp. 121–151, p. 144.

28 Fogarty, *Race and War*, p. 258.

29 *A nos lecteurs et amis* in: *L'Ikdam*, 07 March 1919.

30 Kherroubi, *Appel aux Patriotes* in: *L'Ikdam*, 15 March 1919.

31 A. Koulakssis and G. Meynier, *L'Emir Khaled: premier zaïm?*, Paris, 1987, p. 198.

more radical leaders of the community condemned the reform as “treacherous”, painting it as the first step in a wider attack on European hegemony within the colony. While much of the energy of the European political class in the colony went into the campaign to oppose and/or dilute the provisions of the *Loi Jonnart*, with a certain degree of success, the leaders of the European community also developed their own vision of a just postwar colonial order. At the heart of this vision stood the demand for Algerian autonomy, for the right of the European community in Algeria to decide their own future within the French Empire. Here the influence of some form of Wilsonian self-determination seems evident. But, once more, we must ask, to what extent did the European leadership actually understand their efforts to redefine Empire in Algeria as part of a wider “Wilsonian Moment”?

### The Wilsonian Strategy

When assessing the influence of the “Wilsonian Moment” on campaigns for colonial reform in Algeria, the seeming comparisons with other parts of the colonial world are striking. The practice of post-war claims in Algeria seems to fit into a wider pattern of colonial populations, whether settlers or subjects, asserting a right to self-determination born of their wartime service. When it comes to those seeking a new settlement for colonial subjects, the superficial parallels between activism in the immediate post-war period in British-controlled Egypt and French Algeria seem convincing. Around the same time when the figure of Saïd Zaghul and his Wafd Party were mobilising Wilsonian self-determination against the British authorities, the charismatic Emir Khaled was rallying the indigenous population of Algeria against the crudest forms of French colonial rule. Similarly, just as Britain’s White Dominions were asserting their control over their own affairs, the European community in Algeria was also demanding autonomy from the imperial metropole. Yet, when we look beyond superficial comparisons, do they actually constitute proof of Algeria’s embrace of the “Wilsonian Moment”? Moreover, what evidence do we have, beyond the circumstantial and the comparative, to attest to a real engagement with Wilsonian self-determination by political actors in the Algeria of the immediate post-war period?

If we turn first to the case of the Emir Khaled and his supporters, there is one key document that demonstrates a clear Wilsonian impulse underpinning their campaign. In May 1919, the Emir himself addressed a petition directly to “the honourable President of the Free America” in an effort to win his support for the cause of the Algerian people.<sup>32</sup> The petition, drawn up by a committee dominated by close allies of the Emir, was approved at a meeting in Algiers.<sup>33</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the target audience of the petition, the

32 Pétition de l’Emir Khaled au Président des Etats-Unis Wilson in: L’Emir Khaled : Documents et témoignages, M. Kaddache and M. Guennanèche (eds.), pp. 121-124, p. 121.

33 M. Kaddache, Histoire du nationalisme algérien, Tome I, 1919–1939, Algiers, 2003, p. 94.



Emir's arguments were steeped in the language of Wilsonian self-determination. His petition began with an account of the usurpation of Algerian sovereignty as a result of the French "occupation". He then detailed the numerous legal guarantees granted to the Algerians by the various French regimes over the years who had committed to "respect our laws, our customs, our religions", and lamented that "these beautiful promises turned out to be only words".<sup>34</sup> Here, the Emir was clearly attempting to place the case of Algeria in the nascent international legal order, underlining the illegality of the practice of French rule in his homeland. When it came to expressing his most radical opinion, the belief that the happiness of Algeria's indigenous population could only be secured outside of the existing imperial polity, he chose to evoke Wilson's own words:

*Defeated and resigned to our fate, we have endured all these calamities in the hope of brighter days to come. Your solemn declaration in May 1917, in your message to Russia, that 'no people can be forced to live under a sovereignty it repudiates' gives us hope that these days have arrived.*<sup>35</sup>

This was followed by a concrete proposition that was, once more, heavily rooted in Wilsonian theories. The Emir argued that French sovereignty in Algeria should be replaced with the temporary stewardship of the League of Nations, pending the free decision by the people of Algeria on their "future destiny". The petition ends with a celebration of the famous Fourteen Points, which the Emir claims will serve "to liberate all the small oppressed peoples, regardless of race or religion" and a tribute to Wilson, the "flag-carrier of law and justice" for all the peoples of the world.<sup>36</sup> This glowing tribute to Wilson demonstrates the extent to which the Emir and his followers believed the American President could potentially deliver the most radical re-configuration of the post-war colonial order by bringing an end to French rule and reinstalling indigenous sovereignty.

The contents of this document place the Emir and his supporters at the heart of the global moment of anti-colonial claims-making so convincingly described by Erez Manela. It is, in many ways, the archetype of the "flood of declarations, petitions and memoranda" that various anti-colonial groups issued in Paris in early 1919.<sup>37</sup> Firstly, the Emir's strategy of presenting Algeria's case in the nascent language of an international political system grounded in legalism, self-determination and the respect for the equal voice of sovereign peoples, was a defining feature of this type of petition. Secondly, the praise lavished on Wilson and his Fourteen Points, coupled with the use of his own words to justify the Algerian case for self-determination, was again typical of the appeals directed by anti-colonial activists towards the American delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>38</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the confident sense that Wilson's theories and declarations were wholly applicable to colonial situations, evident throughout the Emir's

34 Pétition de l'Emir Khaled in : L'Emir Khaled, p. 122.

35 Ibid., p. 123.

36 Ibid., p. 124.

37 Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 4.

38 Ibid., p. 5.

petition, was the essential foundation underpinning the “Wilsonian Moment” across the colonial world. The fact that Wilson barely even considered the colonial word in the development of his theories and showed little enthusiasm for extending the principle of self-determination beyond the borders of Europe, meant that, contrary to the hopes of the petitioners, he would not lead the effort to bring an end to the colonial order.<sup>39</sup> The petitions, thus, would fall on deaf ears. This failure to secure change notwithstanding, these petitions do offer us great insight into the way those seeking to transform the colonial world understood their place in the wider framework of an emergent global polity. For the Emir Khaled and his supporters, and indeed, for many other political actors around the colonial world, the presence of Wilson at the conference table in Paris was too good an opportunity to be missed.

Yet, despite the clear enthusiasm for Wilson and his theories evident in this petition, the concept of self-determination and calls for an end to French sovereignty were extremely marginal in the political action of the Emir Khaled and his supporters in the immediate postwar period. While political elites in the indigenous community did share the optimism of their equivalents in Egypt and farther afield in the colonial world that the war would radically transform the colonial world, they did not believe that a defence of Wilsonian self-determination was the best strategy to secure change. Indeed, the Emir’s initiative of petitioning President Wilson was not widely publicized in the colony and would be a source of tension within the indigenous elite, with some moderates denouncing the Emir’s actions.<sup>40</sup> The political leaders of the indigenous community recognized that Algeria’s position in the Empire, as an integral part of the French Republic, coupled with the presence of a numerically significant and politically influential settler population, forestalled any prospect of a renegotiation of sovereignty in the colony. Furthermore, many figures within the elite owed their status in part to their relationship to the French colonial authorities, whether as local notables, elected officials or part of a nascent professional class working for the colonial state. Their central aim was not to call French sovereignty into question but rather to secure for themselves a role in the exercise of this sovereignty through the acquisition of the rights of French citizenship. Even the more radical voices around the Emir had a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards the prospect of ending French sovereignty and opted to eschew a campaign of full-throated opposition to colonial rule in favour of the demand for a reconfiguration of the imperial polity and a new form of imperial citizenship.

The contrast between the cases of Egypt and Algeria in this period is indicative of the fleeting nature of the “Wilsonian Moment” in the French colony. Of course, this is not a case of comparing like with like. Both the legal structures and the history of colonial rule in the two North African territories were quite distinct. British occupation of Egypt began fifty years after the French invaded Algeria and the resultant polity was organized as a protectorate, not a settler colony. Egypt’s position as a centre of both Mediterranean

39 Ibid., p. 10.

40 Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, p. 95.

and East-West trade, as well as the long history of Cairo as one of the intellectual capitals of the Arab world, marked it out from the relative backwater status of Algeria in this period. It was home to an emergent middle class of modern Egyptians, or *efendiyya*, who sought a place for their nation in the new global order.<sup>41</sup> These differences were reflected in the practice of politics in both territories. Egypt was home to a much more politically active elite that was better plugged into global political networks whereas formal indigenous political activism in Algeria was a relatively new phenomenon in a colony where the coercive power of the colonial state and of the settler population weighed particularly heavily on the subject population. These factors undoubtedly influenced the strategic choices of political leaders in both territories in the wake of the Great War, shaping their attitudes towards Wilson and the concept of self-determination.

In Egypt, the movement for reform was unabashedly committed to the drive for self-determination and held the restoration of indigenous sovereignty above all other political goals. Even the name chosen by the new party they founded, the "Wafd" or "delegation" party was a nod to the Egyptians' desire to participate in the new global political order grounded in negotiations and mutual recognitions of sovereignty.<sup>42</sup> The movement in Algeria, in contrast, was never formally organized into a party and generally shied away from a public embrace of self-determination. The kind of popular adulation of Wilson that became a driving force of the movement in Egypt was notable by its absence in Algeria. While Wilson and his theories were omnipresent in the Egyptian press, even the most avid supporters of colonial reform in Algeria rarely referred to Wilsonian doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Over the course of 1919, only one prominent article in *L'ikdam* made reference to "Wilsonian principles" and even then, the theme was evoked only in passing.<sup>44</sup> The Emir's petition stands out as the only example of a direct appeal to Wilson by indigenous Algerians in the period, again contrasting with the numerous attempts by the Wafd and its supporters to win Wilson's approval.<sup>45</sup> While the Emir and his supporters quickly abandoned efforts to secure an international intervention in their colony, the Egyptians persisted in demanding that their voice be heard at the Paris Peace Conference leading to the mass mobilization of the 1919 Revolution.

Even the declaration by the American government that it recognised the legitimacy of the protectorate, albeit acknowledging the Egyptians' right to campaign for further self-government, did not signal the end for Wilsonian rhetoric among Egypt's nationalists.<sup>46</sup> The very fact that the American government was forced to clarify its position on Egypt shows the extent to which the Wilsonian Moment had come to define politics in Egypt. This was most definitely not the case in Algeria, a territory the American government continued to recognize as an integral part of France until its independence in 1962.

41 L. Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt*, Oxford, 2014, pp. 4-6.

42 Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 70.

43 Ibid.

44 Abou-el-Hack, *La guerre continue* in: *L'ikdam*, 05 April 1919.

45 Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, pp. 72-74.

46 Ibid., p. 149.

The legacies of the “Wilsonian Moment” defined politics in interwar Egypt, as activists continued to defend a sort of “Wilsonianism without Wilson” well after their exclusion from the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, the brief flirtation of Algeria’s indigenous political activists with the rhetoric of liberal, Wilsonian self-determination left little trace in the political culture of the colony. The “Wilsonian Moment” was not a foundational event for Algeria’s future nationalist movement.

When addressing the drive for a new post-war order by the leaders of Algeria’s European community, it might seem counterintuitive to suggest that these staunch opponents of any form of majoritarian rule might embrace Wilsonian rhetoric. After all, surely the principle of self-determination, if applied in Algeria, would automatically bring an end to their hegemonic position in the colony. Nevertheless, as both American policy in Egypt and the President’s deep personal commitment to racial segregation in America showed,<sup>48</sup> Wilsonian principles were not necessarily incompatible with a political regime based on racial exclusion. While the leadership of the European community never directly appealed to Wilson, and indeed roundly condemned the Emir Khaled for having done so,<sup>49</sup> their campaign for enhanced autonomy bore some of the hallmarks of the “Wilsonian Moment”. In particular, prominent figures from the European political class staked a claim for Algerian representation at the Paris Peace Conference, the epicentre of the “Wilsonian Moment”. An article in *L’Echo d’Alger* in February 1919 set out a clear case for the seating of an Algerian delegation alongside those of the British Dominions. After all, the author asked, was Algeria not “worth the same as Australia, New Zealand and Canada?” Were her “sacrifices” in men and money “less than that of the Dominions of England?”<sup>50</sup> The demand for Algerian representation was not, however, solely motivated by a desire for equal treatment between the constituent parts of the victorious Empires. The author also stressed the importance of Algerian representation to ensure the colony was not “sacrificed in the wheeling and dealing of the diplomats”.<sup>51</sup> Like their opponents grouped around the Emir Khaled and their equivalents across the colonial world, the leaders of Algeria’s European community understood that a new global political order was being shaped in Paris. Their exclusion from the conference was held up as evidence of the ‘little attention’ paid to their concerns by those in the metropole. Indeed, the language used to articulate their frustration closely paralleled the rhetoric of both the Emir Khaled in his petition and the slogans of the Wafd Party in Egypt. The denunciation of the “close control” exercised by the metropole, which supposedly amounted to a form of “subjugation” would not have been out of place in a speech by Sa’d Zeghlul.<sup>52</sup>

47 Ibid., p. 157.

48 Ibid., p. 26.

49 Le Problème de l’Entente et de la Coopération des Races in: *La Dépêche Algérienne*, 15 November 1922.

50 Les problèmes économiques et la politique : La représentation de l’Algérie à la conférence de la paix in: *L’Echo d’Alger*, 06 February 1919.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

Wilsonian rhetoric had clearly entered the vocabulary of the leaders of Algeria's European community.

The drive to secure a place at the negotiating table in Paris was just one element of the much wider campaign to expand settler autonomy in the colony. Here again the language employed by the European leaders clearly echoed the petitions sent to Wilson. In an editorial entitled "Algerian Freedoms: Autonomy", the newspaper *L'Évolution Nord-Africaine* asserted that "Algeria has reached the age of majority and can no longer live under [the metropole's] guardianship" with its "odious regime of exception that, all too often, enforce all the duties without giving all the rights." Defending its claim for an autonomous Algeria, the newspaper rejected accusations of separatism by drawing comparisons with the British Empire, asking "have the freedoms enjoyed by the English Dominions made separatists of them?"<sup>53</sup> Another prominent supporter of autonomy, writing in *L'Echo d'Alger*, envisaged a settlement for Algeria that seemed to draw inspiration from both the situation of the Dominions and that of Wilson's homeland, advocating a "free Algeria, under a French protectorate, with a democracy modelled on America".<sup>54</sup> The evocation of the relative autonomy of the British Dominions may seem quite distant from the soaring rhetoric of Wilsonian self-determination. It does, however, bear testimony to the settler leadership's desire to negotiate some form of sovereignty for the colony's European population and its recognition that the postwar moment offered a potential global audience to their cause.

This brief flirtation with Wilsonian rhetoric was even more limited among the leadership of Algeria's European community than for the Emir Khaled and his supporters. The demographic position of the European community as a small minority (circa 13% in 1930)<sup>55</sup> made them absolutely dependent on the coercive power of the French state to maintain their racial hegemony in the colony. In colonial Algeria, the protection of settler primacy always took precedence over efforts to expand settler sovereignty.<sup>56</sup> This was not the case in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, where the eliminatory logic of settler colonialism had established a polity in which settler hegemony was a given and settler sovereignty a goal. These Dominions would defend their own specifically imperial vision of self-determination in the wake of the Great War to successfully expand on their already significant autonomy, securing equality of status under the Balfour Formula of 1926 and then full legislative authority under the Statute of Westminster in 1931.<sup>57</sup> Such concessions were unimaginable in an Algeria that was both an integral part of the French Republic and a majority-indigenous settler colony. Given the limits of the po-

53 Libertés algériennes: l'autonomie in: *L'Évolution Nord-Africaine*, 05 July 1919.

54 E. Baïlac, *L'Algérie libre* in: *L'Echo d'Alger*, 22 April 1919.

55 Percentage calculated from the Census of the Population in 1931, from the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, ANOM GGA/3CAB/95.

56 For more on the distinction between these concepts see D. Hassett, *Proud Colons, Proud Frenchmen: Settler Colonialism and the Extreme Right in Interwar Algeria*, in: *Settler Colonial Studies* 17:1 (2017), pp. 1–19, pp. 3–4.

57 For an account of post-war claims-making and the restructuring of the British Empire see J. Darwin, *A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics*, in: *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. IV, *The Twentieth Century*, J. Brown and W. R. Louis, Oxford, 1999, pp. 64–87, pp. 68–75.

litical space in which they operated, the partisans of autonomy in Algeria would prove far less comfortable with imperial adaptations of Wilsonian rhetoric, choosing to frame their demands in a way that more clearly rooted them in the imperial polity.

### The Drive for a New Imperial Citizenship

For political leaders in Algeria the quest for new rights would be expressed in terms of a new form of citizenship, not an extension of new forms of sovereignty. Both the defenders of indigenous reform and the leaders of the European community cast their postwar political projects as a restructuring of the imperial polity that would reward past sacrifice and promote future development. Although they were critical of aspects of the colonial system, especially the metropole's seeming indifference towards life in the colony, they largely eschewed calls to weaken the essential link between France and Algeria. Rather, what they sought was a new model of Empire that could reconcile the particularity of Algeria with the universality of the French Republic. This aspiration for a new place within the French imperial polity meant that the language of Wilsonian self-determination lost out to other rhetorical strategies more clearly grounded in French political tradition.

First and foremost among the rhetorical strategies used by actors from both of Algeria's communities to frame their postwar demands was the French concept of the *impôt du sang* or "blood tax". As the debates around conscription had shown, the notion that rights of citizenship were corollaries of duties of military service had a powerful resonance in French political life. Unsurprisingly, then, Emir Khaled and his followers evoked their wartime service repeatedly to promote their right to citizenship within the personal status while their opponents in the European community pointed to their wartime contribution to defend their right to a differentiated form of settler citizenship.

For the Emir Khaled, who had served with distinction in the war, the communal contribution of the indigenous population was the primary justification for his calls for a new dispensation in the colony. When outlining his manifesto, just one month after sending his petition to Wilson, the Emir defended his call for naturalization within the status with the assertion that "by spilling their blood for France, they have acquired indisputable rights".<sup>58</sup> This message was reinforced repeatedly by his supporters, who constantly evoked the war dead in their defence of the concession of an imperial form of citizenship compatible with the personal status.<sup>59</sup> Any extension of French citizenship that would require the renunciation of this personal status would be nothing more than a "convoluted means of keeping them under the yoke [of oppression]".<sup>60</sup> Close allies of the Emir pointed out that the French government had not been so concerned about the personal status of indigenous Algerians when they sent them into battle.<sup>61</sup> As one Euro-

58 Emir Khaled, Réponse à M. Jean Méliá, in: L'Ikdam, 21-28 June 1919.

59 M. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society*, Manchester, 2005, p. 248.

60 L'Ikdam, 24 May 1919.

61 For more details on this argument see D. Hassett, 'Defining Imperial Citizenship in the Shadow of World War I:

pean sympathizer of the Emir put it "were they made to renounce their personal status so that they could be sent to be riddled with bullets ... for us?"<sup>62</sup> References to the *impôt du sang* proved the perfect rhetorical strategy for Khaled and his supporters allowing them to build on French political tradition to stake a claim for citizenship while pointing to the particularity of the conditions of indigenous wartime service to defend the personal status. Furthermore, in contrast to the perceived radicalism of the rhetoric of Wilsonian self-determination, a language articulated around the *impôt du sang* was more likely to find a friendly audience among the metropolitan political class with whom the power to change the imperial polity rested.

The leaders of the European community also recognized the potential effectiveness of framing their demands in terms of their wartime contribution. Their programme for a new settler citizenship that complemented the general rights of the French citizens with rights specific to the colony would be repeatedly justified by the evocation of the community's participation in the war. Gustave Mercier, a leading proponent of Algerian autonomy, justified his call for an enhancement of the rights of Europeans by asserting "Algeria earned the right to this emancipation through unlimited support for France during the war".<sup>63</sup> While the Emir and his supporters had emphasised the participation of the indigenous community despite their lack of citizenship, the European community's leaders trumpeted their contribution as full citizens of France. They pointed out that Algeria's Europeans had served in proportionally the same numbers as their metropolitan counterparts, which was not the case for the indigenous community.<sup>64</sup> Thus, they argued, the European community should have primacy when it came to reshaping the post-war colonial order.<sup>65</sup> Granting Europeans a new political status specific to the colony, which would complement their status as French citizens, would allow France to "give some credit" to those who had proven themselves "worthy of the *Patrie*".<sup>66</sup> For the European leadership, evoking the war dead allowed them to simultaneously assert their right to compensation and their commitment to the continuation of French sovereignty. Whereas Wilsonian rhetoric, or even evocations of Dominion status, stressed the increasing independence of colonies, the defenders of autonomy, who depended on French coercive power, preferred a language grounded in an imperial form of "reciprocal national obligation".<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, this desire on the part of the European leadership to minimize any potential perception of separatism among metropolitan elites meant that they often sought to frame their project primarily in economic, rather than political, terms. As the editor

Equality in Difference in the Debates around Postwar Colonial Reform in Algeria', in G. Barry, E. Del Lago, R. Healy, (eds.), *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries in World War I*, (Leiden, 2016), pp. 263-280, p. 270.

62 Victor Spielmann, La question indigène au Conseil Supérieur in: *L'Idam*, 06 January 1922.

63 Gustave Mercier, L'autonomie algérienne et la Fédération Nord-Africaine in: *L'Echo d'Alger*, 25 May 1919.

64 Ferdinand Anecy, La Question Indigène au Congrès des Colons in: *L'Evolution Nord-Africaine*, 21 June 1919.

65 F. Ancey, La Question Indigène in: *La Voix des Colons*, 20-27 July 1919; Gustave Mercier, L'Autonomie Algérienne, Le Contrôle Métropolitain in: *L'Echo d'Alger*, 21 January 1920.

66 Gustave Mercier, L'Autonomie Algérienne, Le Contrôle Métropolitain in: *L'Echo d'Alger*, 21 January 1920.

67 Horne, *Labour at War*, 351.



of *l'Echo d'Alger* asserted, "a free Algeria is not a separatist conception: it is a regionalist formula based on modern economic science".<sup>68</sup> Extending autonomy, it was argued, would allow the colony to recover from the havoc of the war and play its role in the future development of the Empire.<sup>69</sup> An autonomous Algeria could transform "the institutions that hamper" the development of the economy and thus cause "a loss of trade to the Motherland".<sup>70</sup> This economic focus chimed with the vision, championed by the Radical politician Albert Sarraut, of a postwar France that would flourish through the development of the resources of its Empire.<sup>71</sup> This strategy sought to place a settler-led Algeria in the vanguard of the imperial project, solidifying its position as a bridge between the metropole and the Empire. The political impulse of the European leaders was to strengthen, and not weaken, the imperial polity.

Algeria's position within the broader framework of the French Empire was also the source of a key argument deployed by those who supported of naturalization within personal status. While the Emir and his supporters may have drawn inspiration from the anti-colonial forces around the world who participated in the "Wilsonian Moment", their main point of reference was internal to the French Empire. In support of their claim for naturalization within the status, the proponents of radical indigenous reform constantly cited the imperial precedent, especially the case of the *originaires* of Senegal.<sup>72</sup> The wartime accession of the indigenous Senegalese of the Four Communes of Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée and St. Louis to full citizenship rights without renouncing their personal status was a source of both inspiration and resentment for supporters of reform in Algeria. Recalling the "multiple promises" made by "democratic and republican France" during the war, they demanded "equal treatment" to that given to their "fellow Muslims in Senegal".<sup>73</sup> If, as the Emir put it, the "blacks of Senegal" could enjoy the rights of citizenship without renouncing their personal status, then why not the Algerians, who had "indisputably proven their attachment to France"?<sup>74</sup> The Emir and his followers wanted to expand this precedent into a new form of imperial citizenship around which they could reconfigure the Empire and claim the compensation due to them for their wartime service. Indeed, throughout this period the Emir and his supporters were vigilant in their efforts to ensure that they, who had so valiantly fought for France, should receive priority in any expansion of rights across the imperial polity.<sup>75</sup> Thus, it is clear that while they may briefly have sought to stake their claims in the emerging global political order at the

68 E Baïlac, *L'Algérie libre* in: *L'Echo d'Alger*, 22 April 1919.

69 *Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc* in: *La Dépêche Algérienne*, 14 January 1919.

70 Discours de M. Giraud in: *La Dépêche Algérienne*, 07 March 1930.

71 For more on this see Martin Thomas, Albert Sarraut, French Colonial Development, and the Communist Threat, 1919–1930 in: *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005) 4, pp. 917–955.

72 See: Réponse à *l'Echo d'Alger* in: *L'ikdam*, 29 March 1919; Emir Khaled, Ne pourrions-nous pas avoir voix au chapitre? in: *L'ikdam*, 27 January 1919; Emir Khaled, Riposte de l'Emir Khaled au journal 'L'Algérie' in: *L'ikdam*, 09 June 1922; Problèmes Musulmans d'Algérie, une conversation avec l'Emir Khaled in: *L'ikdam*, 22 December 1922.

73 Zaouaoui, *L'ère nouvelle* in: *L'ikdam*, 04 August 1922.

74 Emir Khaled, Ne pourrions-nous pas avoir voix au chapitre ? in: *L'ikdam*, 27 January 1919.

75 Hassett, 'Defining Imperial Citizenship, in: *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries*, 273.



Peace Conferences, supporters of indigenous reform looked within the Empire to shape and to defend their vision of a postwar just order for Algeria.

## Conclusion

It would be a mistake to dismiss the idea that the colonial world experienced a “Wilsonian Moment” in the aftermath of the Great War. Like the work of a good global historian, Erez Manela’s study is, by necessity, broad in the nature of the geographical spaces it covers and narrow in its conception of political claims-making, in this case focusing on anti-colonial nationalism. It does not claim to establish an incontrovertible model through which all efforts to reimagine the colonial world must be understood nor does it exclude the possibility of political actors simultaneously pursuing multiple, and often contradictory, strategies to challenge colonial rule.<sup>76</sup> If anything, it throws down the gauntlet to colonial historians and asks us to write the history of post-war claims of specific colonies. In this spirit that this article has explored the resonance of the “Wilsonian Moment” in colonial Algeria.

It is clear that ideas of Wilsonian self-determination, however vague they may have been, did play a role in shaping and framing the postwar claims made by political actors from both the European and the indigenous community in Algeria. They shared with their equivalents across the colonial world a common sense that the future global order was being built around the conference table in Paris and they too sought to have their say. The Emir Khaled’s petition may have been somewhat anomalous in the wider scheme of post-war claims by indigenous actors, but it shows both an awareness of and a desire to take part in a new global community of nation states. It also speaks to the ambiguity at the heart of the nascent political movement among the colony’s indigenous population, torn between a desire to reclaim the sovereignty the French had usurped and a belief that Algeria’s future was bound to that of France and her Empire. A similar tension was evident in the European political elite’s attempt to assert their right to control Algeria’s future. The desire to cast off the control of an interfering metropole was tempered by the knowledge that European hegemony was utterly dependant on French coercive power. When European leaders envied the status of the Dominions, it was as much about lamenting the continued demographic dominance of the indigenous in the colony as it was about longing for a French version of the Commonwealth. Wilson’s own reticence in applying his theories to people of colour notwithstanding, the political leaders of Algeria’s European community recognized the limits of the rhetoric of self-determination in a minority settler colony. In both cases, Wilsonian rhetoric may have captured the ultimate aspirations of certain political actors but they did not believe it to be the best means of securing an immediate and advantageous restructuring of the post-war colonial order.

76 Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 6.

The quest for a new imperial citizenship far outweighed any drive for Wilsonian self-determination in post-war colonial Algeria. A restructuring of the imperial polity, whether to the benefit of the settler or the indigenous population, was seen as a more immediately achievable and, perhaps, a more desirable political goal in the wake of the war. To justify the accordance of new rights that acknowledged colonial specificity, both European and indigenous elites evoked the particularly French understanding of the link between citizenship and military service. This argument could find an audience among decision makers in the imperial capital without provoking repression on the part of the colonial authorities. Both groups also framed their demands in terms of the wider imperial polity, recognising Algeria's intermediary position between the metropole and the Empire. If the postwar Empire was to be successful, it would have to reconfigure its political institutions, whether by extending the limited existing forms of citizenship within the status or by granting economic and political autonomy to a settler-led Algeria. Regardless of the specifics of these rival visions of a just postwar order in Algeria, it is clear that the driving force behind political claims-making in the colony was the desire to wield more political power within the imperial polity, not the demand for some form of disentanglement from Empire. The goal was to become a new form of colonial citizen, not a citizen of some form of postcolonial state.

Much like those across the colonial world who hoped Wilsonian self-determination would deliver for them, the proponents of a new form of imperial citizenship in Algeria would ultimately be disappointed. The colonial state proved unwilling to further undermine the essential boundary between citizenship and subject and would eventually banish Emir Khaled from the colony. In exile, he would come to wholeheartedly advocate self-determination, long after the "Wilsonian Moment" had passed and, through his alliance with French Communists, would lay the foundation blocks for the next generation of revolutionary nationalists.<sup>77</sup> In the colony, however, indigenous elites continued to hope well into the 1930s that the metropolitan government would accord some form of imperial citizenship.<sup>78</sup> Within the political elite of the European community, arguments for autonomy persisted throughout the 1920s to no avail, and were quickly forgotten in the advent of the mass mobilization of the indigenous community 1930 onwards. The desire to maintain French sovereignty, and its perceived corollary, European hegemony, became the dominant force in politics among the European community, all the way up to independence in 1962.<sup>79</sup> Ironically, new forms of Wilsonian rhetoric around self-determination and the rights of minorities, along with Wilson-inspired institutions such as the United Nations, would play a key role in the eight year war that led to the end of

77 G. Meynier, L'Emir Khaled, « premier nationaliste algérien »? in: Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre, Peyroulou, Ounnassa Siari Tengour and Sylvie Thénault (eds.), *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale*, Paris, 2012, pp. 439-442.

78 See Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, 419-433.

79 See Hassett, *Proud Colons, Proud Frenchmen*, in: *Settler Colonial Studies* 17:1 (2017), pp. 1-19.

French colonial rule in Algeria.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, while one can convincingly argue that Algeria was at the very heart of the “moment of revolutionary decolonization” in the post-WWII era, this article has demonstrated that the resonance of the post-WWI “Wilsonian Moment” was extremely limited in the colony.

80 See M. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, Oxford, 2002.