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French settlement movement in Algeria (1830–1900)

حركة الاستيطان الفرنسي في الجزائر (1830–1900)

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Abstract:

This article examines France's settlement policy in Algeria from 1830 to 1900, focusing on the laws and legislation enacted by France to settle colonists in Algeria. This settlement was part of France's colonial policy aimed at controlling all of Algeria. France sought to grant land to colonists, displacing and expelling Algerians from their lands. However, Algerians resisted this settlement movement through uprisings against the occupying French forces.

The French settlement policy in Algeria led to bringing many French and Europeans and settling them in Algeria in order to create a community that would support and assist France in occupying Algeria and plundering its resources, but this policy ultimately failed in the face of the Algerians' determination to gain independence.

Keywords: Algeria, French colonialism, settlement, settlers, French legislation

المخلص:

تتناول هذه المقالة سياسة الاستيطان الفرنسية في الجزائر بين عامي 1830 و1900، مع التركيز على القوانين والتشريعات التي سنّها فرنسا لتوطين المستوطنين في الجزائر. كان هذا الاستيطان جزءاً من السياسة الاستعمارية الفرنسية الرامية إلى السيطرة على الجزائر بأكملها. سعت فرنسا إلى منح الأراضي للمستوطنين، ما أدى إلى تهجير الجزائريين وطردهم من أراضيهم. إلا أن الجزائريين قاوموا هذه الحركة الاستيطانية من خلال ثورات ضد القوات الفرنسية المحتلة.

إن سياسة الاستيطان الفرنسي في الجزائر أدت إلى جلب العديد من الفرنسيين والأوروبيين واستقرارهم في الجزائر في سبيل إنشاء جالية تدعم وتساند فرنسا في احتلال الجزائر ونهب خيراتها، لكن هذه السياسة فشلت في الأخير أمام إصرار الجزائريين لنيل الاستقلال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجزائر، الاحتلال الفرنسي، الاستيطان، المستوطنون، التشريع الفرنسي

1. INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning of the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, the conquest was accompanied by a distinctive colonial policy that set France apart from the other European colonial powers: the policy of French settlement. Through it, France sought to establish a French community in Algeria to serve its colonial aims, by founding "settlements" (colonies) and bringing in settlers (colons).

French settlement in Algeria (1830–1914) constitutes an important stage and a decisive turning point in the modern and contemporary history of Algeria, given the deep impact this policy had on Algerian society. To study this subject, the following elements must be examined.

2. THE CONCEPT OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT POLICY IN ALGERIA

From the outset, the settlers were those who exploited the country's wealth and

dominated its political, economic and social life while systematically dispossessing and marginalizing the indigenous population (Hamamid, 2007, p. 20). Since the beginning of the occupation in 1830, Algeria experienced a French settlement policy (Abbas, 2005, p. 95) — the most dangerous form of modern European colonialism — for this settlement policy was accompanied by economic plunder and a military and civilian invasion (Miyassi, 2007, p. 121). As a result, this imperial system created two distinct classes in Algeria: on one side, a class of Europeans who held all political and social privileges; on the other, a class of indigenous Algerians sunk in poverty, backwardness and servitude, directed toward agricultural labour at miserable wages in the service of European colonialism (Hannache, 1990, p. 23). It is important to note that French settlement in Algeria was not merely the seizure of some five million hectares of

arable land and forest out of a total of roughly seven million; the reality went far deeper, for the appropriation of the indigenous Algerians' lands was the clearest material expression of settlement (Miyassi, 2007, pp. 121–122).

In its early stage, settlement was both civilian and military in character (Saadallah, 1996, p. 128). At the same time, Europeans, the French among them, thus arrived in Algeria in successive waves. Most were initially poor people from the regions south of the Mediterranean, the unemployed, and persons convicted in various cases, who gradually settled in the towns seized by the army and then established themselves around them (Saadallah, 1996, p. 131). To reinforce this policy, France did everything in its power to encourage Europeans in general, and the French in particular, to settle Algeria in the largest possible numbers (Tallas, 1982, p. 59).

From the occupation onward, France also built upon racial discrimination between Algerians and Europeans within the framework of the military regime (Hamamid, 2007, p. 27). European settlement, moreover, came at an important stage in the history of Algeria, the Mashriq and Europe (Saadallah, 1996, pp. 128–129).

Consequently, the nucleus of settlement that formed during the first years of the occupation soon grew strong enough to pursue — and to sustain — the colonial policy to which the settlers owed their continued presence. The result was the emergence of very substantial economic privileges, swiftly accompanied by equally significant ones granted to the French settlers to facilitate their acquisition of land (Tallas, 1982, p. 61).

From the occupation onward, the French wavered between a policy of total occupation with direct administration and one of limited occupation with indirect administration, but in the end they inclined toward the former. They began to encourage European immigration and the seizure of agricultural land and vast real estate to meet their needs. Clauzel is regarded as the

French officer most enthusiastic about the policy of European colonisation and settlement in Algeria; convinced he would succeed through that policy, the colonial authorities on 8 September 1830 ordered the seizure of the property of the Turkish state, the Islamic religious endowments (*awqāf*) and the Turkish families, thereby opening the way for European colonists to immigrate and luring them by every means. Yet free settlement did not succeed, owing to the state of war prevailing across most of Algeria and the European settlers' ignorance of the nature of the country and its people — so much so that they imagined the land would yield tropical crops, only to be astonished later to find it a Mediterranean country. These first settlers were, moreover, intensely greedy, eager for quick riches and a subsequent return to France and Europe (Bouaziz, 2007, pp. 7–8).

Settlement was in fact the fundamental principle on which French policy in Algeria rested, to the point that it left its clear imprint on every aspect of life in the country, so that a relationship of influence persisted between settlement and legislation, between settlement and colonial policy, and between settlement and society (Miyassi, 2007, p. 122).

Settlement policy in Algeria was not merely the stripping away of sovereignty and the toppling of foreign rule; it was a relationship of economic expulsion and of replacing the indigenous population on the land with foreign elements (Saadallah, 2009, p. 26).

When Clauzel was appointed governor-general in 1835 and 1836, he set about implementing a policy of free and official settlement, determined to turn the Mitidja plain and its villages into a true homeland for the European immigrants arriving from France and Europe. Numerous contingents came from Spain, Italy, Malta, the Balearic Islands, Switzerland, Paris and Marseille — most of them vagrants, delinquents and people with criminal records — and they seized all the land, buildings, villages and coastal forests in

unparalleled chaos, after expelling the inhabitants and forcing them to flee, with the blessing of General Clauzel and other officers of the French occupation (Bouaziz, 2007, p. 8).

Furthermore, The French government was confronted with the low level of French immigration to Algeria and therefore resorted to encouraging Europeans in general, and the Spanish and Italians in particular. The Europeans in Algeria thus came to be a mixture of different races, the most numerous element being the French; and France's aim in establishing these settler-colonists was to serve colonialism (Abbad, 1984, p. 121).

3. THE MOTIVES OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT IN ALGERIA

From the outset, imperial expansion, political discontent, the relief of demographic overcrowding, and internal tendencies constituted the motives behind French settlement in Algeria. France found in Algeria an arena for its army from which it could move in any direction it wished. Furthermore, it also dispatched there undesirable politicians and convicted individuals so that they might settle and make it their homeland.

Moreover, capitalists, merchants and industrial monopolists found in Algeria a source of raw materials and a market for their goods; and given the conflict between Germany and France, the latter brought its refugees from Alsace and Lorraine to Algeria to work and settle (Saadallah, 1996, p. 105). After the number of French immigrants from Alsace and Lorraine — which had become German following France's defeat in 1870 — increased, the government found itself compelled to find work for those fleeing the occupied region; the only place that could accommodate them was Algeria, which could absorb them and spare the French government the problem of the new refugees competing with France's own population. In reality, the policy of the Second Republic — in stimulating settlement and granting the European settlers greater powers — was a reaction to

the policy of the Second Empire, which had angered the settlers (Hamamid, 2007, p. 29).

Likewise, France found in Algeria a vast market for its goods, an outlet for demographic pressure, a source of raw materials, cheap labour, a training ground for its army, and strategic positions overlooking the Mediterranean on one side and the Great Sahara on the other, among other things (Saadallah, 1996, p. 90). Therefore, French policy concluded that seizing the reins of Algeria and imposing calm upon its inhabitants could be achieved and maintained only through the multiplication of French settlers (Tallas, 1982, pp. 61–62).

Through the settlement of colonists in Algeria, France sought to rid itself of the unemployment and social problems it was experiencing, by encouraging the jobless to emigrate (Yahia, n.d., p. 225). To this was added the effort to dismantle Algerian society through exile, displacement and the spread of ignorance — and especially by kindling discord among the tribes, encouraging the consumption of alcohol, spreading corruption, and sowing conflict and chaos — as expressed by one of the leading settlers, Dr Bodichon, in his book *Études sur l'Algérie*. Among the most dangerous aspects of this was the division of the population into natives and intruding conquerors and the sowing of discord between them, as the Minister of War, Marshal Niel, expressed in 1864 when he said: "...We have higher expectations of this Berber population than of the other group" (Bellah, 2006, pp. 156–157).

General Gérard, the French Minister of War, declared that retaining the city of Algiers secured for France a vast space for its surplus population and a market for its products. In 1842 one of the generals wrote affirming that Algeria could supply the industry of the metropole on a large scale with the materials it needed. Thus, was realised the dream of Napoleon I, who regarded Algeria as a market indispensable to the growth of French industry; the same note was struck by the writer Jules Gérard in

1861, who held that Algeria could spare France the 560 million francs it paid each year for agricultural materials such as flax, oils, sugar, wine, tobacco, grain, livestock, metals (iron, lead, copper), timber and other imported goods. This exploitative colonial outlook required linking Algeria to the French economic machine — an operation to be accomplished neither by the Algerians nor by the French military, but by the French civilian element (Abbad, 1984, p. 6).

In this regard, Bugeaud¹ believed that the occupation of Algeria would be useless unless accompanied by the colonisation of this country (Algeria) through the settlement of a large number of Europeans in it (Abbad, 1984, p. 6).

Moreover, Bugeaud also affirmed that the settlement of the French in Algeria would create a permanent garrison in this territory to assist the occupation forces — one that could one day take their place and preserve Algeria for France (Yahia, n.d., p. 220).

Likewise, the colonists' desire was to transform Algeria into a bourgeois fief whose sole support was the settlers, who were to play the role of masters as against the Algerians, who were to be cast in the role of slaves (Al-Bukhari, 2005, p. 86).

Furthermore, France wanted to make Algeria a colony for large numbers of French in particular, and Europeans in general, who would seize the finest lands to exploit the treasures and immense wealth above and below them (Miyassi, 2007, p. 22).

Among the principal motives we find civilisational subjugation, in which the crusading impulse mingled with racial supremacism; it aimed at the extermination and displacement of the Algerian people and the transformation of Algeria into a

European colony (Ould Khalifa, 1991, p. 151).

At the same time, the struggle for hegemony — whether within Europe or beyond it — among leaders such as Napoleon III, Bismarck and Cavour made Algeria a vital site for France, since it provided raw materials and a strategic location, facilitated capital investment, and served as a refuge for additional population, such as the inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine transferred to Algeria after the war with Germany in 1870 (Saadallah, 1996, p. 97).

In this connection, Prévost-Paradol declared the following: "We must not make of Algeria a ground for training the French army militarily; rather, we must make of it French soil inhabited by the French, who own it, cultivate it and manage its affairs" (Tallas, 1982, p. 61).

In this connection, we may recall General Clauzel's appeal to the Europeans who had arrived in the city of Algiers, on the occasion of his own arrival there on 9 August 1835: "You must know that this (military) force under my command is but a secondary means, for roots can be planted only through European immigration alone."

Consequently, from 1830, the representatives of French policy realised that a purely military occupation would not secure France's control over Algeria, for it was a vast territory of varied terrain. For the occupation to be consolidated, French immigration had to proceed hand in hand with it, so that the settlers would form a force supporting the army and, at the same time, a force enabling the occupying army to confine the country's legitimate owners to areas where they could easily be supervised and monitored, and where the civilian occupiers could dominate them economically and politically (Hamamid, 2007, pp. 21–22).

Accordingly, Marshal Soult² stated the following in his instructions issued on 13

¹ General Bugeaud, Duke of Isly, who bore the title of Marshal of France, was born in Limoges (1784–1849). He became known only as a colonialist who helped consolidate the foothold of colonialism. He was made governor of Algeria in 1840 and defeated Morocco in 1844. See Tallas (1982, p. 60).

² Soult: a French marshal born in Saint-Amans-la-Bastide (1769–1851). He played a decisive role in the

August 1841: "French settlement in Algeria, within carefully studied limits, is the foremost factor for remaining there; this settlement is capable of preparing, within a few years, the means to defend Algeria without using more than necessary of the country's forces and funds" (Tallas, 1982, p. 60).

In addition, the Industrial Revolution was pushing production ever higher, and producers were seeking markets and raw materials outside the European continent. Algeria was then a new, ideal outlet for the French liberalism that dominated capital and the levers of the Industrial Revolution. Upon it descended those who dreamed of colonising other lands and of transferring Christian European civilisation to peoples they regarded as different and primitive, as well as those seeking political and religious freedom; after the success of the French campaign, these Europeans found in Algeria a refuge (Saadallah, 1996, pp. 130–131).

Meanwhile, the government of the Third Republic likewise encouraged the settlement movement in Algeria and the distribution of land to the newcomers; France wished to console itself by enlarging its territory after losing Alsace and Lorraine (Yahia, n.d., p. 254).

Furthermore, the poverty of the new immigrants or colonists was not the sole reason for their coming, however, for a large number came to sell wine, and a number of businessmen — indeed capitalists — came as well (Yahia, n.d., p. 103).

To conclude, Among the colonial designs was that Algeria should remain an agricultural country, so as not to compete with French industry, and should remain a market for the disposal of French manufactured products and a source of raw materials.

France's aims in establishing a European community bound to the land in Algeria may be summarised in the following points:

- The European community was what supported the military presence against any anti-colonial Algerian movement.

- It served as a source for supplying the colonial administration with officials.

- With technical competence, it oversaw the preparation of raw materials for shipment to France or Europe.

- By virtue of its links to the French market, the European community alone could redirect the aim of Algerian agriculture — which until then had been primarily subsistence farming — so as to serve the French market by introducing the crops it needed; in other words, the Europeans were the ones who worked to bring about the exploitative international division of labour.

- The presence of a European community in Algeria meant the creation of an intermediary between modern French industrial products and the Algerian people, who still relied on handicraft (Abbad, 1984, p. 7).

- The policy of populating Algeria with Europeans aimed precisely at using every means to make this annexation a legitimate integration, by wresting the land from the hands of the Algerians and subjecting them to the laws (Abbas, 2005, p. 65).

4. THE MEANS OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT IN ALGERIA

After the success of the French campaign in Algeria, the official French media distributed leaflets, pamphlets and newspaper advertisements, and, through writers, called upon those wishing to emigrate to head for Algeria rather than America, for Algeria was near them, its climate resembled Europe's, and it offered fertile land and abundant opportunities (Saadallah, 1996, pp. 130–131).

The French colonial authorities worked to adopt official colonisation, to expand it and to support it with the necessary resources. They began

Battle of Austerlitz, became Minister of War and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Louis-Philippe, and was known for his colonialist leanings, playing a major role in French colonialism against Algeria. See Tallas (1982, p. 60).

transporting French and Europeans to Algeria at their own expense and providing them with land and aid so that they could carry out their agricultural work, adapt to the country and settle on the properties and farms granted to them (Bouaziz, 2007, p. 8). These settlers were of various nationalities, and the field was opened to them to seize the country's wealth; to attract them, several privileges were offered, such as paying travel costs, residence allowances, the free distribution of agricultural land, the construction of housing, and supplies of grain and livestock in the early years until they became able to exploit their lands themselves, along with the right of naturalisation as French citizens for foreigners while retaining their original nationality. This policy led to flooding Algeria with European immigrants (Amoura, 2002, p. 119).

In 1837 the French administration offered land for sale at about 48 francs per hectare and permitted sale by mutual agreement. In this way some immigrants obtained more than 4,500 hectares during that year alone (Abbad, 1984, p. 10).

The French government guaranteed the settlers work for every citizen, and the French demanded that they be given a sum of money and ten hectares for each French family wishing to settle in Algeria (Yahia, n.d., p. 225). The officer Clauzel was enthusiastic about the settlement enterprise; he founded the village of Boufarik west of the city of Algiers and began distributing land, machinery and animals free of charge to the new European settlers to encourage them to settle, remain on their lands, and invest in and exploit them.

Nevertheless, this policy did not meet with great success, and up to 1839 the number of European immigrants did not exceed about 25,000. General Bugeaud was determined to colonise Algeria with the rifle and the plough together, and began turning officers and soldiers into peasants and farmers, on the grounds that the soldier was better able to live communally and to defend his farm should it come under threat; he

established about "seven model villages" for settlement in the form of collective farms (Bouaziz, 2007, p. 9).

In a speech delivered to the French Chamber of Deputies on 14 January 1840, General Bugeaud expressed the settlement policy in Algeria, saying: "We need as many French and European settlers in Algeria as possible, and to attract them you must give them the most fertile lands. Wherever you find flowing water, fertile soil and good pasture, settle the colonists there, heedless of the owners; these lands must be distributed to the Europeans so that they become their masters and the original owners are utterly forgotten" (Bellah, 2006, p. 155). Bugeaud sought to settle a large number of French and Europeans and to create opportunities for them to work in agriculture; the Minister of War wrote to him on 13 August 1841 explaining the importance of settling a number of French and Europeans in this territory, confirming his use of the military forces present there. Bugeaud ordered the military forces to take part in the settlement movement in the exploitation of Algeria, and used the battalions to build the new villages for settlers arriving from Europe (Yahia, n.d., p. 220).

The French authorities worked to grant the settlers great economic and political privileges, in order to entrench the notion that, in behaving thus, they were performing a patriotic act and discharging a national mission (Hamamid, 2007, p. 21). France encouraged the settlers by granting them land, promising many of them a bright future and granting them French citizenship; and in order to attract more immigrants and ease their paths of immigration, it granted them free privileges as well as capital and the like (Saadallah, 1996, p. 106). General Bugeaud was an advocate of establishing "military colonies" in North Africa and of preferring them to others, and in 1844 he proposed retaining for the military settlers the majority of the lands seized by the French government in Algeria (Yahia, n.d., p. 220).

In 1848 the French government decided to send to Algeria 12,000 exiles, granting each a plot of land of between 8 and 10 hectares, a dwelling, and life's necessities for three years; thus the first contingent of these (exiles) departed (Abbad, 1984, p. 13). The French government seized the opportunity afforded by the suppression of Algeria's revolts to increase the area of land in French hands, confiscating vast stretches of the finest agricultural land amounting to half a million hectares and annexing them to government holdings in preparation for distribution to the new settler elements; it also used the war indemnity it had forced the Algerians to pay to distribute considerable sums to the settlers (Yahia, n.d., p. 255).

France spared no effort — especially under the Third Republic — in devising and employing every illegitimate means to wrest the land from the Algerians, to settle usurping colonists, and to exploit resources; as a result Algeria was transformed into a settler-investment colony in which the plundering settlers enjoyed all its bounties.

The means available to the settlers for influencing the measures of the French government multiplied — through their deputies, their press and all their instruments of pressure. The settler-colonists obtained the right to participate in drawing up the budget, and the law of 19 December 1900, which made Algeria's budget independent, facilitated this for them; this interference in Algeria's finances and budget had grave consequences.

5. CONCLUSION

Between 1830 and 1900, settlement (colonisation de peuplement) constituted the cornerstone of French policy in Algeria, distinguishing the French experience from that of other European colonial powers. As this study has shown, the policy rested on a clear logic: to implant a European community that would buttress the army, supply the colonial administration, and tie Algerian agriculture and resources to the French market. Its principal means — free or subsidised immigration, the free

distribution of confiscated land, naturalisation incentives, military colonies, and the deportation of exiles — combined to dispossess the indigenous population and to produce two sharply unequal classes. By the eve of the twentieth century, and with the budget law of 19 December 1900, the settlers had become an entrenched force capable of shaping colonial policy itself, leaving a lasting imprint on Algeria's legislation, economy and society.

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