Repeating Revolutions

The French Revolution and the Algerian War

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Introduction

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Introduction

Privately, publicly, intentionally, and thoughtlessly, the history of Algerian decolonization and the history of the French Revolution of 1789 came together in the mid-twentieth century through a series of historical analogies. Together these two histories formed what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as a "timeknot," an element of the past bound up with the present.[1] In and of itself, this was nothing new or strange. We frequently refer to experiences and memories of the past (whether those experiences and memories be immediate and personal, or foreign and mediated) to anchor our lives in the present and prospects for the future.[2] These connections are consequential. In twentieth-century France and Algeria, these everyday mediations facilitated novel formulations for political involvement and ways of conceptualizing French and Algerian pasts and futures.

The history of the French Revolution entered the scene at many different levels, sometimes working on more than one level at once. For many Algerian politicians, it was a potent strategic rhetorical tool, one that could be used to argue for the need for more equal and inclusive policies for non-settler Algerians or to highlight the fundamental contradictions between Republican principles and imperial practices. For others, the history of the Revolution served as a fundamental political myth that shaped the relationship between France and the rest of the world, Algeria included. Neither inherently true nor false, the French Revolution as analogy and myth suggested narrative arcs in which to situate policies and crises; it formed a large part of the French pre-conscious.[3] At other moments, the French Revolution provided a more self-conscious and reflective historical paradigm with which one could diagnose and think through postwar decolonization and Algerian nationalism.[4]

Of course, the French Revolution has never been, and it was certainly not one in the 1950s and 1960s, a neatly defined or self-stable object. In some ways, it acted as a floating signifier, taken for granted by many of its commentators, but always shifting, always contested, and hard to pin down. While many historians of the Revolution spoke and wrote with epistemic certainty about the contours of the Revolution; while anticolonial activists and commentators invoked it strategically, calculating what the effect of citing this

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specific history might have; while rightwing writers knew in their bones all the ills of decolonization, and indeed modernity, were the result of the French Revolution; while government officials knew it was politically safe to celebrate July 14 as the *fête nationale*, but risky to commemorate Robespierre; and while ultraconservatives knew it was the source of all worldly sin and misfortune, the content of these certainties never reduced to one another. At best, they referred to the Revolution's signifiers. In fact, the arguments over what the Revolution meant in the context of Algerian decolonization and what it meant to whom drive this study. In this regard, readers should not expect a study of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, but rather an investigation of changing discussions of those periods in the context of decolonization.

I have titled this study *Repeating Revolutions*, though, not without some initial trepidation. On the one hand, such a title would appear to tip the scales in favor of an all-encompassing universal 1789, giving in to the self-aggrandizement and navel gazing often attributed to French Republican rhetoric. This is not my aim. Instead, this study operates on Gilles Deleuze's insight that every repetition includes difference.[5] Each instance provided an opportunity to reinscribe the Revolution in new contexts. Even when an analogy between events in postwar Algeria or France might imply mimesis, the overt and covert differences are sites of productive meaning.

In this respect, throughout I deal not just with competing objectifications of revolution and the Revolution of 1789 but also with what Massimiliano Tomba frames as competing "chronotones." Thinking in terms of chronotones implies recognizing alternative historical legacies activated by the analogies to 1789 as well as paying attention to the frictions between those different temporalities.[6] The analogy to the Revolution could, at times, refer to the French nation-state's claim to a stable republican identity, thus denying any Algerian revolutionary claims that might disrupt it. The analogy could also, though, imply the Revolution's status as an open and ongoing project—something incomplete in the eighteenth century and still incomplete in the twentieth century. It could also mark a frontier to cross, as many Algerian nationalists looking to decolonize French cultural categories from an independent state attempted. Furthermore, it could represent elements of a modernity that needed to be undone, as many conservatives believed.

Framing the analogies in these ways opens possibilities for seeing the unfolding of Algerian decolonization in new ways, in part because it pushes back against the naturalizing processes of historical experience and the retroactive unities nationalist historiographies constructed.

Whether dealing with illocution—attempting to do something with the Revolution—the world of political myth, or critical historical reflection, the narrative dimensions of the Revolution, however unstable, also demand our scrutiny. In this period, there are three overarching tropes of the French Revolution. The first appears as the cunning of French Historical Reason. In this assessment of the French Revolution's connection to decolonization,

the French Revolution finds itself fulfilled by Algerian nationalist demands for independence. Despite repeated claims advocates of French Algeria made that the Revolution's promises of political, social, and cultural modernity could only be achieved in Algeria through benevolent French tutelage, the success of Algerian nationalist actions provided the proof that this promise could finally be realized. Put another way, rather than seeing Algerian nationalism as a failure of the French imperial project in Algeria, analogies to the French Revolution allowed events to be reframed as a success of the universal promise and scope of French civilization. This logic employed all the same paternalistic dynamics of Oedipal rebellion, another popular metaphor in French decolonization.[7] By describing the Algerian Revolution as a repetition of France's defining historical drama, the defeat and rejection of the French Empire could be framed as deeper affirmation of French universalism.

While some anticolonialist activists used the first rhetorical trope, just as common was to avoid any grand statements about the arc of French civilization while using the analogy to the French Revolution as a way of arguing for political change, from liberal reforms to revolutionary Third World solidarity. While there were plenty of other bases for claiming solidarity between metropolitan and Algerian anticolonial groups—Islamist, Marxist, and anarcho-syndicalist—the trope of the French Revolution representing revolutionary confraternity provided a banner under which multiple, often opposed, constituencies could rally.

The third trope was in large part the obverse of the first: for French conservatives and reactionaries steeped in the tradition of Joseph de Maistre, Louis Bonald, Maurice Barrès, and Charles Maurras, it made sense to see the decline of the French Empire in North Africa as yet another manifestation of the French declension narrative begun with Louis XVI's regicide. In this view, embodied clearly by exponents of "revolutionary war theory," the French Revolution never really ended. It continued through the upheavals of 1848, the Paris Commune, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and then all subsequent anticolonial movements. The true arc of French history was not universal progress but rather ever-slouching decline.

Approaches

The analyses in this book take inspiration from other recent attempts to rethink the limits of intellectual history.[8] Sarah Igo has named this approach "free-range intellectual history," and Peter Wirzbicki calls it "intellectual history in the open air." Whichever metaphor one might deploy, the aim of these works and *Repeating Revolutions* is to see ideas emerging within a historical context while also paying attention to the broader intellectual constellations at work in a given moment and the ways abstract concepts and ideas jump from their original contexts to new ones. This framing allows me to place historians' arguments over the French Revolution's political relevance in conversation with politicians, sociologists, rightwing terrorists, and anticolonial

activists. The result is not so much about productive catachresis or *découpage* as much as recreating the multiple registers of meaning produced by thinking about the history of one revolution in the time of another. It also allows me to highlight the instances where one person has a foot in more than one of those analytic categories at any one time. Many of the historians I examine were also activists. Many of the activists I examine acted with a sense of their place in the narratives of French and North African history, with a claim to that history's relevance for their actions.

Throughout, some of the interpretations of the French Revolution voiced in the 1950s and 1960s will seem quaint, odd, or plainly mistaken, especially to readers up to date on the current historiography of the Revolution. This is a function, not a defect of my approach. Historiography does (and should) change from one era to another—the historical object is almost always unstable at some level.[9] For the purposes of thinking through the ideas that motivated action and thought in the 1950s and 1960s, it is sometimes necessary to highlight these differing interpretations to process the assumptions that supported them and the broader effects they produced. However, it is uninteresting and unproductive to do so solely to judge them insufficient according to contemporary historiographical positions. What is productive, however, is to focus on the points of broad agreement and disagreement in the 1950s and 1960s and to trace the ramifications of the ways the history is framed and put to use. It should also go without saying that a corollary of this position is the possibility of being surprised by the contemporary use of looking at the Revolution from a different vantage point, to see bygone insights and critiques anew. Another way of putting this would be to nurture the sparks produced through the friction, rather than stamping those sparks out.

Beyond the content of the past's connection to the present, historians of all stripes engaged with the French-Algerian War.[10] The conservative historian of the Old Regime, Philippe Ariès, covered Algerian politics for the rightwing journal *La Nation française*; a young François Furet, a decade before his fame as historical provocateur from the liberal center, covered politics and history for the leftwing *France-Observateur*.[11] Other historians engaged with the war more directly. Pierre Vidal-Nacquet's exposés of torture and the government's responsibility for the murder and coverup of Maurice Audin were some of the most important public interventions to sway opinion against the government's colonial brutality.[12] Some, like André Mandouze, Marc Ferro, and Henri Marrou, participated in clandestine political resistance during the Nazi occupation and reprised political agitation during the Algerian War. Others, like Michelle Perrot, found themselves politicized by decolonial struggles in ways that informed different political struggles, like feminism.[13] Perhaps, most interesting were the ways in which historians engaged with the standards and practices of their own profession in addressing political action in Algeria.

The Algerian War and the proliferation of analogies between revolutionary France and revolutionary Algeria provide a way into how historians of

the French Revolution negotiated the proper role of historical distance and the relationship between the French Revolution and modern France. In the process, they inspired later generations of thinkers to see the anti-imperial potential of the French Revolution's processes. By interpreting struggles for Algerian decolonization through the Revolution and projecting the Revolution into the future, it became possible to recognize the importance of anti-imperial struggles to the Revolution's own moment.

Despite the weight of the metropolitan-produced historiography of the Revolution in the postwar period, dominated by figures like Georges Lefebvre and Albert Soboul, the French Revolution's most creative and productive political framings came from outside this intellectual power base, not from within. Decades before the Algerian War began, anticolonial activists from North Africa and beyond had stressed the political imperatives of 1789 and what they saw as its distance from the concrete realities of empire. These figures, writers like Ferhat Abbas, Léopold Sedar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, were some of the first to push the conversation about the Revolution and its ties to empire well ahead of contemporary historiographical trends. More broadly, they were parts of much broader international and transnational conversations about the way out of imperial relationships.[14] By the end of the Algerian War, those writers and activists who had been attracted to these same French revolutionary lessons were ready to trouble any sense that the French Revolution provided a clear-cut paradigm for revolutionary change or universal political progress.

Analogies, Scripts, Paradigms, and Myths

Applying the French Revolution of 1789 to subsequent historical events was by no means a novel phenomenon in the early twentieth century. Though the revolutionary trajectory from Rousseau to Robespierre to Lenin described by Jacob Talmon draws skepticism from modern historians, the desire to see the French Revolution as a political "heuristic," "paradigm," or "model" in twentieth-century France was largely the rule, not the exception.[15] It rather fits into the process Michel Vovelle called "the game of analogies" and Sophie Wahnich described as an ever-recurring "concatenation of presents" that "200 years after the fact, these [Revolutionary] questions put men from the present into a condition of having to take part in the historical condition of 1793."[16] The concatenation Wahnich describes shows that the Revolution itself could exist as a metaphor for other historical times and places, the Revolution literally standing in the place of subsequent revolutions. This description gets to the heart of what made referencing the French Revolution so powerful for modern francophone audiences. The metaphor's durability partially resides in its experienced matter-of-fact purchase of the truth. While claiming the French Revolution was foundational to the modern world, the process of applying the French Revolution to other times and places required applying the *logic* of the French Revolution to other historical moments. This

naturalized impulse to analogy continues even to this day as commentary and analysis of the 2011 uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa attest.[17] What animate this project are not purely retrospective observations of revolutionary homologies between 1789 and 1954. Rather, the phenomena that concern me are the prospective connections that display an expectation of comparability in the moment.

Dan Edelstein and Keith Michael Baker have in a different vein approached the French Revolution as a "script." By looking to the ways historical subjects have related to the revolutionary model created in France, they see a new way of comparing political moments across time and space. In their view:

> Once known and enacted, the script can be replayed indefinitely; but it can also be changed, adapted, or even subverted by the introduction of new events, characters, or actions. The actors—or even the audience—can take over the stage.

This comparative approach is productive, particularly in teasing out the contours of how a particular historical moment might be articulated. We should nonetheless be vigilant against naturalizing the *what* and *how* of translating revolutionary scripts from one historical moment to another, even if the historical subjects are themselves doing the translating. The more pertinent historical question is why and how such a script would or could be staged in the first place.[18]

We gain access to the ways the Revolution provided a conceptual horizon for the meanings of political possibility during the Algerian War when we recognize the multiple uses to which the revolutionary analogy might be put. It mattered whether someone did or did not think there was a fundamental similarity between the French Revolution and Algerian nationalist aspirations. It also mattered *why* they might think so or refuse the analogy. Framed differently, some connections appeared natural or at least naturalizable. Some did not.

If we widen our perspective momentarily, we can also note the logics of analogy and solidarity animating emancipatory struggles in many places throughout the twentieth century. History animated Third World solidarity movements around the globe, providing material to illustrate what prospective gains might look like as well as what past losses may yet be vindicated. Writing at the very moment the Algerian War ended, British historian and activist E. P. Thompson introduced his study of working-class English history with the hopeful statement, "Causes which were lost in England might, in Asia or Africa, yet be won."[19] Were we to see this process as merely one of reducing non-Western historical difference to an imperial universalism in all cases, then critiques such as Frank B. Wilderson III's Afropessimist stance would surely be warranted. Irreducible lived experiences would merely be props for dominant aims and desires.[20] Such a critique would fail to do justice to the processes at work in this context. The French revolutionary analogy

was not *only* a way for white metropolitan actors to justify and communicate their solidarity with the colonized. It was also a way for Algerian nationalists to communicate the future world they wished to construct. It was furthermore a common point of reference capable of bringing both groups together.[21] In some moments, for some actors, this analogy worked to converge revolutionary horizons. In other moments, it no longer held sway. Treating the analogy diagnostically and differentially will, I hope, reveal more than it obscures.

Another way to frame the work of the revolutionary analogy is to approach it through the lens of political myth. Coincidentally, this is exactly what contemporaries Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes did in the 1950s and 1960s. For Barthes', myths operate on the level of depoliticized speech. While the French Revolution as myth did communicate ideas across the political spectrum in the 1950s and 1960s, it would be going too far to suggest those ideas were depoliticized, since very specific politics inhered to the myth itself. As Lévi-Strauss observed:

> [T]o the French politician, as well as to his followers, the French Revolution is both a sequence belonging to the past—as to the historian—and a timeless pattern which can be detected in the contemporary French social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation, a lead from which to infer future developments.[22]

I take Lévi-Strauss' claim as a starting point, but I argue that it goes much further than the realm of direct politics. The myth provided resources for reinterpreting North African history and socio-economic development.

Paying to the ways the Revolution functioned as political myth in the postwar opens opportunities for thinking through expectations for what Algerian decolonization might mean. Mikhail Bakhtin noted in his essay "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel" that, while modern novels generally projected events into an open-ended future, the structure of myths tended to invert this temporality, pointing backward, rather than forward.[23] While I do not aim to suggest the people I examine in this study believed they literally traveled *back in time*, I do suggest that their *literal* representations of events pointed toward the past as much as to the future. The function of historical analogies as an indexical marker linking two points in time informs people's understandings of both.

Time, Temporality, and Figuration

The work of historical and literary theorists provides useful guidance for how to tease out these processes of naturalization and comparison. One of Erich Auerbach's more enduring interventions is his analysis of the concept *figura*, which emerged in classical antiquity but took its decisive form in the writings of the early Christian church's commentators. In brief, *figura* first emerged as one way of translating the Greek *typos*, or type in Late Antiquity;

it also closely aligned with the Aristotelian concept of *schema*, which in the *Rhetoric* appears as something close to a framework for making forensic analogies.[24] The particular types to which early Church commentators often devoted their energy were, of course, scriptural personae. *Figura* in these writings represented the correlation between types of scriptural persons appearing in both the Old and New Testaments. For Auerbach, the clearest examples of this correlation were of the various figures in the Old Testament (Moses, Joshua, and David) whose promises the New Testament figure of Jesus fulfilled.

Three qualities in particular distinguish the *figura* from other symbolic forms: its non-allegorical character, its reliance on teleological thinking, and its function as a stopgap against interpretive uncertainty. These specific qualities are precisely what will make the concept useful for analyzing historical analogies in the French-Algerian War. First and foremost, Auerbach argued that *figura* is a non-allegorical form of interpretation since it refers to two events or persons that really took place in the stream of history independent of each other, rather than one half of the comparison merely representing the other. Whereas in allegory one term services the representation of another, *figura* is "literally and really true. Even in those places where figural prophecy does occur, both the figure itself and what it prophesies are historically real in equal measure."[25] In the 1950s, for example, it was not simply that Napoleon seemed like de Gaulle, or de Gaulle Napoleon, but that both were in their own right figures fixed in the same French revolutionary eschatology the way Joshua and Jesus were fixed in the eschatology of Christian salvation. As a result, the quality of *figura* as fulfillment of an eschatological sequence is also important. According to Auerbach:

> The first event points to the second, the second fulfills the first. To be sure, both remain concrete events that have taken place within history. Yet, when seen from this perspective, both also have something provisional and incomplete about them. They point to one another, and both point to something in the future that still is to come. This will be the actual, complete, real, and final event.[26]

That the social sciences in the 1950s characterized Algeria as a fundamentally feudal and agrarian society in part suggests why commentators could see Algerian revolutionaries as the representatives of a new third estate. That legal privilege, economic inequality, and lack of democratic representation in the French Union characterized Algerian discontent only strengthened the degree to which Algeria appeared to be repeating patterns set by the French Revolution. Social scientists looking to find new ways of studying *ancien régime* France could look across the Mediterranean to test their historical hypotheses in real time.

In Auerbach's analysis, the *figura* was a particularly sacred phenomenon; it is not clear to what extent he believed figural thinking could survive

in a secularizing world. Zachary Schiffman has claimed figural thinking began to disappear with Renaissance ideas of anachronism.[27] If we stay with French history, the French Revolution's project of a radical departure from the past might suggest a form of temporality different from that of Christian eschatology. However, in an essay originally intended to be part of his study *Work on Myth*, but never published in his lifetime, Hans Blumenberg provided examples where political decisions took on a decidedly figural form. For example, Egyptian and Syrian forces timed events during the Yom Kippur War to mirror the Battle of Badr in 623 CE. Napoleon Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign suggested a self-styling after Alexander the Great. Adolf Hitler and his supporters viewed the reign of the *führer* as figural fulfillment of the thirteenth-century crusader emperor Frederick II.[28] In all these instances, circumstantial elements of the situation lent a superficial plausibility to the analogies made. In the end, Blumenberg suggested the analogies nonetheless were a misreading of reality. This misreading, though, provided "a sort of natural physiognomy" to decisions in tense circumstances.[29]

In line with Blumenberg's studies, the historical analogies at play in *Repeating Revolutions* emerged precisely in naturalized and genealogical terms.[30] This is not to say that pre-ordained narrative forms unfolded automatically in time in the ways that some integralist Catholic opponents of decolonization claimed. (Such a stance would give too much to the truth claims inherent in an eschatological *figura* itself.) Context and existing discourses do suggest why certain figural claims would seem to make more sense than others at any given period. To put it slightly differently, even a post- revolutionary, secularized, or secularizing France is still a world pregnant with meaning and signification. It should be of no surprise that the French Revolution is a mythological wellspring for much of this signifying.

Over the course of this history, though, those significances did not remain stable. Their invocation gave rise for new perspectives on the Revolution's meaning and history. As Jordan Watkins has observed within the context of the early U.S. republic, the historical distance of such analogies shrinks as actors argue for their contemporary relevance. In the process, those historical analogs then undergo a form of rehistoricization.[31]

The analogy to the French Revolution made sense precisely because Francophone discourses stressed its evergreen relevance. The contents of the general public's understanding of the Revolution—political modernity, greater formal equality, guaranteed political rights, and popular representation—registered in an imperial framework that denied those very ends' realizations. Over the long term of this history, from roughly the 1930s to the 1960s, the conversations connecting the Revolution of 1789 to Algerian decolonization helped sustain new efforts to rethink the imperial and anti-imperial histories of the Revolution itself. If we are to understand the limits of the Revolution's universal progress and contemporary debates about the Revolution's imperial and colonial contexts, we first would do well to attend to earlier

moments when people posed these questions and opened conceptual spaces for our current discourses.

A skeptical reader might wonder why invocations of the French Revolution among those brought up in the French educational system is any more remarkable than speaking the French language itself. Fair enough. As with language, the point of paying attention to the French Revolution is its supposed natural and self-evident character. Even if the use of historical paradigms and analogies in political debate might be taken for granted, there is more to the history of France and North Africa than their connections to the French Revolution. Along with attending to the *why* of the historical connections people made in the 1950s and 1960s, the *effects* of these naturalized contingencies also matter. Speaking in terms of the French Revolution offered one source of stability as both French and Algerian national identities transformed. Though not totalizing or all encompassing, these analogies offer a different vantage from which to view the broader history of this moment.

Attending to the revolutionary analogy helps understand more fully how historical arguments helped in the "invention of decolonization" as concrete process in Algeria. In Todd Shepard's analysis, public opinion and government bureaucracies moved from seeing Algeria as an integral part of the French nation in part through arguments about the "tide of history."[32] Arguments about historical inevitability acted here as they often do elsewhere: conferring a common-sense quality to inherently contingent and contested events. One consequence of this historiographical unfolding, though, is that political decolonization lacked what Algerian writer Mohamed Chérif Sahli demanded after Algerian independence: a fully decolonized history. The French Empire invoked history in the nineteenth century to deny Algerians' history and bolster France's imperial project. For Algeria to fully decolonize, those suppressed counter-histories needed to be reclaimed, resurrected, and revalorized.[33]

As powerful and relevant Sahli's demands were for his own time—and indeed still are in contemporary society's calls for decolonizing histories—it is also necessary to bracket his demands as corollaries to just one possible outcome among many. Before Algerian decolonization took the concrete form it did, it was still possible to imagine an Algerian future that drew from and claimed a universalist emancipatory politics connected to 1789. Rather than seeing figures with those visions (among whom were Frantz Fanon, Jean Amrouche, Ferhat Abbas, and Kateb Yacine) as not-yet decolonized or not-decolonized-enough, we should see them as bearers of alternative decolonial visions aiming for a politics and history of "relation" that need not simply boil down to imperial hierarchies or a naïve embrace of patronizing tutelage.[34] By dwelling on these chronotones, the point isn't to negate the history of Algerian nationalism that developed and dominated from the interwar through to independence. It does, however, suggest ways for thinking about the political alternatives that lost out in this process and examining the contradictions and tensions that remained.[35]

This Book's Organization

To highlight the interconnected nature of the French revolutionary analogy as well as the broader changes it wrought, *Repeating Revolutions* is organized chronologically around key turning points in the analogy's use with thematic chapters highlighting debates within the historical profession and social sciences.

By the end of World War II, France and its empire were in a profound state of existential crisis. The occupying Nazi military and collaborationist Vichy regime presented themselves as the antithesis of the French Revolution and its heritage. It is therefore not at all surprising that during and after the war, writers placed renewed emphasis not only on the history of the Revolution but also on its contemporary relevance. This chapter surveys the symbolic status of the French Revolution from the 1930s through c. 1960, focusing on Algerian nationalists' use of the Revolution to argue for political independence, the Revolution's status as rallying cry against fascism, the renewed focus on the Revolution's political lessons in the Cold War, and its place in political theory. I rely here on political tracts, early-twentieth-century histories of the French Revolution, editorials, and commemorative essays published in newspapers as well as specialist history journals, historical conference proceedings, teaching manuals, and archival materials from historians and philosophers. The story that emerges tells of broad agreement in French society that the French Revolution held importance for the postwar future of France. The disagreement lay in exactly how far one could go mixing the past with the present before disfiguring both. Professional historians, in particular, worried that excessive politicization of the Revolution risked devaluing their own historical research. Even worse, many feared that far-left commentators risked contaminating the aims of the French Revolution with the oppressive policies of the Soviet Union.

Of particular relevance is a profound disjuncture between Algerian nationalist claims and those that will follow from their metropolitan interlocutors over the course of the war. As earlier champions of the analogy to 1789, as the nationalist movement shifted to open rebellion, they largely abandoned their reliance on this framing of their struggle. As this happened, the analogy gained increased purchase in metropolitan spaces.

Chapter 2 looks at the way public discussion and protest used the French Revolution to mediate the tensions caused by the beginning of the war in Algeria. The Revolution, in particular, signified the gold standard of French Republican ideals against which one should judge the French government's actions in North Africa. At the onset of the war, commentators focused on what true reform efforts should achieve, the extent to which Algerian nationalist demands were legitimate, and the inconsistency of harsh government repression with the core principles set out in revolutionary documents like The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Critics frequently compared the French military's use of torture to both Nazi atrocities during

the war and the renunciation of illegitimate political power in the Revolution. Linking the French Revolution to Algeria in the early years of the war was for many not about calling for an absolute end to empire or national emancipation. Rather, it was about France's broader postwar identity crisis and the legacies of occupation and collaboration.

In the next chapter, I analyze 1958 as a turning point not just in the Algerian War and French politics but also in how references to the French Revolution operated. Robespierre's bicentennial in May 1958 and the debates it provoked marked a high point in discussions of the Revolution's radical possibilities for thinking about metropolitan French renewal. These discussions played out in the press, radio and television programming, public commemorations, and legislative debates over the appropriateness of celebrating the nation's most famous terrorist while fighting so-called terrorists in North Africa. The constitutional crisis and downfall of the Fourth Republic began on May 13, 1958, just a week after Robespierre's anniversary. For many on the left, this moment represented both the extreme danger of a new fascist counter-revolution and the possibility for revolutionary renewal. By the summer of 1958, though, with Charles de Gaulle's return to political life and promises to form a new government, the main revolutionary analogy was to compare de Gaulle to Napoleon Bonaparte. Coding de Gaulle's return in Bonapartist terms through editorials, cartoon caricatures, and even de Gaulle's own self-presentation marked a shift in the historical framing of the war. The revolutionary cycle had come full circle in the metropole, from the Declaration of the Rights of Man to Robespierre to Napoleon. This closure, I argue, allowed more people to see the force of revolution not in the metropole but in Algeria, providing momentum to emerging third worldist ideology.

The third worldist ideology that crystallized after 1958 began to frame Algerians as true revolutionary subjects capable of carrying on France's revolutionary legacy and possibly even ushering in a new renewal of the revolutionary spirit back in metropolitan France. Here, I track this change in how the revolutionary analogy operated, highlighting the shift in statements from tutelage to solidarity and revolutionary confraternity. In particular, this chapter focuses on the 1960 trial of North African and metropolitan activists caught, providing direct support to the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). Many of the defendants in the trial consciously framed their support for Algerian independence as fidelity to the history of the Revolution of 1789, go so far as to claim that "To be French today is to be Algerian," since they were carrying on the same goals and ideals of the Revolution. Rather than approaching the political category "the Third World" as either simply "discovered" or recognized, I show the centrality of understandings of the French Revolution to the early conceptual framing of third worldism in France.

By the time many leftwing metropolitan and French-Algerian activists took to framing the Algerian nationalist struggle as analogous to the French revolutionary tradition, influential Algerian nationalists questioned the limits

of such comparisons, afraid they only reinforced assumed French cultural and historical hegemony while failing to appreciate the Algerian project on its own social, political, and historical terms. Though the early Algerian nationalist discourse that invoked 1789 anticipated the third worldist turn that would come later, in the moment these arguments claiming the heritage of the Revolution proved untimely. They also fed into notions of French civilizational superiority, lending weight to the civilizing mission's assumptions that all historical development needed to be measured against French history. As a way of examining these tensions, Chapter 5 turns to the evolution of Frantz Fanon and Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche's statements on the French Revolution. Until the middle of the Algerian War—the very point when Third World ideology took off—they identified with the universalist promise of the French Revolution. However, by the end of their lives—both cut short of the end of the war—they were critical of automatically identifying with imperial France's historical narratives, whatever promises of liberation they came with.

Reformist and revolutionary groups did not hold a monopoly on analogies to the French Revolution. On the other end of the political spectrum, military theorists, partisans of empire, and ultra-conservative Catholics were just as ready to describe an end of French rule in North Africa as part of the legacy of the French Revolution. Counter-revolutionary War theory comprised a major theoretical component to the French military's counter-insurgency tactics in Algeria. It was also central to many rightwing terrorist groups that attempted to keep Algerian French at all costs. The French military's theory of counter-revolutionary war implicitly accepted the identification of the French Revolution with Algerian nationalists, but saw this as fundamentally a problem confronting western military powers since the revolutionary wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This idea of political instability drew from the much older language of counter-revolution that emerged from conservative reactionaries beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Over time, all revolutions, from 1789 to 1848, 1871, 1917, etc., fit into a broader pattern of decadence and decline. While some recent scholarship has focused on the social dynamics of counter-insurgency theory and practice, as well as the Cold War logics whereby any destabilization of western powers was assumed to be the work of China or the Soviet Union, this chapter contextualizes this imaginary in this deeper history of counter-revolutionary thinking. It furthermore shows that the far left and far right largely agreed on the relevance of the revolutionary analogy. Though diametrically opposed, both extremes spoke the same language.

The first six chapters examine the ways the analogy to 1789 operated before and during the Algerian War, charting its various invocations and meanings. Chapters 7 and 8 consider broader questions about how and why those logics could work in the first place. In order for French commentators and intellectuals to be able to conceptualize Algeria in terms analogous to France, orientalist assumptions that Algerian society was stagnant,

unchanging, and non-modern needed to be undermined. In this respect, historian Charles-Andre Julien was a foundational figure in the French understanding of North Africa. His 1931 study was one of the first to approach the history of North Africa in the same way French historians studied non-colonized histories and spaces. Pushing back against orientalist dogma, he began from the assumption that North Africa *had* a history worth studying. He then proceeded to undermine many of the key historical assumptions supporting French justifications for control over North Africa. From the 1930s through the 1960s, his work provided a framework within which people could see the history of North Africa in terms analogous to the history of France. Beyond this, he trained and supported a generation of historians who came of age in the era of postwar decolonization, and he was widely read by Algerian nationalists and their supporters. The importance of Julien's work is not the frequency with which he compared pre-revolutionary Algeria to pre-revolutionary France, though he did do this, but rather his broader project of writing about Algerian history in ways that made others see the analogy as plausible.

Just as historical description mattered for seeing Algeria as analogous to revolutionary France, so too did social-scientific understandings. There is a growing literature on the role social scientists—demographers, sociologists, ethnologists, geographers, and anthropologists—played in the maintenance and unraveling of the French Empire. Here I focus on the work of Jacques Berque and Alfred Sauvy, two foundational postwar French social scientists who were also active public commentators during the Algerian War. They, too, drew connections between Algeria under French rule and revolutionary France. Sauvy, after all, was responsible for coining the popular understanding of the term "Third World" in 1952. It had long been a convention among social scientists to describe North Africa as a "feudal" space. For orientalist scholars, this was precisely one reason justifying French rule and management of Algeria. Berque's and Sauvy's work mattered by arguing that, yes, Algeria could be described as feudal, but it was in such a position because of despotic French rule. It was not the case, in their analyses, that Algeria was feudal and therefore historically and politically stagnant. It was feudal in the sense of being full of revolutionary tension and potential.

I conclude *Repeating Revolutions* by first returning to some of the problems figures like Fanon and Amrouche posed, arguing that the analogies to the French Revolution ultimately made it easier for future historians to think through the connections between the French Revolution and empire. The first successful slave rebellion in history and the most radically anti-imperial of the Atlantic Revolutions was an obvious analog to Algeria's struggle, in many ways more apt than the European-focused history to which people referred. Yet for historians in the academy, it was a silent referent throughout much of the twentieth century. Here, I suggest the experience of Algeria made the history of Saint-Domingue legible to the generation of French historians who came of age during the Algerian War.

While the history I analyze is in many ways rooted in twentieth-century French thought and the processes of twentieth-century decolonization, I also intend it to provide a model for thinking through the ways historical analogies operate. It is my hope that even those readers not strictly interested in Algerian decolonization, the French Revolution's historiography, or even twentieth-century French thought might still find analogous lessons by taking from the analyses in this study and applying them to their own fields of inquiry.

Notes

1 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 111–13, 243.

2 I take these categories from Reinhart Koselleck's metahistorical approach to conceptual history, which breaks down humans' understanding into horizons of experience and expectation, horizons that are nonetheless open to surprise and transformation. Reinhart Koselleck, "Time and History," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner and Others, Foreword by Hayden White (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 100–15.

3 Throughout, I follow Hans Blumenberg's framing of myths and metaphors as necessary component of human existence and ones that function to relieve existential anxieties and uncertainties. I also see myth and analogy as two ideal forms in a spectrum of comparative meanings. Hans Blumenberg, introduction to *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (1960; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

4 German idealists from Kant to Droysen have treated analogies as fundamental components of human reasoning. The importance of analogical thought has also been highlighted in the work of twentieth-century historians Marc Bloch and Luciano Canfora. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 225–27; Johan Gustav Droysen, "The Modes of Interpretation," in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 2006), 126–31; Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Knopf, 1953), 36, 52–54; Luciano Canfora, *Analogia e storia: L'uso politico dei paradigmi storici* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1982), esp. chapter 1, 11–36, "L'analogia come forma della comprensione storica."

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

6 Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10.

7 Here, there are also some deep parallels with early psychoanalytic studies of colonial rebellion, of which Octave Mannoni's 1950 study *Psychologie de la colonisation* is most emblematic. This deep-seated paternalism is also why Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire criticized Mannoni's framework. Octave Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris: Seuil, 1950); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markman (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 46n–47n, 83–108; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (1950; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 59–62. Lest readers assume I'm referring to some inherent kinship between France and its imperial subjects, my aim is more to think through 1789 as the moment of the primal horde to highlight metropolitan anxieties.

8 Peter Wirzbicki, *Fighting for the Higher Law: Black and White Transcendentalists Against Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Sara Igo, “Toward a Free-Range Intellectual History,” in *The Worlds of American Intellectual History*, eds. Joel Isaac, James T. Kloppenberg, Michael O’Brien, and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 324–42; Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

9 As Ethan Kleinberg has recently argued:

> In relation to the project of history, the point is not to force the historian into a position of total relativism, [Hayden] White’s ‘ghostly ballet,’ but to bring to light the conditions surrounding the construction of a historical narrative both in terms of content and form.

Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 18.

10 For a discussion of some of these broader connections, see Timothy Scott Johnson, “French Historical Writing in the Wake of Decolonization,” in *The Routledge Handbook of French History*, ed. David Andress (New York: Routledge, 2023), 628–37.

11 Patrick Hutton, *Philippe Ariès and the politics of French Cultural History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 67–69; Michael Scott Christofferson, “François Furet between History and Journalism, 1958–1965,” *French History* 15, no. 4 (2001): 421–47.

12 Pierre Vidal-Nacquet, *L’Affaire Audin* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1958); Pierre Vidal-Nacquet, *La raison d’état. Textes publiés par le Comité Audin* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962).

13 Marc Ferro, *Mes histoires parallèles. Entretiens avec Isabelle Veyrat-Masson* (Paris: Carnets Nord, 2011), 32–110; Pierre Riché, *Henri Irénée Marrou: Historien engagé*, preface by René Rémond (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003); Michelle Perrot and Chantal Maruani, “Michelle Perrot’s History. Interview with Margaret Maruani and Chantal Rogerat,” *Travail, genre et sociétés* 2, no. 8 (2002): 5–20. Michael Rothberg and Emma Kuby have also shown how the experiences of World War II and the Holocaust offered powerful frames for thinking and acting during decolonization. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Emma Kuby, *Political Survivors: The Resistance, the Cold War, and the Fight Against Concentration Camps after 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

14 Priya Satia, *Time’s Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Quynh N. Pham and Robbie Shilliam, eds., *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Christopher Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

15 Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker, 1952); Michel Vovelle, “1789–1917,” in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture. Vol. 4, The Terror*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon, 1994), 349–78. For a more enduring example, see Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

16 Vovelle, "1789–1917," 349–78; Sophie Wahnich, *Liberté ou mort: essai sur la Terreur et le terrorisme* (Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2003), 13–14.
17 Edwy Plenel and Benjamin Stora *Le « 89 » arabe. Réfléxions sur les révolutions en cours* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2011), esp. 22–27. The reference in Plenel's and Stora's title is of course to 1789.
18 Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3.
19 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963), 13. On the connections between Thompson's approach to history and his critical relationship to empire, Satia, *Time's Monster*, 251–62. For a discussion of other British-imperial critiques at the same moment, see Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019), 248–55.
20 Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2021).
21 On the difference between analogy as substitution versus analogy as a vehicle for "worldmaking," see Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, esp. 1–5; Robin D. G. Kelley, "From the River to the Sea to Every Mountain Top: Solidarity as Worldmaking," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XLVIII, no. 4 (Summer 2019): 69–91.
22 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 252–52; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structuralist Study of Myths," in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 206–31, 209.
23 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Carryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258, esp. 146–50.
24 Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Time, History, and Literature*, trans. Jane O. Newman (1938; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 65–113. On the Aristotelian *schema*, Carlo Ginzburg, "Aristotle and History, Once More," *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 38–53.
25 Auerbach, "Figura," 80.
26 Auerbach, "Figura," 100.
27 Zachary Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 10.
28 Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration. Arbeit am politischen Mythos,* eds. Angus Nicholls and Peter Heidenriech (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).
29 Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration. Arbeit am politischen Mythos,* eds. Angus Nicholls and Peter Heidenriech (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 15. And here Blumenberg and Barthes agree about the capacity of mythical figuration to lend reality a self-evident character.
30 In David Carr's terms, "the events addressed by historiography are already narrative in character; and this indeed means that they display not only the character of events narrated, but also the element of narration itself." David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 46.
31 Paradoxically, the potential for recognizing historical distance is greatest when pasts that are assumed to have cultural and ideological affinities with the present receive sustained attention. . . . As individuals and groups appeal to a familiar era' s figures, texts, and ideas to address present social, cultural, and political issues, that era becomes a prime candidate for historicization.

Jordan Watkins, *Slavery and Sacred Texts: The Bible, the Constitution, and Historical Consciousness in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.

32 Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
33 Mohamed Chérif Sahli, *Decoloniser l'histoire* (Paris: Maspero, 1963).
34 I am here relying on the poetry and criticism of Antillean writer Édouard Glissant. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).
35 Indeed, central to Omar Carlier's analyses of the long-term development of Algerian nationalist politics is the insight that mercurial positions always seemed tethered to assumptions tied to the French nationalist lexicon, like the interplay between *el-chaab* (the people/le peuple as driving force) and *al-watan* (the nation/"patrie" as their representation). Of these terms, Carlier notes, interwar Algerian nationalists

> did not fabricate them, they appropriated them, transferring them from the lexicon of 1789, and among the bilingual intellectuals like Mufdi Zakariya, into the form best represented by the work of Mustapha Kamil, the writer inspired by the Egyptian *watani* party.

Omar Carlier, *Entre Nation et jihad: histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1995), 228.