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The Intellectual Elite in Ottoman Algeria
-Said Gueddoura as a Model-
النخبة المثقفة في الجزائر العثمانية
-سعيد قدورة أنموذجا-

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مخبر جمع وتوثيق الشعر الشعبي الجزائري من العهد العثماني حتى القرن العشرين
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Abstract:

This research paper aims to illuminate the diverse roles played by the intellectual elite in Algeria during the Ottoman period, represented by one of the era's most renowned scholarly figures, Said Gueddoura. By maintaining the overarching historical context, this study provides a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with the intellectual elite and connects them to various phenomena that occurred throughout the Ottoman presence in Algeria. Among the most significant aspects examined are the prevailing political and administrative systems, the phenomenon of scholarly families and houses, and the cultural and social roles these individuals played. The paper also explores their relationships with the existing political authority. Additionally, this study addresses the conceptual challenges related to the term "elite" and investigates the potential for its application within the historical period under review. The conclusion posits that Said Gueddoura is considered among the elite of Algerian society in that era.

Keywords: Said Gueddoura, Scholarly Families, Elite, Algeria.

المخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى التعرف على مختلف الأدوار التي لعبتها النخبة المثقفة في الجزائر إبان العهد العثماني، ممثلة في واحد من أشهر الشخصيات العلمية آنذاك، وهي شخصية "سعيد قدورة"، مع الحفاظ على السياق التاريخي العام الذي يمكننا من فهم أعمق لإشكالية النخبة المثقفة، وربطها بمختلف الظواهر التي صاحبها خلال فترة التواجد العثماني بالجزائر.

و من أبرزها النظام السياسي والإداري القائم، و ظاهرة الأسر و البيوتات العلمية، و الدور الثقافي و الاجتماعي الذي لعبه أفرادها، دون أن ننسى علاقتهم بالسلطة السياسية القائمة. مع محاولة ضبط إشكالية المفاهيم المرادفة لمصطلح "النخبة" و البحث عن إمكانية توظيفها في الفترة التاريخية موضوع الدراسة.

لنخلص إلى نتيجة هامة و هي اعتبار العالم الفقيه "سعيد قدورة" من صفوة المجتمع الجزائري في تلك الفترة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سعيد قدورة، الأسر العلمية، النخبة، الجزائر.

Introduction:

The concept of elite groups has played a pivotal role in shaping human societies throughout history. Power, influence, and decision-making are rarely, if ever, exercised by the entirety of a population. Instead, a distinct group—referred to as the elite—assumes the responsibility of leadership and governance. This phenomenon, which has attracted considerable scholarly attention in political science and sociology, particularly political sociology, reflects the inherent stratification within societies. This paper focuses on the cultural elite in Ottoman Algeria, examining the unique role they played in shaping intellectual, religious, and social dynamics during a turbulent historical period. The central question addressed is: How did the cultural elite in Ottoman Algeria influence the interplay between tradition, religion, and political authority, and what legacy did figures like Saïd Gheddoura leave in this context?

The Concept of the Elite:

An observer tracing the evolution of human societies notes a crucial idea: authority cannot be exercised by everyone indiscriminately. There must be a group, class, or minority entrusted with leadership, decision-making, and influencing societal trajectories. This group is known as the "elite" a term that has drawn significant interest from researchers in politics and sociology, especially within political sociology (Alaq, 2017). In its broad sense, the Arabic term "النخبة" (elite or select) signifies the essence or the best part of something. The word "الصفوة" (the chosen or purest part) denotes the distilled essence, similar to "صفوة من الماء" meaning a small amount of water. The root "انتخب" (to elect or choose) relates to the act of selection, from which the term "النخبة" originates, referring to a group of individuals chosen for their distinct roles. (Saghoure, 2014).

The concept of the elite has been subject to extensive methodological, ideological, and philosophical debate, differing across periods and contexts. The Social Sciences dictionary notes that elite membership can sometimes be hereditary in some societies, where individuals born into privileged lineages enjoy status by birthright.

Defining a single, comprehensive definition of the elite is challenging due to its association with different historical periods and contexts. There are many classifications: political elite, bureaucratic elite, military elite, religious elite, symbolic elite, business elite, feminist elite, and lastly, the cultural or intellectual elite.

This study, however, focuses on the cultural elite to link it with the historical figure under study, respecting the temporal context and its specific conditions (Alaq, 2017).

The Cultural Elite:

Researcher Fatima Zahra Toubal argues that the concept of the cultural elite is a crucial subject in contemporary historical studies, especially those concerning modern Algerian history. The concept itself represents a specific intellectual orientation in Ottoman Algerian society, reflected in synonymous terms indicating a distinct social hierarchy different from other social classes. (Toubal, 2018).

The intellectual elite in Ottoman Algeria represented a critical force aimed at breaking oppression and injustices and fostering a strategic rapprochement between society and political authority by spreading intellectual awareness aligned with societal values of the time. (Saadallah, 1998).

Our perceptions of society were based on traditional value judgments deeply rooted in its foundations, embodied by a group of pioneering thinkers and scholars who legitimized numerous historical events. (Toubal, 2018).

The Cultural Elite in Ottoman Algeria Through Historical Sources:

A review of historical sources reveals various terms historians used to describe the cultural elite. Salih al-Antri used "الأعيان"

(notables), while Hamdan Khoja used "الأعيان والأشراف" (notables and nobles).

Abu Ras al-Nasiri equated the cultural elite with "العلماء" (scholars), and Ahmad al-Buni limited them to "الصلحاء" (righteous individuals).

Al-Warthilani referred to them as "الفضلاء والصلحاء" (virtuous and righteous), with many sources considering this elite as the dominant force in Algerian affairs, sometimes limited to poets, writers, and scholars close to the authorities.

This broad conception includes groups engaged in intellectual activity, allowing for two main

research directions:

* First Direction: Focuses on scholars loyal to rulers as the basis for political authority and governance.

* Second Direction: Encompasses all intellectual, religious, social, and artistic activities, relying on literary and intellectual outputs to define the cultural elite.

Based on these, the cultural elite concept has two dimensions: religious and intellectual-cultural. (Toubal, 2018).

Algeria in the Era of Saïd Gheddoura:

In the 17th century, Algeria was a hub of knowledge and jurisprudence, following the Maliki and Hanafi schools. Cities such as Algiers, Constantine, Tlemcen, and Bejaia attracted students studying rational and transmitted sciences including logic, arithmetic, grammar, rhetoric, Quranic sciences, and Hadith.

Common teaching methods involved prolonged student-teacher accompaniment, culminating in certifications akin to modern university degrees (Saadallah, 1998).

Three external factors influenced Algerian cultural life:

1. The migration of Andalusians, bringing Islamic civilization advancements, influencing architecture, medicine, education, music, calligraphy, and bookmaking.

2. The Ottoman presence, which introduced the Hanafi school, encouraged Sufi orders,

influenced architecture, and promoted waqfs (endowments) for scientific and social purposes.

3. Foreign threats to the Algerian coast, which led to prolonged conflict and a wealth of literary works, also affecting prisoners who integrated into society. (El-Houari, 2012-2013).

Religious and Literary Life:

A significant feature of religious life during the Ottoman period was the proliferation of Sufi orders.

In western Algeria, the Shadhiliyya, Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, Taybiya, and Darqawiyya orders spread, while in eastern Algeria, the Rahmaniyya, Hansaliya, Qadiriyya, and Shadhiliyya orders were predominant. (El-Houari, 2012-2013).

The commonality between Ottomans and Algerians was religion and jihad against a common enemy.

Early Ottoman rulers relied heavily on scholars, clerics, and Sufis for cooperation and religious legitimacy.

Education was not a government affair but entrusted to locals, though Ottomans cooperated in building educational centers, mosques, zawiyas, and managing their waqfs.

Ottomans focused on military and commercial affairs, showing limited encouragement for scientific and literary production (Saadallah, 1998).

Cultural Institutions:

Institutions mainly included mosques, schools, zawiyas, and libraries, mostly geared towards education rather than broader cultural development.

*** Waqfs (Endowments):**

Waqfs are legally binding religious endowments regulated by judicial authority, often a

qadi. They funded educational and cultural institutions, supported scholars, poor students, or specific communities (e.g., Andalusians), and particular religious schools like the Hanafi. The waqfs

significantly expanded the number of mosques and strengthened social cohesion. The Grand Mosque's waqfs, managed by Sheikh Saïd Kaddoura, represented immense wealth and influence.

*** Mosques:**

Mosques served as places of worship and centers of knowledge and social life. By the late 16th century, Algiers had around a hundred mosques, with the Great Maliki Mosque

being the most famous. Mosques typically were smaller and less ornate than Friday mosques (jami'), which were mainly for sermons. Libraries in many jami' held religious texts and scientific works in medicine, history, and mathematics.

The Great Mosque housed the Maliki mufti and a judicial council, including Maliki and Hanafi muftis and senior scholars. The Kaddoura family notably held the mufti position here (El-Houari, 2012-2013).

The Kaddoura Family:

Historical records trace the Kaddoura family origins to Tunisia, specifically the village of

"Kaddoura" in Djerba. The founder, Ibrahim bin Abd al-Rahman al-Tunisi, settled in Algiers, working as a baker near Bab Azoun. Some sources suggest the family were merchants like many Djerbian families. Scientific ties among Ibadis in Algeria and Djerba strengthened their influence. Ibrahim's son, Saïd, is considered the true founder and glory of the Kaddoura scientific house.(Ibn al-Mufti, 2009).

Saïd Kaddoura – Founder of the Scientific House:

Known as Abu Uthman Saïd bin Ibrahim bin Abd al-Rahman, Saïd Gheddoura was a Tunisian- origin Algerian scholar. Though exact birth details remain unknown, he grew up in Algiers and witnessed two Ottoman ruling phases: the Beylerbeys (1518-1587) and the Pashas (1587-1659), a politically turbulent yet economically vibrant era.

Saïd died in 1659, buried in the zawiya of the saint Abu Abdallah al-Jaza'iri alongside his teacher Muhammad Belkacem al-Matmati.(Kahoul, 2020).

His scholarly journey began under Sheikh al-Matmati at the Grand Mosque, continued at the Zawiya of Tenes (1559-1600), and extended to Tlemcen and Morocco, including Fez, the epicenter of knowledge, before returning to Algiers in 1610.(Ibn al-Mufti, 2009).

Scientific Status of the Gheddoura Family:

The Gheddoura family led the Maliki fatwa, imamate, preaching at the Grand Mosque, and managed its waqfs for over a century.

Saïd held many posts: preacher at Sidi Ramadan Mosque, then imam, preacher, teacher at the Grand Mosque, and Maliki mufti. He headed the scientific-judicial council, outranking even the Hanafi mufti, despite the Hanafi school being the official Ottoman madhhab and Maliki the local one. (Kahoul, 2020).

His personal knowledge and wealth helped consolidate his family's dominance in scholarly and official positions, with his descendants succeeding him in the fatwa post until 1766.(El-Houari, 2012-2013).

Scholarly Contributions and Legacy:

Saïd was primarily a teacher rather than an author, explaining the scarcity of his writings compared to numerous students he mentored both locally and abroad.

His known works are brief lecture notes covering jurisprudence, hadith, and logic, including a commentary on Al-Akhdari's "Sharh al-Sullam al-Murunaq fi al-Mantiq" (Logic).

He was also a poet, famous for his elegy on his slain teacher Muhammad Abahloul (1593).

His Role and Influence:

Teaching at the Grand Mosque, Saïd educated many notable figures, including his son Muhammad, Abu al-Mahdi Isa al-Thaalibi, Abu Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Fasi, Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman al-Ayni al-Tazi, Yahya al-Shawi, and Algiers' mufti Muhammad bin Ismail.

Saïd's correspondences with contemporary scholars reflect his high status, and his reputation for knowledge, piety, and

integrity earned him great respect, even from Ottoman governors who honored him above the official Hanafi mufti. (Lazgham, 2013–2014).

His financial prosperity, augmented by trade and piracy spoils, allowed him to fund the Grand Mosque and establish educational institutions, including a zawiya and school for poor and foreign students. (Kahoul, 2020).

Muhammad bin Saïd Gheddoura:

Born in 1625 in Algiers, Muhammad was well-versed in the culture of his era, educated by his father and other scholars.

He deputized for his father in official duties and formally became the Maliki mufti in 1656. (Lazgham, 2013–2014).

Despite his reputation, his prominence was often attributed to his father's legacy.

He lived through politically unstable times and was temporarily removed from office due to slander but reinstated after proving his innocence.

Muhammad's notable work includes "Jalis al-Zayir wa Anis al-Sair" preserved in the national library. He died in 1695. (Kahoul, 2020).

Ahmed bin Saïd Gheddoura:

Ahmed, another son, was a prominent Maliki jurist who studied under his father and brother.

He became a preacher and mufti at the Grand Mosque in 1695 and served until 1706. (Saadallah, 1998).

Though less renowned than his predecessors, he held significant status and maintained respectful relations with rulers like Dey Hussein Khoja.

Ahmed faced multiple removals from office and was eventually imprisoned and executed by Dey Muhammad Bekdash in 1706 (Ibn al-Mufti, 2009).

Conclusion:

The study of the cultural elite in Ottoman Algeria reveals a nuanced interplay between

religion, intellectual life, and political authority. Figures such as Saïd Kaddoura and his family embodied the dual roles of scholarly leadership and socio-political

influence, anchored in religious legitimacy and cultural stewardship. Their legacy underscores the significance of knowledge, religious authority, and economic power as intertwined forces shaping.

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