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**Western Education and the Rise of Early Elite
Nationalism in Algeria**

التعليم الغربي وظهور مقاومة النخبة في الجزائر

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Abstract in English: Much has been said about nationalism and its roots in North Africa. Yet, few studies could consider the role of the elite in shaping national consciousness and fuelling mass protests. In Algeria, like other parts of colonial Africa, the French introduced western education with the premise of forming an elite agency that could help French colonialism and provide the necessary basics for the intellectual and cultural indoctrination of the people. Yet, this process could not reach its objectives because the new emerging Western educated elite began questioning the political, economic and cultural basics of French colonialism. Based on a conceptual historical approach and a historical research methodology, this article tries to examine the evolution of western education in colonial Algeria and the emergence of the educated elite. The article further probes into the nature of elite nationalism and their early manifestations of nationalism that created a collective psyche among Algerians of the need to challenge French presence and authority. The findings reveal that the emerging Algerian Western educated elite who were a product of colonial education stipulated the growth of an early nationalism that questioned the basics of French presence in Algeria up to 1962.

Keywords: western education; elite nationalism; colonial Algeria; national identity; protests; early nationalism

الملخص باللغة العربية: لقد قيل الكثير عن القومية وجذورها في شمال إفريقيا. ومع ذلك، فإن القليل من الدراسات يمكن أن تنظر في دور النخبة في تشكيل الوعي الوطني، وتأجيج الاحتجاجات الجماهيرية، في الجزائر، مثل أجزاء أخرى من إفريقيا المستعمرة، قدم الفرنسيون التعليم الغربي بفرضية تشكيل وكالة النخبة التي يمكن أن تساعد الاستعمار الفرنسي، وتوفر الأساسيات اللازمة

للتلقين الفكري والثقافي للشعب. ومع ذلك، لم تتمكن هذه العملية من تحقيق أهدافها لأن النخبة الغربية الناشئة الجديدة المثقفة بدأت في التشكيك في الأساسيات السياسية والاقتصادية والثقافية للاستعمار الفرنسي. استنادًا إلى نهج تاريخي مفاهيمي ومنهج بحث تاريخي، تحاول هذه المقالة دراسة تطور التعليم الغربي في الجزائر الاستعمارية وظهور النخبة المثقفة. يتعمق المقال في طبيعة النزعة القومية النخبوية ومظاهرها المبكرة للقومية التي خلقت نفسية جماعية بين الجزائريين حول الحاجة إلى تحدي الوجود والسلطة الفرنسية. تكشف النتائج أن النخبة الجزائرية الناشئة المثقفة في الغرب، والتي كانت نتاجًا للتعليم الاستعماري نصت على نمو قومية مبكرة شككت في أساسيات الوجود الفرنسي في الجزائر حتى عام 1962.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التربية الغربية؛ قومية النخبة؛ الجزائر المستعمرة؛ الهوية الوطنية؛ الاحتجاجات؛ القومية المبكرة

Introduction: Though it seems that western education was the only type of education in colonial Algeria, pre-colonial Algeria knew other types of education that existed long before the introduction of western education. These types included traditional and Islamic education which both come under the name of indigenous education. The latter was a training for life. Though apprentices could not have regular classes, apprentices were equipped with the skills that could enable them to do housekeeping and motherhood obligations for girls and farming and other manly responsibilities for boys. Along this type of education, there existed Islamic education which could have been said to have a great influence along all aspects of life of people at the time. Mainly as a religion and a holly thing, Islamic education was based on both teaching spirituality that is the relation between God and man and secondly rules and guidelines telling about how a man or woman should practice religious rules and interact with the surroundings. Yet, these types were challenged by the introduction of western education which was first a missionary responsibility then a highly government concern.

Whether a missionary activity or a government matter, western education opted for the creation of western educated elite. The elite could have been said to promote the French interests in colonial Algeria and be as a medium to diffuse French language and culture. However, as part of

their highly contact with ideas of nationalism¹ and rights of people to attain freedom, the elite began a strong and irresistible nationalism. Their early nationalism used all the means at hand to join the fragmented Algerian nation under one national identity and aims. Based on this background, the article tries to answer this question:

1- How did Western education stipulate the growth of elite nationalism?: In this regard, the researcher assumes that Western education had a very crucial role in forming the basics of elite nationalism. As such, this article tries to examine the changing role of the elite and their nationalism. These changes demarcate a rich source of inspiration that brought people of Algeria to denounce their rejection to colonial monopoly.

1-The Development of Education in Pre-colonial Algeria: Education in the Maghreb and notably Algeria was not a new phenomenon. It is said that people of the Maghreb were introduced to Islam and the Arabic language through what is known as the Umayyad² expansion (647-709). The Umayyad could have reached all part of the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) and successfully introduced people of the region into formal education and schooling. Few records reached us about the nature of education allotted to apprentices (Bennoune 223).

The Mosque or “Djemaa” was a place for praying and regular schooling at the same time. According to one of the most acknowledged and highly intellectual figure of the region Abd Arrahman Ibn Khaldoun, the first mosque was built during the reign of Idris I (1227-1232) who could have made the mosques as centers for learning about the Arabic language and the Quran at later stages. Apprentices also learned Quran through recitation and were accustomed to strict matters which had to do with Islamic duties like praying. Wooden boards were used to memorize instructions and verses of the Quran. Though there were meager reports about education at the time especially from Arab scholar, there is still

1- Nationalism is an economic, social and political system that seeks the interest of the nation by guarantee that a nation has its self-government and independence.

2- The Umayyad Refers to the second Caliphate set after the death of the Prophet Muhammad peace upon him. Exited between 661 and 750 C.E and had great impact in the expansion of Islam throughout the region and reached Africa and the regions of the Maghreb.

some evidence that showed the existence of a well organized system of education. According to Thomas Shaw, a British traveler and intellectual, the education system in Algeria in 1738 was obligatory and boys and girls attended schools at the age of six. Though people of remote areas or as known as the Bedouin¹ were not allowed the chance to be educated, the Moors and the Turks could have reached good level of education and most of them knew how to read and write (Chabou 325)

Home schooling was also a feature of the pre-colonial education system. This maybe a result of Islamic rules which obliged a kind of separation between girls and boys at a certain age. During the early nineteenth century, home teaching was a common practice among the Berber tribes and Arab tribes of the region. Usually, parents were responsible for teaching their children. In some cases teaching was allotted to older brothers. It was even stated that among rich families that a private teachers took charge of teaching and a special place in the house was attributed to the maintenance of regular sessions. Indeed, the situation of education was astonishing that even the French had a very surprising comments of the current status of education. According to the military officer M. Rozet.

The Moorish people, in their entirety, are likely more educated than the French people are. Almost all men can read, write and do some math; there are several public schools near the administrative district in Algiers where the children are taught at age four (Bennoune 236)

The positive view about education was not only about the number of apprentices who could read and write but also about the increasing number of school establishments. In a record, the historian Marcel Émeret (1899-1985) noted the following: There are countless primary schools (Masjid, Maktab) set up in small buildings that belong to the 'Habus'; every mosque has its own... We know that in 1837 in Constantine there were 86 Qur'an schools, which were attended by 1350 students. Tlemcen, a city with 12 000 to 15 000 inhabitants, had 50 schools... In each 'Douar' there was a tent, the 'Cheria', that served as a study room, with an instructor 'Mu'addib' who was selected by the Scheik of the 'Douar' or 'Djemaa' (group of notables) (Bennoune 237)

1- Originally an Arabic word, Bedouin refers to people who live outside the country and depend on their living on travelling as to secure water and food.

This existing development in the education infrastructure and instruction, however, did not last for long as the French were about to make their conquest to Algeria by 1830 and were in a firm footing to introduce western education which could be said to have molded the minds of people to accept French culture and religion as the basics for modernity and civilization.

2-The French, Western Education and the Emergence of the Elite:

French Algeria was a term used frequently by metropolitan officials and experts whose interests was the creation of a French Empire which could not only join people of the colonial world to one geographical entity that was the French Empire, but it also surmounted to work a full process of indoctrination of the colonial psyche to be servants of the French in their zeal to dominate more areas of wealth. In 1887, a conference was held at the *École Professionnel* in Bordeaux, France. This conference outlined the intent and objectives of the education for Algerians in particular and people of the Empire in general. The metropolitan officials and experts insisted that “It is necessary to deal with [the indigenous population], to work to steer it around to us, to ensure it becomes ours, so that it may be French one day” (Maurice 259). This mindset played a major role in shaping French interests in Algeria and in formulating education policies of the time to create agents of trust to the colonial machinery in Algeria.

As such, assimilation¹ policy became at the hub of education policy designers. Mainly driven by the civilizing mission that opted for uplifting people of Africa from a life style that was seen as backward, the assimilationists sought the diffusion of French civilization and culture. In this regards, education architects favored French ways of life and made blatant attempts to ridicule, or suppress Algerians life style and culture. For the French, Africans in general and Algerians in particular needed to follow a French model as to escape inferiority and backwardness prevailing in their life. According to Michael Crowder, the French attempts to civilize Africans and implant new ideals would be the source of survival for many Algerians. He wrote that Algerians were [people]

1- was a common policy introduced by the colonial powers in Africa as to help indigenous people integrate into European life and culture. The French were the first to encourage assimilation through education as to create Algerians ready to accept French presence.

without any civilization worthy of the name, constantly at war with one another and fortunate to have been put in touch with the fruits of French civilization. Thus, French books describe the conquest of Africa as la paix Française [French peace] and her early administration as l'oeuvre civilatrice [civilizing work]...(Crowder 212)

Schools thus were mediums to teach about French history and literature. There were also subjects about philosophy of Empire and the need to understand the necessity of becoming French citizens. This further was accompanied by the encouragement of apprentices to carry out their studies abroad and particularly in French universities as to make their indoctrination complete.

Making the Algerians acquire French culture and life style was accompanied by a strong desire to use the French language as a medium of instruction. Assimilation no doubt was a force that needed not only French ideals but a language that could work as a tool to embody these ideas in their cultural and social contexts. For the French, a mere reliance on Christianity was not enough until they made Algerians speak French more than the French themselves. In this regard and based on the inability of Christianity in fulfilling a complete assimilation, Jules Cambon, the head of education in Tunisia, wrote in 1882: We cannot count on religion to achieve assimilation; [the Arabs] will never convert to Christianity. But as they learn our language, this will introduce them to a multitude of European ideas. (Judge 315)

Colonial subject's minds were seen as a "tabula rasa"¹ where French ideals could be staffed through French language. This process would make the colonial subjects understand the merits of French culture and thus help the French authorities do their plans easily. Though, meager portions of the population had the opportunity to attend French schools, the ones who could attend had shown relatively the success of the education policies of the time.

1- Based on the assumption that indigenous people had no faculties of reasoning and thinking, colonial authorities in Algeria and Africa in general considered their minds as empty spaces that should be loaded with European manners and life style.

The new emerging Western educated elite¹ or as they were named European Algerians showed signs of French life style. Most of them tried to identify with the French culture and life style through reading French books and journals, reading French literature and most importantly participation in a number of clubs where discussions about French history and ideas about democracy and liberation were the center of debates. Their identification, however, with French life style and Metropolitan France was accompanied by a blatant attempt to suppress or distance themselves from indigenous people and culture. They tried constantly to maintain their superiority over the indigenous people and culture. Yet, partly because of the influence of indigenous culture and the rejection by the French themselves, the elite found themselves in a dilemma. According to Ali Yedes, the elite “wanted to maintain their superiority over the indigenous people but they did not know any other life style except the one that was urging them, reluctantly or not, closer to the Arab/Berber population” (Tyler 238).

Though the elite tried hard to identify with Metropolitan French, the situation turned upside down as they received harsh treatment from the colonial authorities and the Europeans as well. Mostly, the elite were considered as belonging to the indigenous population though had good quality of education. They were known as “the Pieds Noir” because of their distinct and most frustrating situation. The situation worsened to the degree that rejection reached even the elite who could have access to higher education in French universities. One of the elite described the menace of being rejected by Metropolitan French. He wrote: “In the metropole, people do not like us...the atmosphere is unbreathable: they puncture our tires. In Lyon, they even refused us a room in a hotel” (Tyler 240).

This account along many others stipulated more consciousness from the elite about the accuracy of French ideas of liberty and equality and reality before French presence and its hidden objectives. Consequently, the elite understood the need to start a revolution against French presence and provoked many protests against the established French political,

1- Western educated elite refers to a type of people who had a special education from colonial authorities. These people exhibit a distinct identity as a result of their education and contact with colonial authorities.

economic and cultural presence. Early elite nationalism could be said to have shaped a collective national identity that joined all masses of the population under one name, potentials and aspirations.

3-The Emergence of Elite Nationalism and Its Early Demands: Due to the high inferiority complex¹ the elite encountered during their early contacts with metropolitan French, nationalism seemed to have had variant demands. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Algerian youth, highly influenced by French culture and ideas, appeared to have called for the right of representations of Muslims in French assemblies in Algeria and France alike. They had also contributed to the formation of a set of organizations which had nationalistic outlooks like El Rashidia 1902, Salleh Bey Club 1907 and the Algerian Youth Club at Tlemcen. By 1911, however, their demands seemed to have other dimensions which included: election of the head of municipals, tax representation and equality and the increase in elite representation in French administration (Hill 125).

The outbreak of the First World War and its aftermaths seemed to have great impact on elite nationalism. By 1911, French authorities issued a law that obliged all people to participate willingly or not in the French military. The Elite saw the measure as injustice and once again showed the power of the stronger over the weak. One of these highly active figures was El Emir Khaled who was born in the capital city of Syria and had a French type of education. He had served in the French military for a while. He also participated in the war and was among the Algerian soldiers in 1915. He rejected French policy of assimilation that's why his activities took many forms including Pan-Arabism², liberal activities and socio-economic demands (Hill 126).

His active political career started in 1919. This was not sudden as he was able to attract the majority in the local elections of the city of Algiers. Later, El Emir Khaled could have had strong grounds to call for equality with the French. He drafted a letter to the American president Wilson where he expressed the main demands and potentials of his

1- A status where an individual feel unable to be like others in status. Usually, this inferiority goes beyond the physical influence to include an individual's psyche.

2- Means All-Arabs. An ideology that seeks for the unification of Arab nations under one aim and aspiration.

movement. He further helped found the organization of the Algerian Brothers and encouraged the youth for the formation of literary and cultural clubs. After a visit to Egypt, El Emir Khaled drafted a set of demands in 1924 that summarized his main objectives:

- 1- The right of Algerian Muslims of Freedom
- 2- the outlaw of measures that curtailed the Algerian citizens from having the same rights as the French
- 3- The right of Algerian Muslims of having the same number of representatives as the French settlers
- 4- The necessity of issuing an amnesty
- 5- The right of education and obligatory education enrollment
- 6- Equality in the participation in the military between the French and Algerians
- 7- The right to form organizations and open clubs
- 8- A separation between religion and the state
- 9- The right of Algerian workers of entry to France (Deming 354).

These demands along journalistic activities made El Emir Khaled nationalism among the very active movements that shaped a national consciousness among people of the need to challenge colonial authority and question the basics of French colonialism in Algeria.

Newspapers were another medium for the elite to voice their demands. The newspapers worked as a channel between the elite in dispersing national ideas. That's why the majority of the elite were either editors or contributors in these newspapers. Among these newspapers was one created by Omar Ibn Kadour named "El Farouk"¹. Omar Ibn Kadour used the paper to show the Algerian Muslims situation and focused on the bitter experience of Algerian with French colonialism. Though the paper had great impact on people at the time, the French authorities banned it in 1914 because of an editorial entitled "the Quran" written by its president. Another important newspaper was El Hilal which was edited by a French named Filler. The Elite used the paper to agitate against the French discriminatory attitudes against Algerians. Though the paper could not operate for a long period, the editorials issued in six months could have great impact in letting people know about the elites

1- For more information about the newspaper and others mentioned in this article see Hill, J. N. C, "Identity in Algerian Politics : the Legacy of Colonial Rule".

and their demands. In 1911, there appeared also a newspaper named “El Rashidi” which was purely elitist in nature. As the journal was centered in Jijel, a city in the East of Algeria, many of its topics were local until after few editorials the paper started to have wide range of issues that have nationalistic tastes (Hill 258).

In addition to newspapers, the elite used clubs for nationalistic aims. The elite choice of the creation of clubs was not sudden. As French authorities placed strict measures on the formation of newspapers, the elite found on the clubs another way of showing their grievances. Notable of these organizations was one established by Ibn El Touhami in 1911. Under the name “El Tawfikia”¹, the organization called for equality between Algerians and the French. It had also contributed in the holding a number of lectures about Islam and laws of Islam. Other lectures were both in Arabic and French languages and took different themes pertaining to culture and science. Moreover, Saleh Bey Club was another important club established in 1906. The club could establish many branches in Tlemcen, Constantine and Anneba and mold people attention to demand their rights (Deming 125).

Coupled with newspapers and clubs, the elite saw in official correspondences and diplomacy another form of protest. Though this was not new, the correspondences centered on showing peoples grievances and having more formal ways of contacting the colonial administration. Besides these correspondences, the elite appointed delegations to work inside Algeria and abroad to have more voice. In 1908, the elite sent a delegation to Paris to express people needs for socio-economic changes. The delegates met the French president Georges Clemenceau and gave him a correspondence about the Algerian situation. The delegates further insisted that before Algerians could be recruited in the French military they had to attain their political rights. Indeed, these forms of protests made elite nationalism the only nationalism that shaped awareness among the masses of the need to question colonial authority.

Conclusion: The article focuses on western education and the rise of early elite nationalism in Algeria. Through a scrutiny of French education policies in Algeria, the article reveals that these policies introduced

1- For more information about the newspaper and others mentioned in this article see Deming Habiba, “Language and Politics: A New Revisionism”

people of Algeria into new type of education that was different to what was known in pre-colonial Algeria. Western education and its content also imposed French culture and education as an attempt to create a Algerian people with French minds. Yet, what happened was the reverse. As a product of French ideas and lifestyle, the elite who were educated in French schools revolted against French policies and formed an early nationalism that was strong and organized. Through newspapers, clubs and diplomatic delegations, the elite began joining the masses under one voice to speak about their grievances and retain the lost dignity and manhood that was suppressed under French colonialism. Their early protests could be said to have shaped the basics of mass nationalism that brought an end to the French presence in Algeria by 1962.

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