

Commanding Words

Commanding Words:

*Essays on the Discursive
Constructions, Manifestations,
and Subversions of Authority*

Edited by

Lynda Chouiten

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INTRODUCTION: AUTHORITY IN CARNIVALESQUE TIMES

LYNDA CHOUITEN

The question of authority cannot be eluded when addressing the issue of community cohesion. In a modern world made up of states and societies structured into “rulers” and “ruled”, the perspective of strictly horizontal, that is, egalitarian relations is, even for its champions, obviously utopian. The pyramidal shape associated with authority since Hannah Arendt’s famous discussion of the concept ([1954] 2006, 98) is everywhere: in political parties and governments; in companies; in clergies; in academic institutions. The essays proposed in this volume reflect on this notion as manifested in these and other aspects of human history, examining in turn discursive and constitutional legitimizations of colonial rule, state authority, which sometimes takes abusive forms like censorship and the marginalization of minorities, authorship and literary authority, gender interaction in patriarchal cultures, and the teacher/learner relationship.

If authority is everywhere, it is also, paradoxically, *decried* everywhere. The crisis of authority, which Arendt announced six decades ago, is arguably even more salient today. Arendt pointed out that this crisis, while apparent in politics, made itself most obvious in the field of education. Long seen as natural—indeed, as a necessity imposed by children’s state of ignorance and dependence and the need to inculcate in them the norms and values of the community in which they are growing up—the authority of parents and teachers was, “in the century of the child”, put into question (2006, 91-92; 1956, 403). Of course, this is still very much the case today. That the distance between educators and pupils is looser than ever is evidenced not only in the dynamics of what Pierre Bourdieu called the Pedagogic Action ([1970] 1990), which has ceased to be a downward movement from an all-knowing teacher to a rather passive learner, but also in the discursive and sartorial attitudes of the two representatives of the educative interaction. The barely codified, more or less informal style of both teachers’ and learners’ costumes also informs their speaking manner, marked by the use of first names and the suppression of titles and other polite forms, including *vouvoisement*.

Examples of this general triumph of familiar, “cool” attitudes can be seen in several other spheres of human interaction. Obviously comparable to the one just discussed, the parent/child relationship is often marked by the adults’ disarray in the face of the rising power of the new heads of the house—their children—as eloquently shown by the worldwide success of parenting programs like *Supernanny*. The popularity of reality television shows is in itself a sign of our postmodern world’s distaste for boundaries and separations; if the very design of such programs blurs the distance between the private and the public spheres, the fact that supposedly serious and important public figures—politicians, in particular—are invited (and sometimes agree) to take part in them simultaneously disrupts the frontier between the serious and the trivial, the high and the low, and indeed between governors and the governed. Even when not actually partaking in such programs, politicians *are* involved in reality show performances; this is the case, for example, when a president—say Obama, Sarkozy, or Putin—is filmed while exercising; when a party leader chooses to send his season’s greetings from his kitchen, where he is shown cooking; or when a minister invites journalists to take pictures of her newborn child.¹ Obviously, one major reason behind such displays is the wish to present authority holders as “normal” people, thus toning down the hierarchical aspect of their relationship with the governed—and, one might suppose, the latter’s resentment, which might otherwise accompany it.

It is this simultaneous rejection of hierarchy, abolition of distance, and disruption of binaries which urges me to call this world of ours “carnavalesque”, borrowing the famous term with which Mikhail Bakhtin refers to that spirit which disavows “reverence, piety, and etiquette”, mocks all that is traditionally solemn and elevated, and brings together “[a]ll things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic, hierarchical world view” ([1929] 1984, 122-123). While illustrated in the “crowning/decrowning” of politicians—who, by virtue of holding high offices, must prepare themselves to be turned into “clowns” by cartoonists and TV programs—this carnivalesque state seems to me even more apparent in matters pertaining to family and gender relationships. What can remain of the old patriarchal household structure in an age when the very classifications on which this structure was built—the husband/wife, mother/father, and male/female categories—are deconstructed? If, as Arendt explains, authority has, ever since the Romans, been inseparable from tradition and religion, the two other constituents of what she considers to be an indivisible trinity (2006, 93, 124, and 140), then authority can hardly be maintained when, as is the case in the modern world—at least, in the *Western* modern world—both

tradition and religion are deemed superfluous, when not actually made light of. And yet, it would be too hasty to agree with Michael Whiteman that “the death of traditional authority can be seen with [...] optimism” (28). This is so not only because whether the death of traditional authority is something to celebrate remains—withstanding the fact that this often tends to be taken for granted—a matter for discussion, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because whether this authority has actually vanished is no less debatable.

Authority, according to Max Weber’s and Arendt’s simple and clear definition, consists in the ability to command, that is, to make other members of one’s community obey, *without coercion or violence* (Arendt 2006, 92; Weber [1922] 1978, 213-214).² Obedience, they argue, is made possible by other people’s *belief* in the legitimacy of the authority holder, which can be sanctioned either by laws (as in the type of authority that Weber terms legal or rational), the weight of tradition, or the powerholder’s own charismatic aura—that “special innate quality that sets individuals apart and draws others to them” (Potts 2009, 2). The legal and charismatic types are still very much in power, though the definition of the latter has considerably evolved. Indeed, as John Potts notes, this concept has gained so much importance that in the late 1990s, “teach yourself charisma” books started to flourish (191). This, in my view, says much about the ambiguous status of authority in the contemporary world. While betraying a rather conservative attachment to a concept which is traditional since it dates back to the middle of the first century C. E. (12), the success of such books simultaneously challenges the traditional acceptance of the quality they claim to inculcate in their readers, making it a science that can be acquired rather than the mysterious, God-sent gift that Weber takes it to be (1978, 241-242). Because it is marked by an ambiguous mixture of self-denial (in the present case, there is no such thing as *innate* charismatic authority) and self-assertion (charisma does exist, and can be attained through knowledge), traditional authority oscillates between persistence and constant erasure.

The emergence of self-appointed specialists authorized to teach authority signals the paramount place of knowledge in contemporary understandings of this concept and the rise of what might be termed “epistemic authority”. As Claire Blencowe has argued, in “the modern post-foundational, deterritorialised, egalitarian world”, “authority is the force of ‘wise’ or ‘in the know’ counsel” (2013, 10). Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that our world is as ambiguous about equality as it is about tradition. This can be illustrated with examples from the very field of knowledge that we are now discussing, the best of these being perhaps

the case of Wikipedia. If the famous encyclopedia, to which every internet user is welcome to contribute, seems to be the very embodiment of the democratization of knowledge, the contempt in which it is held in academic circles belies this democratization, showing that learning is still very much hierarchized.

The valorization of specialists, whose advice is now sought in the most familiar aspects of everyday life, also reveals the limits of the twenty-first century's supposed attachment to (individual) freedom. The contemporary world has freed itself from the rigidly gendered and morally defined dressing codes of the previous centuries only to replace them by the "reign" of experts on the subject, who dispense their know-how not only through catalogues and manuals but, again, through reality shows, which tend to hold the lion's share in broadcast programs. Counselors can be solicited in miscellaneous other issues, including dieting/exercising, interior design, and social (and sometimes more intimate) relationships. It is indeed ironical that individual freedom should be so much celebrated in this century which counts, among its accredited professions, that of a "life coach"; and it is no less ironical that in a time when essentialist definitions of gender are questioned, women wishing to change their dressing style should, as one can often hear in the makeover shows referred to above, be given tips to dress in such a way as to highlight their "femininity".

Inasmuch as it induces lay people, without any apparent obligation, to follow the implicit codes of taste and elegance (and healthy nutrition and positive lifestyle, among other normalized attitudes), this recourse to experts fits very well within the classical Arendtian vision of authority, which the philosopher associates with the two essential principles of hierarchy and freedom (2006, 92-93). In lieu of freedom, however, it is possible to argue that what those submitting to authority enjoy is, rather, the *illusion* of freedom famously detected by Noam Chomsky in other aspects of modern democracies. Chomsky explains that democratic regimes exert more effective control than totalitarian systems in that they control the thoughts, rather than the words or actions, of those they govern (1992). Although seemingly free to run their own lives and define their own tastes, modern citizens are unconsciously led to allow these to be shaped for them.

Democracy, precisely, is arguably the best incarnation of Arendt's definition. The very invention of authority was, according to her, urged by the "democratic" need to protect dissident voices within the community—particularly those of philosophers. Traumatized by the execution of Socrates, Plato imagined a utopian republic that would be ruled by a philosopher-king, an idea which might well be considered to have

inaugurated the concept of authority through knowledge (2006, 107-108). Later, the actual introduction of hierarchy and authority in ancient Rome put an end to the association between freedom and equality which used to inform the practice of rhetorical persuasion in the Greek polis, thus “facilitating a far more open and differentiated category of citizenship” (Blencowe 2013, 14). It is this schema which is still in force today, in our world where social inequalities do not prevent citizens from having equal access to justice and political rights—in theory, at least. Seen in this light, authority is, notwithstanding the arguments of its liberal detractors, far from incompatible with freedom; rather, it is a limitation upon freedom that *guarantees* freedom (12). On the other hand, as Chomsky’s argument and the examples discussed above highlight, the seemingly increasing amount of freedom granted to citizens does not result in an effacement of hierarchical relationships but, paradoxically, in an insidious obliteration of freedom itself.

While compatible with some forms of freedom, authority is antithetical to violence, to which it offers an alternative mode of domination (see Arendt 2006, 97). In *Authority: A Sociological History*, Frank Furedi explains that it is precisely the experience of violence—of the Second World War, Fascism, and Stalinism—which gave democracy the universal appeal and legitimacy it enjoys today, in the West, at least (2013, 351). Prior to that—in the late nineteenth century—aspects of democratic practice such as the expansion of the franchise were viewed with an anxiety resulting from a doubt about the masses’ ability to rule, despite the growing conviction that democracy would henceforward be the prevailing type of governance. This awareness of the necessity to cope with democracy and the simultaneous suspicion towards it led, Furedi adds, to the mobilization of science to limit the powers conferred to the people, by demonstrating their irrationality and, therefore, their intrinsic incapacity to be dependable citizens. This theory was particularly circulated by crowd psychology (332), but it had already been advocated by theorists such as the historian Hippolyte Taine, who developed the idea of a “credulous crowd” whose actions are motivated by “unconscious resentment” (335). In view of the masses’ incapacity to take the lead, such theories recommended that the destiny of society be decided by “an enlightened elite” (334). Read in the light of these explanations, the proliferation of experts in our century may be seen as no more than a persistence of this ambivalent attitude towards democracy which consists, on the one hand, in an idealization of this concept as the healthiest alternative to tyranny and fascism and, on the other hand, an unspoken mistrust in the people’s aptitude to rule. As a result, the masses are trapped in a no less ambiguous

status: while officially the holders of authority (so democracy dictates), they are actually subjected to a subtler but more effective authority—that of science/knowledge.

The hegemony of knowledge, which Weber unsurprisingly classes in the category of rational authority, also marks a departure from the Weberian vision, which viewed charismatic authority as superior to, and more influential than, the two other types in that it requires neither the support of established rules nor that of tradition (1978, 244). Yet this seeming victory of the rational is, again, less certain than it might seem. Because what can pass as valid knowledge itself has to be defined, this category is not necessarily a mark of objectivity; rather, it is the manifestation of an “idea of objectivity”, that is, of impartiality and reality, which is anterior to the experience of knowing and which is collectively shared (Blencowe 2013, 15). Thus, rational authority is seen as such not because it is itself a guarantee of truth but because it maintains a “truth” founded long ago by the community. As such, the rational authority of knowledge seems to be subordinated to the second Weberian type of domination—the supposedly obsolete traditional form of authority.

In sum, notwithstanding Arendt’s lamenting the death of tradition and, with it, authority, and leftists’ welcoming of this demise, authority—traditional authority, in particular—seems to be still very much alive, despite its carnivalesque guise. What is more, the contemporary exercise of authority relies on discursive strategies very similar to those deployed in previous centuries. The recourse to the support of “science” to gain control over the supposedly inferior masses is, for example, reminiscent of the pseudo-scientific theories which sanctioned the myth of the superiority of the white race, thus participating in the legitimization of the Western imperial domination of dark races seen as childlike, undependable, and, therefore, unable to take control of their own destiny (see, among others, Said [1978] 1995; Jahoda 1999), much as the mass of people are viewed in Western democracies. As Weber points out, the support of knowledge is also paramount in other forms of rational domination, particularly bureaucracy (1978, 225).

The recurrence of the discursive methods discussed so far—the weight of tradition, the appeal to science, and the overt or implicit denigration/infantilization of those it subjects—raises the question of whether there are rhetorical constants which, regardless of historical specificities, endow authority with legitimacy. If yes, morality would arguably hold pride of place in the list, an importance strongly conveyed in such philosophical concepts as the Kantian categorical imperative—the idea that morality is the ultimate obligation, from which all other duties should derive—and

Emile de Durkheim's insistence on the desirability of morality, that is, on individuals' recognition of obligations dictated to them by morality as the highest form of authority (Carls; Furedi, 4). At a more concrete level, if morality chiefly justifies the aura bestowed on saints, prophets, and religious figures in various cultures, it is also central in the construction of other forms of legitimacy, particularly in politics, where moral irreproachability or lack thereof has classically served as a trump card in election campaigns or, more simply, the race for credibility. Of course, the example of politics shows that morality is less the ultimate imperative advocated by Kant than an often *a posteriori* justification of less elevated motivations. Again, one obvious manifestation of such manipulation of moral discourse can be found in the perceived moral duty of carrying the light of religion and civilization to the benighted parts of the world, with which the nineteenth-century imperial enterprise justified itself.

The Chapters

Pursuing the above discussion, the following chapters highlight the discursive mechanisms at play as much in the process of constructing authority as in that of subverting it. However, instead of focusing essentially on authority in our twenty-first century, they examine the manifestations of this concept in different historical and geographical contexts which range from the Islamic Middle Ages to twenty-first century America, passing through nineteenth- and twentieth-century India and North Africa. Despite this diversity, the contributions are organized by the sphere of human life in which the authority they discuss is exercised: racial encounter (particularly in a colonial context); politics, with a focus on manifestations of authoritarian rule and resistance to its oppression; literature, with its canon and its institutions; household organization and gender relationships; and academia.

Philip Dine's "Competing Claims to Authority in the Early Colonial Sportscape: A Case Study of Horse Racing in Algeria" shows how equestrianism played a decisive role, on both the military and the symbolic levels, in the intricate competition over authority which informed the colonial confrontation in nineteenth-century Algeria. If horsemanship, valorized in the Islamic tradition and associated with the imperative of *jihad* against infidels, played an important role in early Algerian anti-colonial resistance—a resistance Dine represents through the example of Emir Abd el-Kader—the French colonial authorities relied on the equestrian tradition to win the native nobility over to the colonial cause, by highlighting the features of patriarchal authority and aristocratic ancestry

incarnated by this tradition and held in high esteem both by French culture and the indigenous elite. Horsemanship—in particular, horse racing—was also central in the struggle for supremacy between the military and civilian representatives of the colonial administration, that is, between the French occupiers themselves.

Javed Iqbal Wani's "British Colonialism, Authority, and the Framework of 'Order' in Nineteenth-Century India", Lynda Chouiten's "Gods and Heroes: Manifestations of Western Authority in Knud Holmboe's *Desert Encounter*", and Kirsty Bennett's "Specters of Desire: Tangomania, Orientalism, and Stereotypes of Latinity" discuss other colonial discursive strategies, as manifested in the British legal policy in India, a Danish account of travel to colonized Libya, and cinematographic representations of tango respectively. The first article sheds light on the colonial ideology underpinning the penal system in India, used by the British as an effective means of control. In particular, Wani examines the case of the gangs of criminals referred to as *Thuggs*, which he shows to be a colonial construction aimed at reinforcing the myth of the colonized Oriental's moral deficiency and propensity to violence, thus legitimizing their subjection by white Europeans presented as morally superior. Chouiten's contribution underscores the persistence of colonial discursive reflexes even in supposedly anticolonial Western voices such as that of the Danish journalist Knud Holmboe. Despite his obvious sympathy with the Libyan Bedouins and his condemnation of Fascist Italy's colonial methods, this convert to Islam bestowed on his American companion and himself the status of heroes able not only to display a resourcefulness and a know-how that were beyond the ignorant North Africans' reach, but even to triumph over the desert's miscellaneous deadly trials. Drawing on the analyses of Edward Said and David Spurr, the contribution also discusses Holmboe's representation of the natives, which it shows to oscillate between aestheticization, debasement, and surveillance. For its part, Bennett's essay shows that tango, as represented in Western films, is a revised narrative of the authentic Argentinean dance, which is both less spectacular and less sensual than what is presented to the Western consumer. Bennett suggests that this "commercial" version simultaneously feeds and feeds *on* other constructions: the myths of Latin excess and voluptuousness.

The last contribution to the part devoted to colonial authority analyzes not the discursive strategies of this authority but postcolonial writers' problematic attempts to free themselves from it. Assessing the validity of the familiar Prospero-Ariel-Caliban triad as an allegory for the evolution of novelistic discourse in Africa, Si Abderrahmane Arab's "L'Ecrivain africain eurographe: Au-delà d'Ariel et de Caliban" argues that the history

of this discourse was marked by three major phases, but that the relevance of the Shakespearian triptych is limited to the first two of these. If the first stage, which the author terms “crypto-colonial”, was governed by the figure of Ariel, with realist writers remaining “meekly” in the shadow of their colonial masters/mentors, the second period was that of Caliban-like writers who, either in realist or modernist style, “wrote back” in defiance to Western literary Prosperos. However, in its complexity and ambiguity, the third, postmodern phase of the African novel transcends these figures. Rather than Ariel and Caliban, the contemporary African novelist evokes Janus, the double-faced god, and even more so, African figures like the trickster Djeha and the Yoruba god Esu, both of whom incarnate sly adaptability and resourcefulness as alternatives to the fixity of traditional cultural categories.

In “Writing Against Power: Textual/Sexual Acts in André Brink’s *Other Lives*”, Hager Ben Driss points out the interconnectedness of sexual regulations and textual practices both in the Apartheid regime and André Brink’s literary denunciation of it. In Brink’s novels, the violent episodes of sex and humiliation fulfill the double function of allegorizing the writer’s vision of literature as a sexual body that resists the reader’s attempts at violation, and unveiling the South African government’s segregationist practices, including its racial codification of sexuality. Communist Romania’s intrusion into, and regulation of, its citizens’ private life as a mechanism of control is the subject of Adriana Cordali Gradea’s “Communist Authoritarian Discourses and Practices in Romanian New Wave Cinema”, which discusses the cinematographic tropes deployed by New Wave films produced during this country’s post-communist period as a means of shedding light both on the strategies of the communist regime and the tactics of survival of those living under it. Drawing a parallel between the government’s practices and those of imperial domination, the chapter shows that Romanian citizens’ responses consisted of maneuvers like mimicry and invisibility (and its corollary, silence), shown by Homi K. Bhabha to be typical of colonial subalterns. In the same vein, Arvi Sepp’s “Authority and Subversion: the Aesthetic Power of Democratic Utopia in Wolf Biermann’s Poetry” analyzes the artistic gestures through which the East-German dissident singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann decries the abuses of the regime in his country and pleads for a reformed democracy. Such gestures include deliberately shocking language, meant to shake his fellow countrymen’s consciousness, and a rejection of the Party’s jargon in favor of the people’s plainer vocabulary.

Rather than on the discursive strategies of communist regimes and their opponents, it is on the verbal confrontation between pacifist movements and pro-war governments in early twentieth-century America and Europe that Bill Bolin's "Arguments from Authority: Pacifism and its Counter-Discourses in the Modern Era" focuses. This chapter shows how both the exercise of authority and resistance to it can sometimes take oblique ways, mobilizing public opinion and the "cultural censorship" of the media. Arguments from genus and circumstance, marked by a pronounced moral tone, were used on both sides, with the pacifists insisting on the evil character of war and the governments presenting the act of engaging in it as a patriotic duty.

Opening the part devoted to literary authority, Verita Sriratana's contribution, "But How Can a Wall Protect if it is not a Continuous Structure?" Rethinking the Literary Periodization of Modernism in Franz Kafka's 'The Great Wall of China'", reads Kafka's short story as a metaphor for the constructed character of the literary periodization of modernism, whose Eurocentric character it denounces. To the traditionally accepted fixed and monolithic definition of modernism, "The Great Wall of China" opposes multiplicity: that of modernism itself and that of the textual interpretations offered to readers. K.A. Wisniewski's concern in "The Periodical Disruption: The Minor Methods of the Eighteenth-Century American Essay" is similar in that it questions literary classifications, such as rhetoric-versus-poetic and major-versus-minor genres, showing how the periodical essay, particularly of the type which flourished in post-independent America, disrupted these and other binaries. As a playful, rhizomatic genre (Deleuze), the eighteenth-century American essay presented elements of both fiction and non-fiction prose, and blended moral content and entertainment, seeking, through these formal disruptions, to undo the political order of things itself and assert a new American identity, free from the influence of the British colonizer, including its laws, language, and political vision. Thus, while displaying what Gilles Deleuze identified as features of minor literature, the essay functioned as a major tool in the construction of the nascent American nation.

Reflecting on the status of the author rather than that of literary genres, Subashish Bhattacharjee and Saikat Guha's contribution, "Authorship and Authority: Oral, Textual, and Post-Textual Presences of Authorial Identity", discusses the evolution of these concepts from the medieval period to our digital times. Bhattacharjee and Guha argue that while the age of cyberscape literature seems to have taken literature back to the medieval tradition of anonymity, it has actually replaced both this anonymity and

the post-Renaissance sacralization of individual authorship with a cheerful interaction of multiple authors, thus compensating for the Barthesian announcement of the death of the author by the rebirth of *many* authors. For his part, Patrick Voisin analyzes the stakes at play in the construction of a literary name in nineteenth-century French drama. As its title indicates, his chapter, “Autorité littéraire et autorité commerciale: l’exemple du théâtre de Victor Hugo et d’Alexandre Dumas” opposes the concept of literary authority, built on the intrinsic artistic values of the literary work and the sanction of elite readers, to that of commercial authority consecrated by a public which is wider but also less demanding in terms of literary value. Voisin suggests that the former type of authority is more elevated and more longstanding, as testified by the fortune of its representative Victor Hugo. Obviously, this writer is, today, better known and much more respected than his rival Alexandre Dumas, who, in the two playwrights’ time, recorded a more consequential commercial success.

Inaugurating the part devoted to authority in gender relationships, Adam Walker’s “Authority Through Agency: The Role of Some Women Delegates in the Late Antique Islamic World” points out the ambivalent status of women in medieval Islamic history. Walker’s discussion of historical accounts detailing Umayyad caliphs’ verbal intercourse with *wafidat* (women delegates) shows that women in medieval Islam not only intervened in public affairs, acting as leaders, entrepreneurs, and reliable sources of knowledge, but also that their views were considered and, sometimes, acted upon by the rulers themselves. However, while thus challenging the widespread idea of women’s oppression in Islam, the chapter also observes that the question of female Muslims’ status in the Middle Ages is rendered problematic by the doubly significant fact that the testimonies relating to this subject are the product of *male* authors. As such, they not only marginalize the supposedly authoritative women they portray and whose narrative voices are silenced, but also arguably serve male interests. In authorizing accounts of their friendly encounters with their female guests, the caliphs might well be constructing less a vision of powerful Muslim women than their own image as just, sympathetic rulers.

The primacy of male agency is also shown by Djamel Zenati and Abdelkarim Mahraoui to be at the core of far more modern Islam-inspired texts. In “Le Divorce et l’autorité masculine en Algérie”, the two authors analyze the gender politics underpinning the language of the legal texts regulating the act of divorce in the Algerian Code de la Famille (Family Code). As designed in these texts, particularly in Article 48, the gender-based divorce schema bestows on the male part the authority to make the act of final separation effective, while the woman’s role is confined to the

right to *request* this separation. In John Searle's and J. L. Austin's terms, woman's illocutionary acts are stripped of the performative function which empowers her husband's utterances to effectively exert an influence on the course of events.

Linda Gill's and A'icha Kathrada's contributions discuss the issue of authority and gender in relation to narrative discourse in female European novels. In "Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*: Gender, Discourse, and Power", Gill argues that as representatives of the self-made, middle-class capitalistic subject, the characters of Austen's novel strive to write their own fiction, used as an empowering strategy in the "marriage market". Despite their attempts, however, female characters fail to liberate themselves from the established authority of patriarchal discourse; ultimately, the only female figure to emerge victorious from this discursive race is that of Austen herself, whose adroit manipulation of language enables her to assert her god-like authorial presence without challenging the codes of the patriarchal tradition. Examining the case of two other European female writers, Kathrada's "Autorité de l'écrivain et discours genré: Marguerite Yourcenar et Virginia Woolf", focuses on these literary figures' androgynous identity as manifested in their essays and correspondence. Although Woolf is traditionally seen as a much more affirmed feminist than her rather misogynist French counterpart, the essay shows that both writers use gender-bending as a means of transcending the patriarchal constraints impeding the construction of a female creative authority, before transcending this authority itself, in favour of a political voice which undertakes to denounce contemporary evils such as Nazism, thus acting as spokes(women) for humanity as a whole rather than for a particular gender category.

The last part of the volume, which addresses the question of authority in the process of knowledge transmission, opens with Kathryn Marie Hudson's discussion of the evolution of Maya civilization as an epistemic category. In addition to showing how scholarship erased the original plurality of Mayaness, replacing it with an artificially homogenized historical entity, "The Making of 'Maya': Authority, Knowledge, and the Construction of History" highlights how this academic construct has sometimes served not-so-scholarly interests. While the prestige vested in this civilization has urged some governments to celebrate their real or invented Maya heritage at the expense of other marginalized cultural components, the reproduction of authorized, ready-made knowledge on this topic facilitates recognition in an academic world where the weight of tradition is paramount.

The two concluding chapters are reflections on the thorny questions of teacher-learner relationships and the degree of effectiveness of so-called modern teaching methods. In “L’Ecole algérienne d’hier à aujourd’hui: vers un effondrement de l’autorité pédagogique”, Fatima Zohra Boukerma and Habiba Benaouda defend the thesis that legal texts and new conceptions of the learning process have combined to strip the Algerian teacher of his/her traditional authority, leaving him/her helpless in the face of learners not only reluctant to obey but also increasingly inclined to violence, as shown by the alarming surveys carried out by sociologists and by the national Ministry of Education. Finally, taking veterinary science as a case study, Heli I. Koskinen’s “Learning by Doing in a Changing University Organization” examines the learning effects of the constructivist methods and problem-solving activities recently introduced in Finnish universities. Koskinen explains that the lower grades obtained by students taught with these new methods are the result of inadequate assessment rather than ineffective teaching. While favorable to these approaches, the author warns against the possible marginalization of the teacher and the automated information processing that might result from the learner’s growing independence and the increasing recourse to technology.

More than half a century after Arendt’s “What is Authority?” this concept is still very much in crisis, less in the sense, meant by Arendt, of falling apart than in that of being at a “crucial point”; of reaching a “climax”. If the practice of authority has, as the above discussion argues, not been renounced in this seemingly carnivalesque age, even this carnivalesque guise is increasingly being decried, with reactionary voices rising to question the chaos engendered by the relativity celebrated since the 1950s and calling for a return both to a hierarchizing system of thought and a firmer enforcement of order. And if, as Arendt warns, and as the multiform recrudescence of aggressive behavior in our times seems to confirm, too lenient an authority is a door open to violence, then the gradual rehabilitation of this concept should perhaps be viewed with favor.

Notes

¹ The political figures I have in mind here are French: respectively, Hervé Morin, the president of the *Nouveau Centre* party, and Ségolène Royal. Fifteen years before she stood for presidential elections—in 1992, when she was a young minister of environment—the latter invited journalists to the maternity clinic where she gave birth to her fourth child. For his part, in 2010, Morin presented his New Year wishes to the French in a video featuring him in his kitchen, which he declared to be his favorite place in the house. Both cases illustrate the blurring of

frontiers not only between the public and the private spheres but also between male and female roles, as traditionally defined.

² Weber sees only one exception to this definition: the master/slave relationship.

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PART I:
INSCRIBING/RESISTING COLONIAL
AUTHORITY

CHAPTER ONE

COMPETING CLAIMS TO AUTHORITY IN THE EARLY COLONIAL SPORTSCAPE: A CASE STUDY OF HORSE RACING IN ALGERIA

PHILIP DINE

Introduction: Colonization and “Sportization”

Scholarship on the simultaneous emergence of modern games and the European colonial empires has highlighted the centrality of the British experience to these overlapping processes of territorial expansion and sporting diffusion (Darbon 2008). However, the imbrication of sport and empire should not be underestimated in the territories of France, Britain’s main rival, in that colonization was accompanied by the “sportization” of recreational activities in both imperial contexts. Indeed, neither the general history of France overseas nor the specific narrative of French engagement with physical recreation can be related without reference to the British Empire, conceived as both a threat and a model for emulation. In addition, the rise of modern sport was itself unquestionably informed by the rhetoric of empire, which David Spurr characterizes as “a kind of repertoire for colonial discourse, a range of tropes, conceptual categories, and logical operations available for purposes of representation [...] that come into play with the establishment and maintenance of colonial authority [as] part of the landscape in which relations of power manifest themselves” (1993, 3).

France’s colonial project in Algeria was prefigured by the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt and Syria (1798-1801), an event that opened the modern age of conflict between the West and the Arab-Islamic world, and which encouraged the emergence of the totalizing apparatus of knowledge and control characterized by Edward Said (1978) as Orientalism. The combination of territorial ambition and cultural aggression which first characterized the *Expédition d’Egypte* was to re-emerge in 1830, when

France invaded Algeria, the first act in what would be a century and a quarter of colonial violence in North Africa. Following an early period of military occupation and indigenous resistance, to which we shall return, large-scale civilian settlement of the territory gathered pace after the 1848 Revolution, which declared Algeria to be an integral part of the French Republic. France's subsequent defeat in the war of 1870 against Prussia, resulting in the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, further encouraged these migratory flows, thereby lending demographic weight to the post-1848 administrative fiction of "French Algeria". Ironically, it was this same military reverse that led to France's belated discovery of modern athletic pursuits, which would be imported from Great Britain expressly to counter the perceived moral and physical degradation of the nation. Epitomized by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the strongly pro-colonial founder in 1896 of the modern Olympic Games, advocates of the new physical culture sought explicitly to equip the country for the "Great Game" of European imperialism (Weber 1991).

Against this backdrop, the overlapping processes of colonization and "sportization" may profitably be examined in Algeria, where France's first modern sporting spectacle would be adapted to local conditions in pursuit of overtly colonial objectives. Racing on the English model had begun in Paris in the final decades of the *Ancien Régime*, but the sport was most enthusiastically developed under the July Monarchy (1830-1848) and the Second Empire (1852-1869). The establishment in 1833, just three years after the *Expédition d'Alger*, of French racing's governing body, the *Société d'encouragement pour l'amélioration des races de chevaux en France*, underlines this historical coincidence. The sport's rise thus overlapped with the early period of military-managed colonization in Algeria, where French cavalry officers would look to exploit a shared passion for equestrian pursuits in order to exert influence upon indigenous elites. This chapter consequently offers a case study of equestrianism in the two decades which followed the invasion, focusing on the respective claims to authority of local tradition and sporting modernity.

Equestrianism in the Early Colonial "Sportscape"

As elsewhere, the coming of modern games to North Africa entailed the reconfiguration of existing physical cultures, as well as the assertion of new values and meanings. Thomas Carter has argued persuasively for an ethnographically informed application of Arjun Appadurai's notion of "scapes" to the process of sporting diffusion, as a replacement for monolithic "conceptualizations of globalization and notions of unitary

flows of power from colonial metropolises to marginalized colonies” (2002, 417). The “sportsapes” posited by Carter are characterized by fluidity, irregularity and disjuncture, and may be understood as locally specific responses to transnational forces: “What these disjunctures have in common is that globalization produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms yet have contexts that are anything but local” (2002, 418).

Applying this concept to early colonial Algeria, we may date the coming of sporting modernity to the organization of a series of race meetings in the western part of the territory, in the late 1840s and early 1850s. This initiative centered on the army’s equestrian headquarters in Mostaganem, and was intended from the outset to attract indigenous spectators, who undeniably attended in large numbers. This successful template was enthusiastically adopted by military governors and civilian administrators in other centers, including the regional capital of Oran, as well as in Algiers and Constantine. I have written elsewhere of the practical and political aspects of this remarkable sporting experiment, including its intended contribution to a new understanding—and even an embryonic form of association—between tribal leaders and colonial officers (Dine 2011). This narrative will be returned to in the final section of the present discussion, which focuses on the competing claims to authority mobilized in the course of the extraordinary Oran races affair of May 1850. For now, we may simply note that the army’s appeal to a shared sporting enthusiasm assumed the existence of a vibrant equestrian culture in pre-colonial Algeria, of the kind described in broader geographical terms by Donna Landry:

[...] there existed from the eighth century onward in the Islamic world an elaborate discourse of horsemanship or *furusiyya*—the theory and practice of hippology, veterinary care, farriery, and equitation. This discourse combined Islamic with pre-Islamic, especially Sasanian, ideas, and was transmitted orally as well as by means of treatises in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish [...]. (2009, 23)

The military value of such expertise had been acknowledged since the Middle Ages, when the association of Eastern horsemanship with resistance to the Crusades indelibly marked both indigenous and exogenous representations of this pivotal encounter. In the colonial period, the militarized performance of indigenous equestrianism would similarly be endowed with an emblematic quality, exerting an abiding appeal for both local audiences and European visitors, most obviously in the form of the ostentatious gun-play of the *fantasia*. As noted by one French officer:

“L’Arabe, qui est *le premier* de tous les cavaliers du monde, déploie une admirable adresse dans ce genre de fantasia” (Garnier 1883, 111).

Generations of Orientalist artists would share this enthusiasm, led by Eugène Delacroix, who was an early visitor, producing an influential series of paintings devoted to the *fantasia* in 1832 and 1833. Such depictions would exert a lasting influence on later travelers, such as Eugène Fromentin, both in his own painting and in his travel writing, notably *Une année dans le Sahel* (1858).¹ This text prefigures Fromentin’s mature tableau *Une fantasia: Algérie* (1869) and concludes with a stirring account of *le jeu de la poudre*:

Le premier départ fut magnifique; douze ou quinze cavaliers s’élançaient en ligne. C’étaient des hommes et des chevaux d’élite. Les chevaux avaient leurs harnais de parade; les hommes étaient en tenue de fête, c’est-à-dire en tenue de combat [...] dans le pêle-mêle d’une action joyeuse comme une fête, enivrante en effet comme la guerre, le spectacle éblouissant qu’on appelle une *fantasia* arabe. [...] la fantasia, c’est-à-dire le galop d’un cheval bien monté, est encore un spectacle unique, comme tout exercice équestre fait pour montrer dans leur moment d’activité commune et dans leur accord les deux créatures les plus intelligentes et les plus achevées par la forme que Dieu ait faites. (1858, 219-222)

We may note here the emphasis placed by Fromentin on the shared nobility of man and beast, who both have elite status, as well as the martial aesthetic deployed in this ritual celebration of the pair’s divinely ordained harmony. Such a depiction hints at important connections between indigenous equestrianism, the performance of masculinity, and the religious construction of patriarchal authority. We shall argue that this linkage turns on the importance traditionally attached to patrilineality in both equine and human genealogy.

Male potency is foregrounded in Isabelle Eberhardt’s travel account “Fantasia” (1901), in which, as Lynda Chouiten has observed, “images of Islam’s constructed masculinity pervade the *récit*” (2015, 67). Eberhardt accordingly evokes the “Têtes énergiques et mâles” of the human participants, becoming even more explicit as she describes their equine counterparts: “Excités par une jument noire aux yeux de flamme, née sous le ciel brûlant de la lointaine In-Salah, les étalons piaffaient, frémissaient et hennissaient, courbant avec grâce leurs cous puissants sous la lourde crinière libre” (1901, 16). In the culminating display, a dozen young warriors simulate a cavalry charge, uttering war cries and charging their steeds into the impromptu arena formed by the assembled crowds, only bringing their mounts to a shuddering halt at the last possible moment and

simultaneously discharging their long muskets into the sand (Eberhardt 1901, 18). Chouiten identifies this priapic episode as “one of the most poignant images in the text”, and she is undoubtedly right to highlight the writer’s fixation on the sexual politics of “this culture that she over-masculinized so as to fit her ideal of power” (2015, 67). That said, it is hard to disregard the embedded patriarchy of the *fantasia*, as characterized by M.E. Combs-Schilling in her analysis of gun-play as a rehearsal of manhood: “Without much subtlety, the sequence mimics the sexual act—the men mount their horses, release their animal energy in a burst of passion, then jerk that passion to a final halt for their own pleasure and fulfillment with a single outburst of sound and white smoke from their pointed guns” (1989, 203). Thus regarded, the *fantasia* becomes for Combs-Schilling “a public exhibition of who males are and how they are to behave” (1989, 204), while both their horses and their horsemanship are revealed to be imbricated in the fundamental structures of patriarchal power. In what follows, various claims to authority will be considered, many of which may be seen to have their anthropological roots in the perceived primacy of blood, whether equine or human.

Indigenous Equestrian Culture and Traditional Authority

The single most important source of authority in Algerian equestrianism prior to the arrival of the French was undoubtedly the Qu’ran. Although the region’s horse culture was inevitably syncretic, having been influenced by a series of mounted invaders from the Romans onwards, the Arabs’ conquest of the Maghreb in the seventh century meant that the horse became established as a compelling emblem of Islam’s project of territorial and doctrinal expansion. Horses appear at several points in the sacred text, where they are typically described as a divine gift to man (e.g. Qu’ran 16:8). They feature strikingly in the *Surat Al-‘Anfāl*, sometimes known as “The Spoils of War”, and rendered in M.A.S. Abdel Haleem’s contemporary English translation as “Battle Gains”:

The disbelievers should not think they have won; they cannot escape. Prepare against them whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off [these] enemies of God and of yours, and warn others unknown to you but known to God. Whatever you give in God’s cause will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged. (Qu’ran 8:59-60; Abdel Haleem 2004, 185)

As previously noted, the linkage between cavalry and *jihad* is something which has durably marked the depiction of Islam’s encounter with the

West. It is a subject to which we will return when we examine the very special case of the Emir Abd el-Kader.² However, there is another important equestrian claim to authority that we need to consider at this point, namely its traditional reliance on genealogy, the fetishization of which has been central to the theory and practice of modern horse racing since its codification in England in the mid-eighteenth century.

Crucially, this sporting innovation was only made possible by the introduction of both bloodstock and expertise from the Arab-Islamic world. More particularly, the rise of the “English Thoroughbred”, the equine hybrid around which the modern racing industry is built, was critically dependent upon the genetic input of some two hundred horses brought from the Middle East and North Africa between 1650 and 1750. Donna Landry explains the circumstances of this decisive importation, together with its encouragement of new methods designed to establish and maintain the purity of equine ancestry, noting that:

[...] a potent infusion of Eastern blood transformed not only the equine gene pool in the British Isles but also ideas about horse breeding and record keeping [...].

[...] The origins of that pioneering English work of animal pedigree-keeping, the *General Stud-Book*, lay in the Syrian desert. (2009, 76-77)

This appropriation of non-European materials and methods would make possible new forms of control in the equestrian sphere. It additionally reinforced an even more fundamental annexation, which was conventionally legitimized by reference to fundamentally complementary Eastern and Western models of blood-based patriarchy. For while the abiding genetic legacy of brood mares in modern racing is beyond question, the genealogical model used to determine bloodlines both in traditional and “sportized” equestrian cultures remains essentially patrilineal. This male-dominated schema was consequently to the fore as Europe’s ruling elites embraced racing on the English model, with the perceived nobility of finely bred horses appealing, in Georges Vigarello’s formulation, to “la nostalgie des valeurs aristocratiques: l’investissement sur la race, une reconnaissance tenace de la différence, la perfection imaginaire par le sang” (1995, 194). Having been enthusiastically developed in France under the July Monarchy, senior cavalry officers quickly looked to extend the new sport to Algeria, where the patrilineal authority of the crown was embodied by the Duc d’Orléans and the Duc d’Aumale, royal princes and celebrated horsemen who would play a prominent role in the French military campaign. The former would be

best remembered for his equestrian statue, unveiled in Algiers in 1845, which became emblematic of colonial rule (Dupuy 1973, 122-127). The latter would personally accept the honorable surrender of Abd el-Kader at Sidi-Brahim, on 23 December 1847, in token of which the Emir presented the prince with his own mount (Etienne and Pouillon 2003, 53).

The assumed equestrian kinship underpinning such symbolic displays was itself predicated upon non-conflicting conceptions of masculinity, as well as of both equine excellence and political legitimacy. Such thinking would subsequently inform the so-called *politique des grands chefs*, as the French army sought to rally Algerian tribal leaders to the colonial cause on the basis of their supposedly shared aristocracy, as expressed in a common equestrian enthusiasm. At the most basic level, such attempts to engage indigenous elites depended for their effectiveness on the perceived overlap between the structures of ancestry and authority in place in the respective cultures of colonizer and colonized, both of which were traditionally male-centered. On the French side, and as in the British Empire, the equestrian pursuits of the elite, including particularly army officers, contributed to the colonial expression of “a viripotent masculinity which reflected and sustained a natural hierarchical order of superordinate and subordinate masculinities” (Mangan and McKenzie 2008, 1062). On the Algerian one, religious authority sanctioned local expressions of masculine dominance, including particularly those rooted in genealogy; as Combs-Schilling has argued: “Islam did not invent patriarchy and patrilineality, but it did make them sacred” (1989, 58). This sacralization of masculinity is most visible in the tradition of the *sharif*, which leads us now to consider the Emir Abd el-Kader’s religious mobilization of local equestrian culture against the invader.

Horses and Horsemen in the Resistance to the French Invasion

The heroic campaign of armed resistance mounted by Abd el-Kader between 1832 and 1847 was critically dependent upon the aristocratic kinship ties in place at the time of the invasion. In the Emir’s case, these tribal affiliations were powerfully reinforced by his family’s claims to be *shurafa’* (sing. *sharif*), that is to say, descended from the Prophet, based on attested genealogy and thus sacralized patrilineality. As Ahmed Bouyerdene observes: “This nobility by blood was often associated with the religious nobility, which lent a family further legitimacy” (2012, 10). Abd el-Kader’s sharifian authority was reinforced by links, again through his father, to the Qadiriyya Sufi order, and thus to a locally specific variety