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# The Roots Of Political Activism In Algeria At The Beginning Of The Twentieth Century

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## Abstract:

Since the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, the initial reaction adopted by the Algerians was armed struggle. This armed resistance was seen as the effective and only means to resist the oppressive occupation and defend Algerian identity and sovereignty.

However, over time and with the evolution of events, there has been a shift in the resistance approach. With the dawn of the twentieth century, Algeria witnessed a transition from armed resistance to political resistance. This political resistance was manifested in the strategy of using political work, diplomacy, cultural movements, and social movements to achieve freedom and independence. Despite this shift in tactics, Algerians did not lose faith in the justice of their cause and the restoration of their national rights. They continued the struggle for freedom, independence, and national dignity, whether through armed struggle or political resistance, which will be discussed in this research paper.

**Keywords:** Algeria, resistance, political, parties, associations.

## Introduction :

Algeria faced a fierce colonial onslaught since the 1830s, where those colonial powers annulled the national rights of Algerian citizens, in addition to seizing its economic resources and wealth. The aggression extended beyond political, economic, and cultural exploitation to encompass a national and civilizational aggression targeting individuals themselves through killings, exile, displacement, and persecution.

Algerians, in general, initially responded to the shock of military occupation by primarily relying on armed struggle to reclaim their national rights. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a shift from armed resistance to political resistance. Nevertheless, they did not lose faith in the justice of the cause they were fighting for.

### First: Factors that constitute the national elite:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Algeria witnessed significant development through the emergence of various political organizations. The appearance of these organizations was influenced by both internal and external factors, which can be summarized in the following points:

- The awakening of the Arab East and the call of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani<sup>1</sup> and Muhammad Abduh<sup>2</sup> for Islamic revival, which had supporters and followers in Algeria as it emerged from the call of the Islamic University movement.

- The entry of some Eastern newspapers and magazines into Algeria, despite the strict control exercised by the French authorities, such as the magazine "Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa," where Jamal al-Din al-Afghani presented enlightened ideas, playing a role in educating Muslims<sup>3</sup>.

- Visiting Sheikh Muhammad Abduh to Algeria in 1903, where he spoke to Algerians about Islamic reform and the revival in the Near East, delivering lectures and lessons. His visit left a lasting impression in the minds of some prominent figures and played a decisive role in the revitalization of the Islamic intellectual movement in Algeria<sup>4</sup>.

- The emergence and growth of the Algerian elite represented by the group of elites and the conservative bloc consisting of scholars, religious figures, defenders, and veteran warriors. Some of these reformers believed in the concept of the Islamic University, advocating for the spread of education, progress, and tolerance.

- The prominent figure of Charles Jonnart, the governor-general of Algeria, an expert in Algerian affairs, who advocated for treating Algeria as a special colony and preserving Algerian traditions and customs. Under his governance, Algeria witnessed new atmospheres that allowed the Algerian renaissance to manifest in various aspects.

- The return of some Algerian intellectuals from the Arab East who played a crucial role in rekindling the Arab-Islamic awakening in Algeria at the beginning of the twentieth century. These individuals from scientific missions were at the forefront of the Algerian resurgence<sup>5</sup>.

In the early 20th century, amidst the challenging conditions faced by Algerian society, a group of educated Algerians who had studied in France emerged, returning to Algeria to resist French colonization through peaceful means starting in 1910. Some of the prominent members included the lawyer Ahmed Bouderbala, the financial deputy Haj Amar, and the journalist Sadek Dandan. They advocated for reform in accordance with the 1865 law, which aimed at achieving justice between the locals and the settlers. Their intention was in line with the idea of the Islamic University previously advocated by Jamal

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<sup>1</sup> Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) was one of the prominent figures in the Arab Renaissance era and a proponent of Islamic renewal. Born in Asadabad, he learned the Arabic language and memorized the Quran there. He traveled to India in 1869 and then to Egypt in 1870. In 1883, he published the newspaper "al-Urwah al-Wuthqa" in Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammed Abdu (1849-1905) was born in the village of Mahallet Nasr in Egypt. He joined Al-Azhar in 1866 and obtained his Alamiyya certificate in 1877. He also contributed to the Arab revolution. He co-founded the newspaper "al-Urwah al-Wuthqa" with al-Afghani and established the Revival Society. Abdu authored several works including "Message of Tawhid," "Islam and Christianity," and "Reforming the Sharia Courts."

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Miyassi: "Inspirations of the Algerian National Movement 1900-1914," in the magazine "Al-Masadir," Issue 06, Algeria, 2002, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Abu al-Qasim Saadallah: "The Algerian National Movement, 1900-1930," Vol. 2, Part 3, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1992, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ibrahim Miyassi: The same reference as above, pp. 129-131.

al-Din al-Afghani, as they received support from the Ottoman Empire<sup>6</sup>. This group had newspapers that defended their rights and interests<sup>7</sup>. As their ideas evolved and grew, they worked on establishing an organization called "Alger la Blanche" (The White Alger) in 1912.<sup>8</sup>

### **Secondly: Political currents:**

The political movement in Algeria crystallized into two prominent currents:

A - Conservative Current: This current consists of scholars (religious figures), their students, veteran warriors, Sufi leaders, some feudal lords, and farmers. They did not have a clear organizational structure or a specific institution but rather formed a collective intellectual gathering where they unified their demands. They advocated for equality in parliamentary representation, the abolition of taxes, and the promotion of the ideas and principles of the Islamic University under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II. They opposed naturalization, compulsory conscription, called for the repeal of the Indigenous Law and the Assimilation Law, and emphasized the need to return to Islamic judicial system, respect Islamic traditions, freedom of migration, especially towards the Arab East<sup>9</sup>.

B - Elite Current: This current stood in political and social contrast to the conservatives in most instances. Their demands centered around political rights equality, including the complete abolition of the Indigenous Law and full parliamentary representation for Algerians. This current aimed to unify Algeria with France, adopting Western ideas and culture. The French writer Jean Jaurès said of them: "They are a group lost between two civilizations, between the Arab civilization and the Western civilization." The initial beginnings of this current emerged in 1912<sup>10</sup>.

We also find that the Algerian Renaissance had other manifestations, which can be summarized as follows:

**1. Birth of the Algerian Press Movement:** Omar Rassem<sup>11</sup> referred to it as "The Majesty," indicating that the press is the translator of nations. It is the greatest means

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<sup>6</sup> Alalal al-Fassi: "Independence Movements in the Arab Maghreb," 1st Edition, Abdessalam Jassous, Tangier, Morocco, pp. 10-12.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed Tawfik al-Madani: "Life of Struggle (Memoirs)," Part One, in Tunisia 1905-1925, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algeria, 1976, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Yahia Bouaziz: "Colonial Domination Policy and the Algerian National Movement (1830-1954)," Diwan al-Matbuat al-Jamiya, Algeria, 1985, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed Al-Khatib: "The Algerian Muslim Scholars Association and Its Reformatory Impact in Algeria," National Book Foundation, Algeria, 1985, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Claude collot et jean robert henry : le mouvement National Algérien .TEXTES ,1912 - 1954 ,2em ,ED ,o. P ,u .Algeret Lharmttan ,PARIS 1981 ,P23 .

<sup>11</sup> Omar Rassem (1884-1959) received his education at the Tha'alibiyya School and started working for the newspaper "Al-Mobsher" in 1898. He also corresponded with several newspapers. In 1912, he joined the newspaper "Al-Haqq" and a year later founded the newspaper "Thul-Fiqar." After 1923, he turned towards the art of illumination and is considered the founder of the Algerian school in this field. One of his notable works is the manuscript "Scholars of Algeria." For further information, refer to: Nasser al-Din Saidani and Sheikh

whose benefits reach public services. Its function is one of the most significant roles in Islam, as it is the most precise tool for educating people and advancing nations. It instills in the minds of the free the spirit of virtue and vigilance. Algeria was acquainted with Arabic newspapers in an early period, although initially colonial, it quickly transitioned to a national identity at the beginning of the 20th century. Several titles emerged, such as "Kawkab Ifriqiya" in 1907, "Algeria" in 1908, "Al-Muslim" in 1909, "Al-Islam" in 1910, "Al-Farouk" in 1912, and "Dhu Fiqaar" in 1913. With the appearance of Arabic journalism in Algeria, it paved the way for enlightened national pens that contributed to a political awakening embodied in the Algerian nationalist movement<sup>12</sup>.

**2. Revival and Promotion of the Intellectual and Cultural Heritage of the Algerian People:** At the beginning of the 20th century, Algeria witnessed an intellectual and cultural renaissance that appealed to the mind, aimed at self-construction, and sought the collective memory. Several studies written by Algerians shed light on significant Algerian historical issues, including works such as "The Compilation by Ibn Ammar" in 1902, "Ibn Maryam" in 1907, "The Journey of Al-Wartilani" in 1908, and "The Encyclopedia by Sheikh Al-Hafnawi" in 1907 titled "Introduction of Descendants to the Men of the Past"<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, Sheikh Mohammed ibn Abi Shanab contributed to the dissemination of some manuscripts and translated some of them into French, including "The Journey to Al-Hijaz" and four dictionaries of the biographies of scholars and saints<sup>14</sup>.

Here is the translation of the provided text:

**3. Emergence of Reformist Leaders:** There were reformist leaders in Algeria who were influenced either by the call for reform in the Middle East or by Western thought through European civilization. They constituted a group of thinkers and reformers, the most important of whom were Sheikh Abdelkader El Maghawri, one of the conservative reformist leaders in the city of Algiers, and Sheikh Abdelhalim Ben Smaya, also known as "Al-Mouloud Ben El Mohoub," who played a significant role in the Algerian Renaissance through his scientific activities, teaching, and dissemination of social and cultural articles in newspapers and magazines. This led to the birth of the reformist movement during the second decade of the 20th century, led by Sheikh Abdelhamid Ibn Badis and his colleagues such as Sheikh El Bashir El Ibrahimy, El Tayeb El Okbi, El Amin L'Amoudi, El Arabi El Tebessi, and El Mubarak El Mili.

**4. Establishment of Algerian National Clubs and Associations:** These clubs and associations were established with political, social, and cultural objectives. They operated like schools in terms of education, guidance, and teaching. These associations and clubs served as platforms for secret political discussions and also as social, sports, and cultural meeting places. Additionally, there were scouting clubs. While they appeared to be cultural associations, their true goals were political.<sup>15</sup> **Thirdly: National Associations:**

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Bouamran: "Dictionary of Moroccan Celebrities," University of Algiers, Algeria, 1995, pp. 231-233.

<sup>12</sup> Ibrahim Miyassi: The same reference as above, pp. 143, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed Meriouch: "A Study on: Conditions and Features of the Algerian Awakening 1870-1914," Higher Teachers' School, Unpublished, Algeria, 2007, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim Miyassi: The same reference as above, pp. 141, 142.

<sup>15</sup> Ibrahim Miyassi: The same reference as above, pp. 134-138.

One of the most important associations established at the beginning of the 20th century is:

- **Al-Rachidia Association:** This was the first genuine association that emerged at the start of the year 1908. It was a fraternal association for former students of French-Arabic schools in the city of Algiers. Its aim was to provide assistance to its members, particularly by encouraging them in their studies. This association had several branches across Algeria, with the branch in Algiers having 251 members in the year 1910<sup>16</sup>. Some prominent figures associated with it included Ibn Tihami, Dr. Ibn Brehmat, and some honorary members from the French community<sup>17</sup>.

- **Al-Tawfikia Association:** This association was founded in the capital city of Algiers in the year 1908 and was renewed in 1911. The general aim of the association was to bring together Algerians who were eager to educate themselves and develop their scientific and social ideas. Dr. Ibn Tihami Belqasem served as the president of this association, with his assistants being Mr. Soualh Mohamed, a teacher at the Algiers High School, and Mr. Branki Mohamed.<sup>18</sup>

- **Al-Talia Association:** This was the first sports association established by young people at the beginning of the year 1895. It consisted of graduates from French schools, including doctors, teachers, and lawyers. Prominent members included Dr. Ibn Tihami and Mohamed Soualh. The association aimed to educate the new generation soundly and demonstrate the capabilities of Algerian elements in various sports. They sought to highlight the intellectual and athletic potential of Algerian youth through this initiative.<sup>19</sup>

-**Salah Bey Club:** Founded in the year 1907 in Constantine under the name of Literary, Scientific, Economic, and Social Studies, its president was a French employee named "Arib." Other members included individuals like Ibn Mohoub, Mustafa Bachtarzi, and Mohammed Ben Badis. By the year 1910, the club had around 1700 members, with 500 of them registered for studies. It had numerous branches in several Algerian cities.<sup>20</sup>

since the treacherous French occupation of Algerian lands and the accompanying arbitrary policies aimed at draining and plundering Algerian resources on one hand, and on the other hand, solidifying their presence in Algeria through a series of oppressive laws and oppressive practices against the innocent Algerian people, involving plunder, killings, and land confiscations.

On the other hand, the Algerian resistance managed to stand up against the enemy, expressing its rejection of colonial presence on its lands. Although it couldn't expel the enemy outright, it succeeded in slowing down or delaying French expansion and encroachment into the interior regions of Algeria. Despite this, Algerians were not

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<sup>16</sup> Abu al-Qasim Saadallah: "The Algerian National Movement, 1900-1930," Vol. 2, Part 3, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1992, p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed Sari: "Figures and Issues from the Contemporary History of Algeria," Arab Printing House, Ghardaia, Algeria, 2004, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Archives de la préfecture d'Alger, dossier n° =231

<sup>19</sup> Al-Jama Khemri: "The Movement of Algerian and Tunisian Youth (1900-1930): A Comparative Historical and Political Study," PhD thesis, Department of History, Mentouri University, Constantine, 2002, p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> Mahfoud kaddache:histoire du nationalisme,tome 02.S.N.E.D,Alger,1981. p75

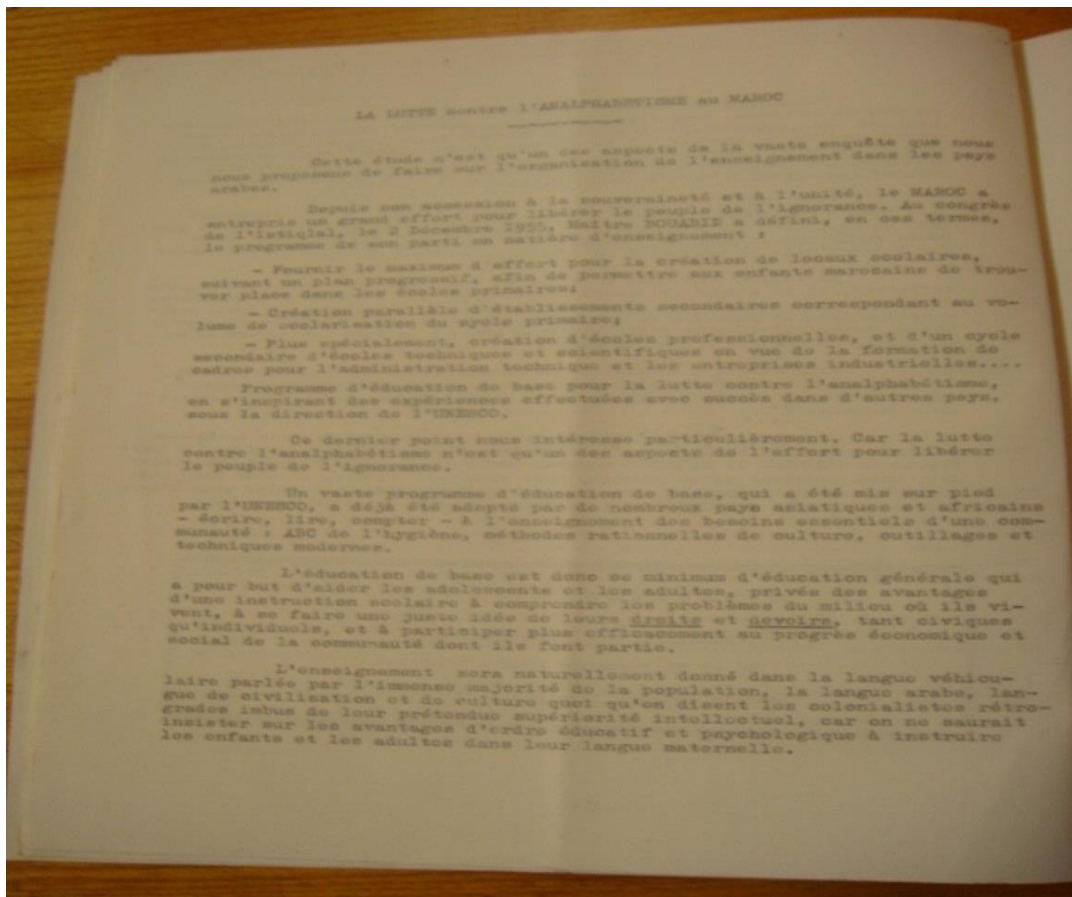
deterred from leading another form of resistance, namely political resistance, using new mechanisms and methods.

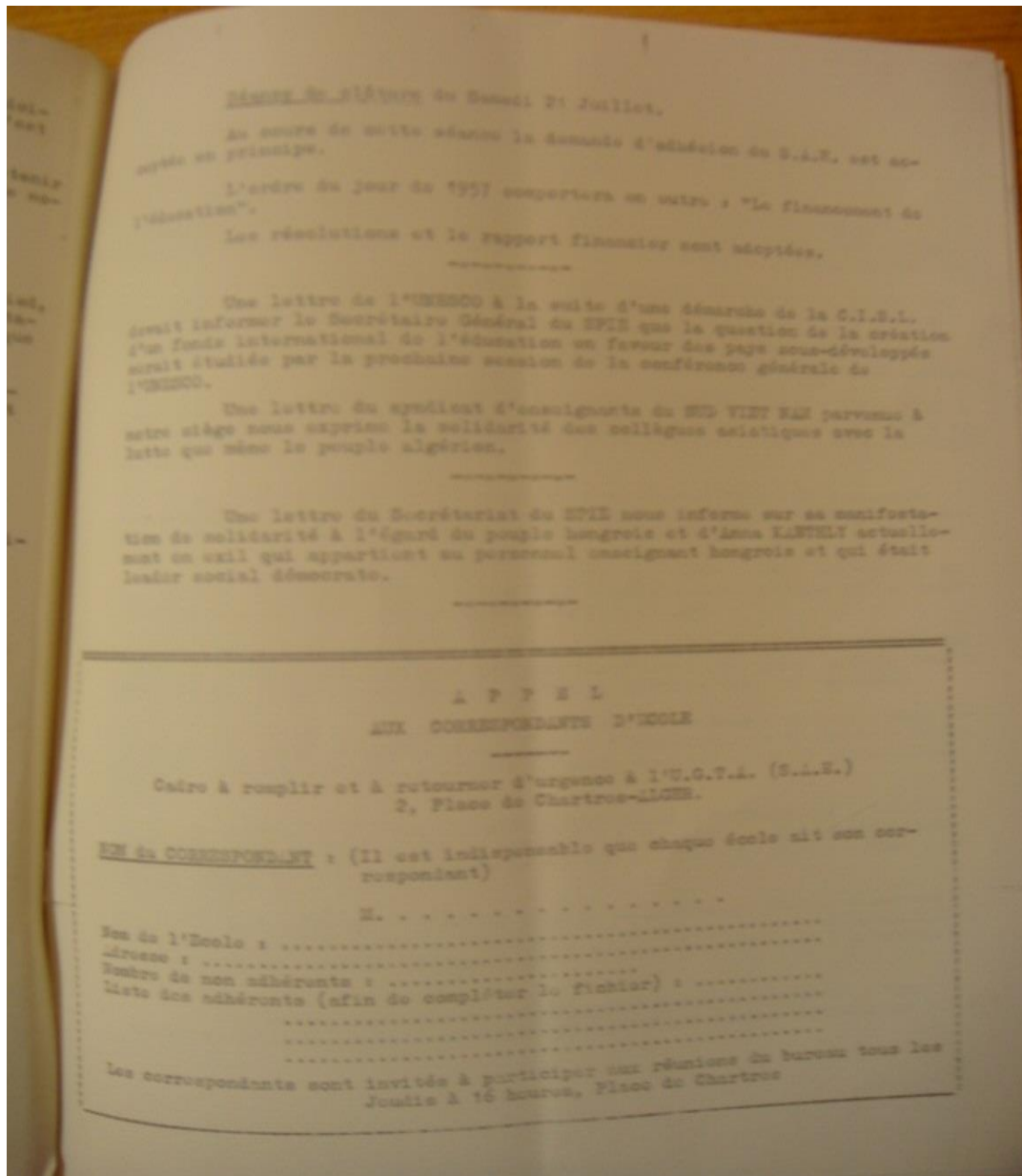
### Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is evident that Algeria endured the hardships of colonization due to its brutal policies, oppressive practices, and arbitrary acts on individuals, firmly establishing its control over all political, economic, social, and even cultural aspects of the countries in the Maghreb region, steering them according to its agendas. This resulted in grave consequences for the Maghreb countries.

On the other hand, free nationalists managed to express their rejection of colonial presence in their countries through various means, notably armed resistance initially as a natural reaction, followed by political resistance that particularly emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, driven by a set of considerations as mentioned earlier.

### Appendices:





### les archives d'autre mer, Aix- en Provence- France, boîte n°s3/16

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