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Performing the nation in anti-colonial protest in interwar Morocco

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ABSTRACT. This article applies a process approach to the study of nationalism, analysing anti-colonial protest in interwar Morocco to address how and why elite-constructed national identity resonates for larger audiences. Using Alexander's social performance model to study nationalist contention, it examines how a Muslim prayer ritual was re-purposed by Moroccan nationalists to galvanise mass protest against a French divide-and-rule colonial policy towards Moroccan Berbers that they believed threatened Morocco's ethno-religious national unity. By looking at how national identity was forged in the context of contentious performances and why certain religious (Islam) and ethnic (Arab) components were drawn on to define the Moroccan nation, this study offers a model for answering why national identity gets defined in specific ways and how the nation gains salience for broader publics as a category of collective identity.

KEYWORDS: contentious social performance, Morocco, anti-colonial nationalism, Islamic repertoire, colonial state, social movements

Oh Allah, the Benevolent, we ask of You benevolence in whatever fate brings, and do not separate us from our brothers, the Berbers.

Modified *Latif* prayer

Introduction

The two theoretical axes for much of the study of nationalism have addressed the 'what' (Renan 1990 [1882]) and the 'when' (Connor 1990) of the nation. The classic ethnic vs. civic taxonomic debate revolves around the former while the modernist-constructivist vs. ethno-symbolist division centres on the latter. Battles over these questions at the theoretical core of the field have been waged, for the most part, over cases from early modern, Enlightenment and industrial Europe. This article shifts the focus 1) by focusing on two different interrogatives, pursuing a process-oriented approach (Brubaker 2004; Zimmer 2003; Wimmer 2008) to probe the 'how' and the 'why' of nationalism, and 2) by looking at a non-Western case, anti-colonial nationalism in Morocco during the interwar period. Rather than focusing on Moroccan nationalism's *longue durée* historical origins or whether it fits into an ethnic or civic category, this article asks how and why the nation became a primary level of collective identity at a specific juncture in Morocco's history, the protectorate period of

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colonial rule (1912–56), and how and why certain cultural elements and not others were emphasised at this point in the process of defining Moroccan national identity.

The answers can be found in a close analysis of the Berber Crisis in the early 1930s, a period of early anti-colonial protest that birthed the Moroccan nationalist movement. This cycle of contention constituted a watershed moment in which Moroccan conceptions of collective identity began to shift towards a distinctly 'national' level of religio-political community. By re-purposing a traditional prayer, the *Latif*, to mobilise urban protests against a French-promulgated decree systematising a juridically based ethnic division between Arabs and Berbers, young Moroccan Arab nationalists began to hone and diffuse a definition of national identity. According to the nationalists, the 16 May 'Berber Decree', which kept certain Berber-speaking rural regions under customary law and not Islamic law, constituted an integral threat against a Moroccan imagined national community which Islam and Arabisation had unified for over a millennium. Between June and August 1930, these activists used the *Latif* prayer to communicate this impending threat against Moroccan ethno-religious national unity and mobilise thousands in anti-colonial demonstrations.

In exploring how the staging of urban protests in interwar Morocco forged a nascent sense of national collective identity, this article takes aim at a puzzle that elite-oriented constructivist theories of nationalism leave unaddressed: Why do specific invented or imagined discourses of the nation strike a chord with a mass audience, and how do particular elite-defined conceptions of an imagined national community come to be shared by a larger group of people? The Moroccan nationalists' reinvention and re-purposing of the *Latif* prayer was undoubtedly strategic and innovative, but these choices were also profoundly embedded in and oriented by deep cultural structures. This interplay between actors' agency and the constraints of culture, expressed to greater and lesser degrees in all nationalisms, remains one of the most difficult dimensions of nationalism to unravel.

To analyse the actor–audience dynamics of mass protest and the potentialities and constraints involved in constructing national identity, I draw on Alexander's (2004) cultural pragmatics approach to examine the *Latif* protests as a 'social performance' that fused ritual, pre-existing religious and linguistic ties, and a specific anti-colonial political agenda. The first two sections discuss how a sociological approach sensitive to the cultural dynamics of contentious performances fills a significant gap in the nationalism literature by helping pry open the black box of why identity resonates. Turning to the Moroccan case, I first describe the historical context of European intervention and the formation of nascent Arab nationalist elite in the 1920s. Then, I examine the 1930 protests using Alexander's toolkit, analysing the representational, spatial and material dimensions involved; the social powers that various actors wielded; and the reception and response of audiences that this attempt to mobilise the nation targeted.

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Ibn Khaldun's question for Ernest Gellner

In his 1983 *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner helps lay out the modernist paradigm for the study of nationalism by providing a structuralist model emphasising the post-industrialisation economic imperative for nationalism. He argues nationalism is the necessary outcome of a transition from agro-literate to industrial culture that requires context-free communication within a given political unit. In an earlier piece comparing Durkheim's and Ibn Khaldun's theories of social solidarity, Gellner (1981) asserts that people in modern society have all been castrated, a 'mamlukisation' in which a homogenised socialisation in a 'high culture' has superseded kinship, or mechanical solidarity. In addition to the economic advantages of this cultural and linguistic homogenisation, Gellner hints that nationalism also provides a modern substitute for Ibn Khaldun's magic ingredient for state formation and maintenance: *'asabiyyah*, an Arabic term meaning tribal solidarity or group feeling that he posited was the critical factor behind the rise and fall of dynastic states.

The question Gellner ignores, though, is how nationalism ever generates a strong enough sense of *'asabiyyah* in modern societies. In Gellner's model, the historical and cultural components selected for the content for national identity are purely arbitrary, 'any old shred or patch would have served as well' (1983: 45). He leaves unaddressed why a certain high culture generates strong enough feelings of group solidarity to make a difference, or why certain 'shreds and patches' of history successfully serve in the construction of the nation while others are irrelevant. Whether in agreement or not with Gellner's economic determinism, most other macro- and meso-level modernist-constructivist theories of nationalism also stress the fabricated nature of the communal solidarity that nationalism proposes but do not explain how it works. Why do certain invented or reinvented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) resonate while others do not? For mass print reading publics, why do specific communities get imagined the way they do (Anderson 1991)? Or, in the Moroccan case, why do largely *illiterate* populations imagine collective identity the ways they do?

More post-modern cultural approaches to nationalism also lack a compelling explanation for the specificity of nationalism and its tangible appeal beyond elites to non-elite audiences. Anthony Smith (1998: 138) complains that 'an excessive emphasis on the idea of the nation as a narrative of the imagination, a text to be read and grasped and deconstructed through literary categories and devices' has the result that 'causal explanations of the character and spread of a specific type of community and movement tend to be overshadowed or relegated'. However, in emphasising the role of myth, symbol and history in the long-term development of national communities, the ethno-symbolist paradigm can underdetermine the selection mechanisms involved in the definition of national identity at specific historical junctures as well.

This is where a focus on nationalist collective action can fill a gap: by isolating the processes through which elites define the nation, we can start to

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work out a more causal explanation for the content of nationalisms. In this case, to apply political leverage against the French colonial state during the interwar period, Moroccan nationalists had to translate their claims into mass protest. Framing national identity was directly linked to motivating collective action. For any of these appeals to the 'nation' to work, the nationalists had to tap one or more previously existing feelings of solidarity. Geertz (1963: 105–57) talks about these feelings as 'primordial sentiments', various types of 'givens' (whether tribal, linguistic, religious, etc.) that, even if they are socially constructed, influence an individual's behaviour. Regardless of how invented these are, at a given historical moment they exist within a population, and they constitute a constrained repertoire of building blocks with which nationalists can attempt to construct the nation.

By asking *how* these 'givens' get activated in different ways depending on contextual factors, the approach outlined in this study fits between the ethno-symbolists, who are focused on tracing the continuities of these building blocks, and the modernists who emphasise the political, social and economic structural changes in the past two centuries that have made nationalism ubiquitous. Rather than a static or essential object of analysis, I approach the nation as a configuration of identity that gets contested through time for particular political purposes. This shifts the object of analysis from 'what is a nation' to the *process* through which cultural, linguistic, religious, historical or other repertoires of identity are tapped in efforts to define and redefine this configuration. The staging of nationalist protest offers a particularly fruitful venue in which to study these definitional struggles, because it highlights both sides of the process: the elite attempts to define national identity and the degree to which these claims on collective identity resonate with a larger audience. One powerful proof of the resonance of various configurations of national identity is whether nationalist appeals get people out on the streets to demonstrate.

Sociological theories of framing and contention performances

The sociological literature on social movements has developed a sizable toolkit with which to study collective action. Though developed to explain collective action in liberal democracies, it has been used to explain a wide range of historical and other types of phenomenon, and, in a limited number of cases, has been applied directly to nationalist movements (Romano 2006). In its evolution, social movement theory has focused on a range of features of collective action including collective behaviour, political opportunities, mobilising structures and resources, framing activity and contentious protest. Each of these analytical lenses can be used to study nationalist movements, but the last two are particularly relevant to the question of how these movements define national identity.

The framing literature explicitly focuses on the meaning-making processes of social movements, how goals are explained and communicated to mobilise

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participation. Benford and Snow (1986) categorise three framing modes: diagnostic, prognostic and mobilisational. This almost exclusive focus on the cognitive and functional dimensions of framing is a weakness of this approach, however, in that it has difficulty explaining how movement narratives and collective action frames move people to participate or to be sympathetic to the goals of a social movement. Similarly, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly and other scholars of contentious politics have developed a well-articulated tool box for talking about its sequential, modal, interactive, and performative dimensions, but this framework's mechanical and instrumentalist orientation loses the embodied dimensions of how actual actors and audiences interact with and respond to meaning production.

A *cycle of contention,* as Tarrow (1998: 142) explains, refers to a 'phase of heightened conflict across the social system' in which much larger groups are mobilised into action, new forms and frames of contention are developed, and there is a more intense interaction between the powers that be and movement activists. Tilly (1978) coined the phrase *repertoire of contention* to refer to the array of imaginable tactics (i.e. sit-ins, street barricades, marches, strikes, etc.) available at a given locale and period in history that movements can use as tools for protest. In later work, Tilly (2008: 14) more explicitly theorises the performative dimensions of collective protest embedded in this concept:

> The theatrical metaphor calls attention to the clustered, learned, yet improvisational character of people's interactions as they make and receive each other's claims. Claim making usually resembles jazz and commedia dell'arte rather than the ritual reading of scripture. Like a jazz trio or an improvising theater group, people who participate in contentious politics normally have several pieces they can play, but not an infinity.

Though this definition gets closer, it still does not deal with the content of the performance and the cultural, aesthetic and emotive aspects of protest (Eyerman 2006; Goodwin et al. 2001; Isaac 2008). Here is where a cultural sociology of movements has a complementary role to play, bringing added value to an understanding of how contentious performances work.

Alexander's social performance model and nationalist protest

Alexander (2004) outlines a cultural sociological approach that treats 'social performance', including contentious performances, in a much more nuanced way than the social movement literature. By emphasising cultural pragmatics, Alexander's goal is to explicate how culture represents a potential but delimited reservoir of content that elites can use creatively, but which also has a level of autonomy, parameters and internal logics that structure how it is used to signify meaning. By neither under nor over-emphasising the pragmatic and strategic interests of meaning-making actors nor the real autonomy of the cultural background in which they and their audiences are embedded, this approach seeks a balance that captures how 'cultural practice must continue to

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be capable of capturing sacrality and of displaying it in successful symbolic performance' (Alexander et al. 2006: 15).

Alexander's model breaks down social performance into six components. The first is collective representations, the background cultural references or 'universe of basic narratives and codes and the cookbook of rhetorical configurations from which every performance draws' (2004: 550). Choices about specific meanings that performers wish to project form the 'script' of the performance; to succeed, the trick is for this improvisational selection to remain authentic, ringing true for the audience. The second component is the actors, the flesh-and-blood, embodied performers who project the meanings of the script. Third are the multiple observers/audiences involved in the performance, including participant-observers and broader audiences not in direct attendance. The fourth component is the means of symbolic production, including the physical props and the space(s) in which to perform. Fifth is the *mise-en-scène*, the temporal sequencing and spatial choreography involved in the performance. The sixth component is the social power involved, including the material power to allow or prohibit performance and the interpretive power to determine its meaning (Alexander 2004: 530–33).

The key thing for Alexander is the degree to which a social performance achieves a 're-fusion' of these elements of social performance that have been 'de-fused' in modern, complex societies. Re-fusion at the component level (of background representations and foreground meanings; of actor and role; and of script, action and performative space) creates the necessary conditions for a macro-level of re-fusion between audience and performance. This type of successful performance recaptures a sense of sacrality or ritual, which constitutes the resonance dimension among the audience and enhances feelings of collective solidarity. Though addressing a wider array of phenomenon, this model has clear relevance for the study of nationalist performances, unpacking why these demonstrations bring certain cultural elements to the foreground and why these do or do not work.

The following analysis employs this schema to analyse a critical formative moment in the process of constructing and defining Moroccan national identity: a three-month period during summer 1930 in which Moroccan nationalist activists attempted to mobilise protests against a French 'divide and rule' policy distinguishing Berbers from Arabs and applying different legal codes for the two populations. Neither Tilly nor Alexander have explored the importance of religion in structuring, providing content and enhancing the aesthetic strength of contentious performances. By looking at the evolution and the success the *Latif* cycle of contention in mobilising mass urban protest around an anti-colonial nationalist cause, I demonstrate how the re-purposing of a 'traditional' religious ritual to mobilise mass protest constituted a new type of 'fusion' that began to substantiate a mass consciousness of national identity. Through this process, certain ethnic and religious dimensions of national identity came to the fore, creating a path dependence that eventually influenced state-sponsored Moroccan nationalism after independence. From the

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Berber Crisis in the early 1930s through the late 1990s, Moroccan national identity was based on Arab and Islamic markers of 'High Culture', to the exclusion of other groups, most notably Morocco's Berber and Jewish populations. Before analysing the 1930 cycle of protests, it will be helpful to provide historical background on interwar Protectorate Morocco.

Colonial state building and collective identities in protectorate Morocco

Morocco survived the late nineteenth century colonial 'scramble for Africa' due to internal tensions among European powers over control of the strategic southern edge of the Straits of Gibraltar. Only after a series of diplomatic agreements in the early twentieth century, France was able to formally bring Morocco into its African empire in 1912. The Treaty of Fes instituted a protectorate framework of colonial rule in which the French (who delegated zones of control in the north and far south to the Spanish) pledged to ensure economic development, put down tribal insurgency and carry out state building on behalf of the Moroccan sultan, who remained nominally sovereign.

With more than 1300 years of Islamic dynastic history, Morocco was much less of an artificial construct than other colonial units that European empires created, but the colonial intervention profoundly transformed it nevertheless. From the late eighth century, successive Arab and Berber dynasties based in Morocco had waxed and waned with some medieval empires extending to encompass the Iberian Peninsula and most of North Africa. Alongside this political history, processes of partial Arabisation and near-total Islamisation of the autochthonous Berber-speaking population (excluding a substantial indigenous Jewish minority) had established common cultural references as well. These ties at a proto-national level did not, however, supersede other levels of collective identity including tribe, city, region and religion in the precolonial period. Colonial state building, however, set processes in motion that indelibly impacted these prior notions of collective identity, reifying the salience of the nation and influencing the ethnic, cultural and religious markers selected to define it.

One of the most significant of these processes was the introduction of a radically different notion of state power. In precolonial Morocco, the territory and social groups clearly under the control of the central government coexisted with territory and social groups with varying degrees of autonomy from the state. Between 1912–34, French and Spanish 'pacification' campaigns fundamentally reconfigured this relationship by systematically eliminating 'non-state space' (Scott 2009), subduing the formerly autonomous, largely Berber (*Tamazight*) speaking regions in the Rif and Atlas Mountain ranges and in the pre-Sahara regions of the south. The completion of this process created a monopoly of force that eliminated the threat of armed dissent against the colonial state and incorporated Berber tribesmen as the backbone of the colonial army.

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The total military pacification of Morocco consolidated not only a territorial but also a nascent social unit. Over the first two decades of the protectorate, the French installed more than 1600 km of railroads and built modern ports on the Atlantic for an extractive phosphate industry. They also built a vast network of primary and secondary roads to enable the military operations of the pacification campaign. These roads connected previously remote tribes more closely than ever with the lowland plains and the coasts where Morocco's cities are located. The roads that brought soldiers into resisting zones later allowed these rural populations to quickly traverse the country. These groups could complete a trip from the High Atlas, the Sous or the Tafilelt to Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakesh or Fes in a matter of hours rather than days or weeks. Regional markets became major hubs for the rural population, growing into small-sized cities.

French administrators and military officers were aware that the pacification had transformed Morocco structurally by linking the countryside more closely to the city and were worried about the Arabisation and Islamisation of a Berber population they believed could serve as a loyal ally. A result of their concern about 'making Berber peasants into Arabs' (Weber 1976) was the introduction of classificatory practices that hardened an ethnic binary, which differentiated Arabs and Berbers. Rather than assimilating Arab or Berber Moroccans as Frenchmen, French colonial officials instead hoped to maintain (and sometimes invent) static native social categories and, most importantly, preclude the consolidation of a Moroccan national sentiment. The 'Berber myth' (Ageron 1972; Lorcin 1995; McDougall 2006) inherited by military officers from the Algerian experience inspired the French Berber Policy applied in the newly pacified territories. This colonial stereotype valorised Berbers as settled noble savages, freedom-loving, democratically inclined, only superficially Islamised and therefore more assimilable as Frenchmen than Arabs, who were viewed as nomadic, authoritarian, and fanatical about Islam. From 1912 into the 1920s, a Moroccan school of French Berber experts implemented a set of policies intending to create, as Jacques Berque described it, 'a Berber reserve, a sort of national park which was to be sheltered from the ideologies of the plain, whether Arab or French' (Berque 1967: 123). From the onset of operations directed at the Berberophone Atlas highlands, the Direction of Indigenous Affairs maintained a separate administration including a system of tribal councils, customary law schools and Franco-Berber schools distinct from those used in civilian controlled areas in the lowlands (Hoffman 2008).

Among these policies, the preservation of a separate legal framework of Berber customary law was the primary mechanism used by the colonial state to distinguish and preserve Berber ethnicity. A 1914 decree enabled the continuance of Berber customary law, rather than the extension of the Islamic court system, for tribes labelled as Berber. These tribal areas designated as 'under Berber custom' increased as the pacification progressed, and by 1929, over 81 *jama'a-s*, or tribal judicial councils, were in use. The 1931 census counted

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5,067,800 Muslims, 124,500 Jews, and 172,400 foreigners (Gouvernement Chérifien 1946), and Georges Surdon, a lawyer and High Commissioner within the protectorate administration, estimated that close to half of the Moroccan Muslim population was under the jurisdiction of Berber customary law (Ageron 1972: 117).

With the growth of the area and populations under this jurisdiction, concerns over legal ambiguities regarding real estate transactions that involved tribal lands prompted the formation of a commission in December 1929 to give the Berber customary system a legal basis on par with the other jurisdictions (French, *shari'a* and Jewish law) in use. The resulting decree, published on 16 May 1930, buttressed the status quo of the separate customary law system and, significantly, transferred criminal cases from the jurisdiction of the sultan-appointed Islamic courts to French tribunals.

Performing the nation in anti-colonial protest: the *Latif* cycle of contention

Though the French attempted to decouple state and nation formation through the policies outlined above, they had consolidated a nation-sized political unit in Morocco themselves through military conquest, infrastructural development and administrative extension by 1930. The construction and delineation of this type of proto-'national political field', as Zubaida observes, catalyses 'different political and cultural discourses and practices, elements of which are brought into play in relation to particular conjunctures and struggles' (1989: 150). In protectorate Morocco, the publication of the 16 May 1930 decree constituted the 'particular conjuncture' that gave birth to a struggle over national identity in the Berber Crisis. The following sections analyse how the staging of the anti-'Berber *Dahir*" (*zahir*, in classical Arabic, a decree signed by the sultan) protests combined the components identified in Alexander's social performance model. I first identify the actors – the young, Arabophone nationalist elites that instigated the protests. Then, I turn to the script they crafted around the *Latif* prayer, asking how it drew on Moroccan collective representations and cultural references to communicate the threat of French Berber policy and motivate audience participation. The following section addresses the symbolic means of production and *mise-en-scène* involved in the *Latif* performance. Finally, I assess the social powers that the nationalists, the sultan and the French authorities wielded.

The actors: the urban Arab nationalist elite in the interwar period

In the late 1920s, a new generation of Arab, urban young men that had grown up under French rule began to form informal, secret societies in Fes, Rabat, Salé and Tetouan. They met in homes to read and discuss Arabic and French newspapers and books from Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Europe, including smuggled Islamic reformist journals such as Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*

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and Ibn Badis' *Al-Chihab.* Most had been educated in the traditional system or the modernised Arabic curriculum offered in the Free Schools (al-Fasi 1954: 161–3) and studied at the Qarawiyin University in Fes, the millennium-old bastion of Morocco's educated elite, under several professors whose *salafist* reformist teaching urged the revitalisation of Moroccan Islam and resistance to assimilation into French culture. Their preaching emphasised modernising Islamic law, revitalising the Arabic language and purifying heretical expressions of Islam in the country's widespread Sufi brotherhoods, or *zawiyas* (Abun-Nasr 1963: 91). Most of the leaders of the Rabat group, in contrast, had received, or were in the process of receiving a Western education in one of the Franco-Moroccan schools, with a handful going on to pursue university studies in Paris. In total, each of the groups' meeting in the various cities numbered only between fifteen to twenty members (Halstead 1967: 166–72). In the late 1920s, this loosely linked network of Arabic and French educated, urban young men focused on revitalising cultural, linguistic and religious dimensions of Moroccan nationalism. The 16 May decree about Berber courts catalysed a transformation towards political claims and provided a strategic opportunity to act on their hopes.

For the young urban Arab nationalists, the 1930 decree fused the political, ethnic and religious dimensions of Moroccan collective identity by systematising a classificatory division between Arab and Berber based on different legal systems: *shari'a,* or Islamic law, for the former and *izref*, or customary law, for the latter. For the nationalists, the stakes related to the trajectory of nation building in Morocco increased dramatically as the colonial state neared completion of pacification operations in Berber majority regions in the early 1930s. Though most of the Arab nationalists had few to no personal links with the rural populations that French Berber policy affected, a decree that further formalised a territorial division based on the colonial state's ethnic classifications represented a mortal threat to their own goal of consolidating Arabo-Islamic national identity by Arabising the countryside and reforming more Sufi-oriented Islam practices prevalent there.

In 1930, the young Moroccan elites were in place, had a growing sense of national identity and now had a *causus belli* for anti-colonial protest. The question was how to communicate it and get the masses out on the street to protest. Examining the *Latif* cycle of contention that played out between late June to early September shows how these actors improvised on background cultural representations to create a new political script for religious ritual, how they staged this within the strategic space of the mosque and *medina* (the historic, walled traditional city), and how authorities wielded social powers within the colonial field to manage and eventually shut down the protest.

Improvising on Moroccan collective representations in the Latif script

The French did not choose a propitious time to announce what became known as the Berber Decree. Locusts had devastated the crops of the Souss valley in

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1929, an autumn drought had decimated a third of the cattle and a fifth of the sheep, and Morocco had begun to feel the effects of Great Depression with a decreased demand for phosphate exports. Several factors, including the conversion and entry into a priestly order of the son of a prominent Fez family and pro-evangelistic rhetoric from the bishopric of Rabat had heightened religious sensitivities in the late 1920s (Julien 1952: 147ff; 1978: 159ff). French actions early in the spring further escalated tensions. In April, authorities announced a plan to divert most of the water of the Fez River to French settlers, which triggered a demonstration of 10,000 people on 9 May and caused the Resident General, Lucien Saint, to rescind the plan. The following week, the Residency issued the decree reorganising the Berber customary law system.

Abdellatif Sbihi and Mohamed Lyazidi, two Moroccan translators working for the protectorate administration who were also members of the proto-nationalist secret societies in Rabat and Salé, were among the first to become aware of the *dahir* reorganising Berber customary law courts (Brown 1972: 209; Halstead 1967: 181). Sbihi resigned in protest after the decree published in the *Bulletin Officiel* on 16 May. Over the next several weeks, his warnings of the impending geographical division of Morocco failed to move students or the older generation in Rabat, Salé and Fes (Lafuente 1999: 198–88). Ahmad Maaninu, one of the early Salé group, relates that Sbihi finally evoked a strong response when he shifted from using the word *turab*, or soil, to warning that 'Islam is being violated in its very being ('*Islam yumass fi jawharih*')' (Brown 1972: 209). This shift in framing, which conflated the plight of the Berbers, territorial integrity and the religious unity of the Moroccan Muslim *ummah* began to resonate successfully among the small network of cultural nationalists. It took until the end of June, though, for these men to translate this message into mass protest.

The successful strategy they hit upon was to re-purpose a ritual Muslim prayer, *Ya Latif*. The *Latif* was traditionally used in Morocco in times of calamity – pestilence, locust plagues, drought, floods or famine – to invoke divine relief. At the large Friday gatherings at the mosque, the *imam*, or someone in the congregation, would call out 'Oh God, the Benevolent, we ask of You benevolence in whatever fate brings!' with reference to the disaster facing the community. The assembly of the faithful would then join in the prayer.

During the third week of June 1930, one of Sbihi's friends, Abdelkrim Hajji, suggested using the *Latif* prayer to raise awareness about the 16 May decree. That week, Sbihi and other youths pressured imams in Salé, including the imam of the Grand Mosque, to recite the *Latif* at the Friday noon prayer, the largest gathering of the week, on 20 June in response to the threat of the 'Berber Decree' (Lafuente 1999: 190–91). At the Grand Mosque, Maaninu relates that the old imam's cracking voice calling out the *Latif* 'electrified all those present', including a large group of women congregated on the roof to listen to the prayers, and that 'it was as if something very heavy had descended on all of us' (Brown 1972: 212). As a social performance, this re-purposing of

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the *Latif* transformed the congregation into participant observers through a familiar prayer ritual that fused intense religious emotion with a nascent sense of national identity. The resonance the *Latif* achieved 'electrified' the audience, as the gravity of the threat against the unity of an imagined Moroccan Muslim community reinforced this level of collective identity. Over the next days and weeks, the *Latif* performance proved remarkably portable, being replicated in mosques throughout most of Morocco's major cities.

Symbolic means of production and the mise-en-scène of the Latif performance

After the first performance on 20 June, congregations in multiple mosques in Rabat and Salé chanted the *Latif* again on the 27 and 30 June. The prayer was typically scheduled for the Friday service, the largest of the week, and speeches explaining the Berber Crisis to the large gathering would follow it. An intelligence report of the Direction of Indigenous Affairs relates that Sbihi went down from Salé to Marrakesh on 6 July to organise a *Latif* performance. He instructed his collaborators to go to multiple mosques for the noon prayer, and then cry out '*Ya Latif, ya Latif*!' When asked what the imminent danger was, they were to respond saying, 'for our Berber brothers who are deprived of Muslim law and who can no longer live under the law and customs of their ancestors'. These collaborators would then call on the audience to fast the next Sunday (Lafuente 1999: 192). The effort to diffuse the *Latif* beyond Rabat-Salé began to bear fruit, spreading to Fes on 4 July and to Casablanca on 18 July.

In July and August, the contentious cycle gained steam as the *Latif* became diffused as a 'collective action performance' (Isaac 2008), generating demonstrations in almost every major city in the country. Fes proved to be the most active hotbed of anti-French agitation. As the 'spiritual capital' of Morocco, it offered a substantial urban population numbering over 100,000 ('Le Maroc' 1931), including large numbers of students, small-scale artisans under economic duress due to the Great Depression and the influx of global manufacturing competition, and other *petit-bourgeois* elements with a high potential for mobilisation. After the *Latif* was chanted in Fes on 18 July, crowds from multiple mosques converged at the tomb of Moulay Idriss, the patron saint of the city, and proceeded to the pasha's residence to explain their concerns. The pasha told the organisers to return the next day, then had Mohamed El Ouezzani and Hasemi al-Filali arrested and publicly whipped. Other young nationalist protest leaders, Allal Al-Fassi and Abdelaziz Bendriss, were arrested and released after a brief imprisonment (Lafuente 1999: 194). The *Latif* protest reached its peak in early August as crowds increased during the annual *moussem* (saint's day) for Moulay Idriss and more than 7,000 participated in prayer performance on 7 August in Fes (Ageron 1972: 138–9).

Moroccan nationalists could escalate and spread the *Latif* social performances because they were able to exploit important spatial and human resources related to what Alexander describes as the 'symbolic means of production'.

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One of the most critical of these was the mosque, which provided a strategic space for staging the performance. The first French Resident General, Hubert Lyautey, soon after the founding of the Protectorate, issued a decree prohibiting all non-Muslims from entering mosques in Morocco. This decision protected mosques as free(er) spaces for political speech due to the fact that French personnel could not enter. This space fuses the religious and the political, as prayers are said in the name of the ruler of the community, an Islamic equivalent to a pledge of allegiance. Changing the name of that ruler has been a political statement tantamount to declaring a revolution. The Friday sermon, the *khutba*, is another political instrument, as it constitutes a way to communicate to a large audience and inherently affords itself to mobilising the community to action.

As a social institution, in Morocco, as in the rest of the Muslim world, mosques have functioned as a primary locus of public association in urban life with most of the male and a significant amount of the female population gathering regularly for prayers, particularly on Friday for the main service. Though hard numbers on how many participated in the *Latif* are not available (except for the estimate of 7,000 for the 7 August performance in Fes), a significant majority of the male population and a lesser number of the female population (for whom prayer at the mosque was not viewed as obligatory) would attend the Friday prayers. With the *Latif* performed numerous times through July and August in Rabat (population 38,000), Salé, Tetouan, Fes (100,000), Marrakesh (149,000) and Casablanca (107,000), it is likely that a vast majority of the Moroccan populations of these cities experienced the performance or heard about it from others who were present. Staging an anti-colonial nationalist protest in the mosque gave the nationalists the largest possible mass impact within urban Morocco.

Another structural-spatial advantage the nationalists exploited was the bifurcation of urban space between the modern European and traditional native quarters, which, in segregating the populations, created more freedom of activity for the Moroccans within the *medina*, or historic walled area of the city. The Fes *medina*, the largest in the world, presented an intimidating labyrinth to French security forces (including Moroccan colonial soldiers, many of whom were Berbers from the countryside) that gave the nationalists an advantage due to their familiarity with the layout of streets and the fact that they could find refuge throughout the city. The nationalists also benefited from institutions such as the Qarawiyin mosque-university complex at the centre of the *medina*, which served as a central meeting place that could accommodate crowds in the thousands. Qarawiyin University provided an important networking node creating strong ties between *Fassi* activists and like-minded youth in Marrakesh, Tetouan, and Tangier who had spent time studying Islamic sciences there in the 1920s. Qarawiyin also linked urban centres and parts of the countryside, as a majority of the students at the university were actually *tolbas* (students of Islamic sciences) from rural areas (Berque 1967: 177).

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The young nationalists utilised these informal networks as well as those developed among the like-minded secret societies which had grown out of relationships developed at Qarawiyin University, at French-run *collèges musulmans* in Fes or Rabat, or through family and business connections. As has been mentioned, several of the activists exploited their diplomatic immunity as protégés or naturalised citizens of foreign governments – primarily Britain, Italy and the United States – to travel among cities and openly organise the *Latif* with the assurance that the Protectorate authorities could not imprison them for long. Some of the most effective protest organisers were British protégés and Moroccans who had gained Italian citizenship, who used their legal immunities as an advantage as they spread the protest to Marrakesh and Casablanca. The diplomatic protections afforded to these activists gave them greater ability to travel, to organise meetings, to print and distribute tracts, and to gather funds and to maintain contacts outside of Morocco (Kenbib 1996).

The specific *mise-en-scène* of the *Latif*, its staging and sequencing in communal services in mosques, gave the nationalists maximal access to an urban audience and a means to mobilise this audience with an emotionally resonant appeal about an imminent danger to the unity of the Muslim community in Morocco. The marches that resulted were highly public contentious performances – including the shouting of slogans, singing of songs and chanting of the *Latif* again – that served the dual functions of broadcasting their grievances against the government throughout the *medina* and educating the population at large about the anti-Berber *Dahir* cause. Through large-scale participatory social performance, the nationalists fused religious ritual and political protest that made the solidarity of a Moroccan national community unified by Islam and Arabic language and culture an embodied experience for thousands of urban Moroccans.

Social powers of the Moroccan nationalists, the sultan and the French colonial authorities

This social performance was staged within a context in which multiple actors other than the nationalists, including the French administration and the Moroccan sultan himself, retained high levels of social power to mitigate and control its impact. The French authorities tried to forestall the initial recitation of the *Latif* in Salé by arresting Sbihi the day before (Brown 1972: 211). After the street demonstrations in Fes in mid-July, the police arrested twenty-four agitators. The following Friday units of the Foreign Legion were stationed around the *medina*, and police actually entered the mosque to make arrests (Halstead 1967: 182). After the huge crowds that gathered in Fes and in other cities on 7 August, the French recognised that the Berber protests in Moroccan cities had begun to pose a significant threat against public order and a more serious threat against the legitimacy of the protectorate partnership.

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Resident General Lucien Saint's response was to enjoin the sultan to issue a letter calling for the protests to end. The letter, which was read in the mosques across the country on 11 August, criticised the nationalists' attempt to drum up passions about French missions activities and warned against the politicisation of the mosque:

> Some young people, lacking any type of discernment and unaware of the full range of their reprehensible acts, would have one believe that these measures that we have decreed have no goal but the Christianization of the Berbers. They have thus induced the crowds to believe this error and convinced people to gather in the mosques to recite the '*Latif*' prayers after the ritual prayers, transforming prayer by this process into a political demonstration that troubles peoples' minds. Our Majesty absolutely condemns the transforming of mosques, which God made as places of prayer and piety, into halls for political gatherings where hidden political agendas and negative tendencies are given free range. (Lafuente 1999: 196)

On 13 August, the French authorities officially prohibited the *Latif* prayer in Morocco, but the sultan agreed to receive ten delegates from among the protestors.

The delegation met with him a week later and presented a memorandum. It first reaffirmed the historical precedent that Morocco's Berbers had been Islamised and Arabised centuries before. It then iterated a set of demands encapsulating an alternative programme for nation-state building that included a unified judiciary administering Islamic law, a unified Arabic and Islamic educational curriculum for the educational system and recognition of Arabic as the country's official language. The teaching and use of Berber dialects in administrative records was to be prohibited; all missionary activity was to cease as were government subsidies for evangelistic efforts, the pay of priests and church construction; and Muslim alternatives were to be supported in place of Christian orphanages and vocational schools. To the activists' great disappointment, the memorandum achieved no immediate effect. There were *Latif* performances on 31 August and 2 September, but the French cracked down and arrested many of the organisers. With a prohibition against the *Latif* strictly enforced, the streets of Fes, Salé, Rabat, Marrakesh and Tetouan calmed down that fall.

The Berber Crisis' legacy for Moroccan nationalism

In subsequent years after 1930, Moroccan nationalists developed a nationalist press, publishing in Fez, Rabat and Paris in French and Arabic. However, because of severe colonial censorship and a limited readership, and most importantly because of an illiteracy rate at 94 per cent for women and 90 per cent for men in the interwar period (Ennaji 2005: 201), non-print strategies of social performance honed in the *Latif* protests remained far more important for helping a mass Moroccan audience imagine the nation. Staging country-wide commemorative spectacles remained one of the most important tactics in the nationalists' contentious repertoire. Throughout the 1930s, 16 May

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remained the most important of these nationalist 'holidays', which continued to be marked by large gatherings at mosques to perform the *Latif* prayer. On this anniversary of the 'Berber Decree', Moroccans would also close down stores in the *medina*, circulate petitions and send scores of telegrams to officials in Rabat and Paris. The *Latif* prayer was also used to ritually commemorate other anniversaries including the signing of the Treaty of Fes (30 March) and the arrest of the most prominent nationalist leader, Allal al-Fasi (26 October 1937). In 1933, the nationalists invented one of the most significant national holidays; a Throne Day to celebrate the day Sultan (King) Mohamed ben Youssef succeeded his father, which became a major resource the monarch used to consolidate his own symbolic capital.

Though the Residency tried to co-opt the event, this new tradition remained an effective structure through which to channel anti-colonial protest by reaffirming allegiance to the monarchy. Similarly, the sultan's ceremonial visit to Fes in May 1934 to the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss (the founder and patron saint of the city) provided an opportunity the nationalist leadership seized to channel a mass demonstration of public enthusiasm. Upon his entrance to the *medina* (*Fes al-Bali*) through the *Bab Boujeloud* on 10 May, the boisterous crowd welcomed the sultan by chanting in Arabic and French, '*Yahya al-Malik*,' '*Vive le Maroc!*' '*Vive l'Islam!*' '*Vive le Sultan des jeunes!*' '*Vive notre Roi indépendant!*' (MAE-DI 892 1934). These public spectacles enabled the nationalists to project a specific framing of Arab-Islamic Moroccan identity unified around the Alawite monarchy to a mass urban audience. As the independence movement gained momentum during and after World War II, the Berber Decree anniversary and other invented traditions provided a repertoire of contention for continued anti-French agitation. Even after the routinisation of the 16 May protests eventually led to a decline in participation, the ritualised refrain, 'Do not separate us from the Berbers', remained a foundational pillar of Moroccan national identity.

And what about the Berbers themselves? Though at the centre of colonial and Arabo-Islamic urban nationalist struggles over Moroccan identity, voices from the largely illiterate and largely rural *Imazighen* (Berber) populations were absent mostly in the Berber Crisis itself (Wyrtzen 2011). Though they had put up the stiffest armed resistance against the colonial occupation, Morocco's Berbers, large numbers of whom were incorporated into the colonial army, remained largely disconnected from the Arab urban nationalist struggle until much later. French indigenous affairs officers in Berber regions reported the *Latif* performances in the cities generated little to no response within these populations with the exception of a few tribes close to Fes and Midelt (BNM F186 1930). It took ten more years for the Arab nationalists to start cells in rural centres such as Azrou, Khenifra and Midelt. When the Berber-majority regions in the Rif and the Atlas ranges did rise up in late 1955 in armed struggle, the rural-based Moroccan Liberation Army leadership had an antagonistic relationship with the leadership of the urban nationalist movement (M'Barek 1987).

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Morocco's Berber population was impacted directly, however, by the early precedent in the 1930 *Latif* protests of mobilising anti-colonial protest by conflating Islam, Arabic and the Alawite dynasty as the constituent elements of Moroccan national identity. The crystallisation of this definition in the *Latif* performance and its aftermath created a path dependency marginalising Berber cultural or linguistic markers of national identity which were, by default and by design, rejected due to their association (actively cultivated by Arabo-Islamic nationalists) with colonial 'divide and rule' policies. One of King Mohamed V's first acts after independence in 1956 was to abolish the Berber customary law system and to unify a *shari'a*-based judiciary. Arabic was inscribed in Morocco's 1962 constitution as the country's sole official language, and Arabisation was prioritised in the educational policies of the postcolonial state. Newspaper editorials and articles marked 16 May and the Berber Crisis annually until the late 1990s. This homogenising narrative of Moroccan identity as Arab and Muslim has only recently begun to be renegotiated with *Amazigh* (Berber) identity being integrated in official discourses about the Moroccan nation.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to break open the cultural black box most modernist theories of nationalism leave untouched: why do specific notions of identity that elites construct, invent and imagine resonate within a large enough population to make them viable? Focusing on the how and the why of the nation, I analysed the process by which the nation began to emerge as a meaningful unit of collective identity in protectorate Morocco due to transformations wrought by the colonial state. Applying Alexander's social performance model to mass anti-colonial protest brought insight into why certain cultural content was used in defining Moroccan national identity. This cultural sociological approach highlighted important components of the *Latif* performances including the background collective representation implicit in the use of the Muslim prayer, the strategic use of the mosque and *medina* as 'traditional' spaces from which to challenge the colonial state and the reception of and participation in this social performance by urban Moroccans. It also emphasised the social powers wielded by the French authorities who shut it down and the Moroccan sultan who was forced by the colonial overlords to vocally condemn it for inappropriately mixing religion and politics.

The *Latif* protests represented a critical juncture when large numbers of urban Moroccans began to conceive of a national identity that fused religious (Islam) and ethnic dimensions (Arab). This study targeted the gap between modernist and ethno-symbolist paradigms of nationalism, analysing how and why nationalist elites, in framing Moroccan national identity, used certain 'shreds or patches' (Gellner 1983: 45) from pre-existing 'givens' (Geertz 1963: 109) of cultural, religious and historical identity and not others. These

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selections were directly impacted by French colonial policies attempting to forestall nation-building processes by reifying a firm ethnic division between Arabs and Berbers. By translating the threat of this territorial and administrative division of Morocco into a religious vocabulary, the *Latif* performance helped forge a nascent political sense of Arabo-Islamic Moroccan national identity among urban populations.

This case also pushes sociological theories of movements and performance forward in dealing with religious background representations, as it inverts the 're-fusion' Alexander claims constitutes a successful social performance in post-traditional societies. In 1930 Morocco, the *Latif* took a pre-existing 'fused' traditional ritual and redirected it in a novel direction that helped consolidate collective solidarity and political identity on a new national level. Another significant facet of the *Latif* performance was the success the nationalists had in replicating it in other cities through summer 1930. Here, the social performance model bridges to Tilly's concept of a 'repertoire of contention,' illustrating how a particular Moroccan repertoire was established and then constituted an important invented tradition invoked repeatedly in subsequent episodes of anti-colonial protest over the next two decades.

While the fact that a normative Arabo-Islamic national identity emerged through this process and became state policy after independence does not seem incredibly surprising, I contend the stridently anti-Berber orientation of this nationalism was *not* a necessary dimension of Moroccan identity but a specific result of the colonial context and the particular circumstances of French Berber Policy at the origin of the nationalist movement. The counterfactual evidence for this claim and further confirmation of the value of a process-oriented approach to nationalism is the fact that since 1999 the current Moroccan king has responded to resurgent *Amazigh* (Berber) cultural activism by officially redefining Morocco as a multi-ethnic nation which recognises both Arab and Berber identity. The fact that in June 2011, eighty-one years after the Berber Decree, Morocco's new constitution recognised *Tamazight* (Berber) as an official national language alongside Arabic offers ample proof that the questions 'how' and 'why' constitute continually relevant interrogatives about the nation and that the answers change through time.

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