



The Elite and its Integrationist Approach in Algeria (1900-1919)

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Received 21/11/2025

Accepted 23./11/2025

• Abstract:

The study of the assimilationist elite in Algeria does not merely aim to understand a limited political movement, but rather serves as an entry point for grasping the profound transformations that reshaped Algerian national consciousness. It reflects the complex interactions between culture and politics, as well as between reform and revolution, within an oppressive colonial context. During the French occupation of Algeria (1830–1962), the country experienced radical changes that affected all its political, social, cultural, and religious structures. These transformations were the result of colonial policies that sought to impose a new reality based on the exclusion of traditional elites, the dismantling of Algerian societal foundations, and the replacement of these with a new sociological model inspired by the French system.

Within this colonial trajectory, a new Algerian elite gradually emerged—educated in colonial schools and imbued with French culture—seeking to find a place for itself within colonial society. However, the emergence of this elite raises an essential question: were its assimilationist choices an expression of a transitional national consciousness aiming to secure the minimum of rights under settler colonialism, or were they the product of cultural and intellectual attraction to France’s civil and cultural systems?

Keywords:

The elites, Sherif ben Habillis, Farhat Abbas, Naturalisation, French politics .

• Introduction

The study of the assimilationist elite’s orientation in Algeria does not fall within an attempt to understand a specific limited political current; rather, it represents an approach to understanding the profound transformations experienced by Algerian national consciousness. It reflects the complex interactions between culture and politics, and between reform and revolution, within an oppressive colonial context. During the period of French occupation (1830–1962), Algeria underwent radical transformations that affected all its political, social, cultural, and religious structures, as a result of colonial policies that sought to impose a new reality based on

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the exclusion of traditional elites, the dismantling of the foundations of Algerian society, and their replacement with a new sociological model inspired by the French one.

Within this colonial path, a new Algerian elite gradually emerged. It was formed in colonial schools and imbued with French culture, attempting to find for itself a position within colonial society in Algeria. However, the emergence of this elite raises an important problem: were its assimilationist choices an expression of a transitional national consciousness seeking to secure the minimum of rights under settler colonialism, or were they the result of cultural and intellectual attraction to France's civil and cultural systems?

To address this problematic, this research paper will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What is meant by elite in Algeria during the period of French colonization?
- What are the historical, social, and political factors that contributed to its emergence and shaped its intellectual and political vision?
- To what extent did it influence the course of the Algerian national movement?

1. The Concept of the Elite

The word *elite* (*nukhba*) in Arabic denotes the best or the finest; it is said “the best and finest part of something,” and *nukhbat al-qawm* means “the best among them.” The word *intikhab* means “selection” or “choice,” from which *nukhba* derives, referring to a group of men chosen or selected from others¹.

As a term, *elite* in its general meaning refers to a group of people who occupy positions of influence and control within a given society, that is, a small minority of influence that dominates a larger group². The term began to be used in the field of social sciences to refer to a group of prominent individuals in a particular field of activity—whether intellectual, political, or economic—who at the same time have an influence in shaping the values and orientations of the sectors they represent in society³.

From this definition, we find that the term *elite* (*élite*)⁴ in Algeria, especially at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, carried meanings and connotations

¹ Ahmed Zaki Badaoui : *Moadjam Alouloum Alaidjtūmaiya* , Maktabat loubnane , Bayroute , Loubnane , 1986 , p127.

² Ibid , p129.

³ Abdelhalim Ezayat : *fi sisiologya binaa Essiyassa* , dar El Marifa El jamiaia , Masr , 1990 , p 239.

⁴ **Elite**: ,ensemble des personnes les plus remarquable d'un groupes ,une communauté crème gratin.

• **Les élites**: , les personnes que par leur valeur occupent le premier ronge

• **Elitisme**: , système favorisant les meilleurs élément d'un groupe aux dépenses de la masse politique, visant à la formation d'une élite

• **Elitiste**: de l'élitisme partisan de l'élitisme politique élitiste,

influenced by colonialism and its media instruments. Colonialism sought to make the term exclusive to a specific group while excluding others. Therefore, some consider that the term *elite* is a purely colonial construct, as it differs from the notion of *community*, which has an Islamic-Arabic formation⁵.

Observers soon began to ascribe various labels and descriptions to these two seasoned generations, such as “*the young Algerians*” as opposed to “*the old turbans*”, or *conservatives* versus *liberals*, on the basis that they represented two competing blocs. However, the historian Charles-Robert Ageron considers that these observers were hasty in highlighting the conflict between the two generations, as if it were a clash between two modes of thought—traditional and modern—while in fact, that disagreement was not clearly defined. Both intellectual currents at times opposed and at other times converged, as if they were echoes of what would later be called *the awakening of Algerian Muslims*⁶.

Meanwhile, the historian Abu al-Qasim Saadallah considers the *elite group* to be a rival to the *conservative bloc* due to differences in education, demands, and positions regarding several common national issues⁷.

What distinguished the *elite group* was that they were known by several designations, such as *the youth*, *the liberals*, *the intelligentsia*, and even *the assimilationists*. They had their own programs and theories concerning Algerian politics. In 1911, Ibn Habbiles, a member of this group, sought to define it, saying:

“They are the young people who have grown up in French universities and have succeeded in rising above the masses and positioning themselves in Algeria, bearing civilization with merit—a distinction that cannot be granted to all the inhabitants of Algeria.”⁸

As for the French scholar Georges Marçais, who was director of the Algerian-Islamic School in Tlemcen, he did not consider the elite to be that minority of civil servants, lawyers, journalists, and teachers, but rather those Algerians who combined both Arabic and French culture⁹.

In contrast, Ali Merad defined them as “*a group of young men who were not only of French education, but who were also entirely loyal to the modes of thought and the way of life of France, aspiring to grant their coreligionists the benefits of European civilization.*”¹⁰

Voir ,LE ROBERT , pou tous ,dictionnaire de la longue française ,pp371,372

⁵ Abdekader Halouche : *siyasate faransa Etaalimia* , da El Ouma , El jazair , 2010 , p251.

⁶ Charl reber Ageroun : *Elmouslimoune El jazairiyouna wa faranssa* , tr : mesoude El hadje Mesoud , T2, dar El kitabe El Arabi, p 695.

⁷ Abou El Kacem Saadallah : *Elharaka El wataniya El jazairiya* , T2 , Alem El Marifa , El jazair , 2009, 159.

⁸ Ben habillesse : *El jazair kama yaraha Ahade El Ahali* , tR : Abdellah Hamadi, dar Bahaa Dine , 2009 , p96.

⁹ Abou El Kacem Saad Ellah : *El mardjaa Essabek*, p159.

¹⁰ Ali Merad : *El haraka El islamia fi El jazair El hadith , Bahthe fi tarikh Edini wa leaijtimai min 1925 ila 1940* , Tr: Mohamad yehyaten , dar El hikma , El jazair , 2007 , p53.

Sheikh Muhammad al-Sa'id al-Zahiri (1899–1956), one of the reformist figures, defined the identity of this elite in a lecture he delivered at the headquarters of the Student Association in 1919, stating: “The intellectual leaders in Algeria are divided into two groups: a Europeanized group, graduates of French schools, who despise their nation, show no respect for its religion, customs, or history, and offer it nothing but accusations of ignorance and stagnation; and another group composed of trustworthy reformers—the conservative group.”¹¹

From these opinions, it becomes clear to us that what was termed *the elite* in Algeria at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were those produced by the French school in Algeria and those influenced by the ideal image of France and its civilization, considering integration into the French entity as a means of social, cultural, and consequently political advancement.

2 / The Emergence of Assimilationist Ideas in Algeria:

Opinions differed concerning the possibility of integrating the *natives* in a general and direct way with France, due to the civilizational difference between the two societies. Dr. Auguste Warnier saw that “*it is impossible to accept a backward and barbaric society within a European society that leads Western civilization,*” thus proposing the theory of the gradual integration of the *natives* into European society by raising the social and cultural level of the indigenous people¹².

While others believed that the integration of the *natives* should begin with a certain category trained in a Western French manner, as one of the French officials said: “We must teach our civilization, our customs, and all our knowledge to young men who will be useful intermediaries between us and their brothers in religion.”¹³

As for the discussion of the emergence of the assimilationist elite, it is difficult to separate it from the French school and the resulting spiritual, cultural, social, and political outcomes¹⁴, Jules Ferry presented his conception, as he considered it different from that existing in France, where he limited its mission to forming a second-class group of those dealing with the French administration¹⁵.

¹¹ Mohamed said Ezahiri : *El Islam fi haja Ila diaia wa tabchir* , Matbaat El Iatidale , Dimachk , 1933, 193.

¹² Ammar Bouhouche : *Etariikh Essiyasi mina El bidaya wa lighayat 1962* , dar El bassair , Eljazair , 2008.

¹³

The French Minister of War in the year 1839. / looks at ; kamile rislire : *essiyasa ethakafiya el firanciya , Ahdafoha ;hodoudoha (1830-1962)* , tarjama : nadhire tayar , dar kitabate djadida linachre el iliktrouni , 2016 , p193 .

¹⁴ ammar halal : *Abhath wa dirasat fi tarikh el djazair el moasira 1830-1962* , diwane el matbouate al djamiaiya , aldjazair , 2016, p 109.

¹⁵ ammar halal : El mardjaa Essabek, p105.

These schools were called *Franco-Arab schools*, and their number was very small, while the content of their programs did not exceed brainwashing, according to the historian Saadallah, and the directing of a generation of Algerians toward Frenchness, cutting them off from their roots, and shaking the family and society behind them¹⁶.

That was after colonial France completed its mission in this field by confiscating the properties of *waqf* (endowments) and attacking cultural, educational, and religious properties, diverting them from their purposes, thus depriving local education of its most important resources. This was not denied by Alexis de Tocqueville when he said:

“We have laid our hands everywhere on these properties (the endowments) and directed them to other purposes than those in which they were used in the past. We have paralyzed charitable institutions, and thus we left schools to die and scientific circles to disappear.”¹⁷

In fact, colonial France worked, since the beginnings of the occupation, to make the Algerian people ignorant, for *colonialism understood early that a people without education and culture does not require a great battle.*¹⁸

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The destruction of the fortress of immunity of Algerian society would make it easier for it to fall into the culture and principles of colonialism. And since the French educational policy had as its urgent mission the formation of Algerians who would serve as intermediaries between the *natives* and the French colonial administration, it saw the necessity of teaching Algerian Muslims the French language, while also learning the Arabic language in order to penetrate and expand further after knowing the culture of the Algerians and reducing the danger of some educated Algerians who graduated from *zawiyas* and mosques and continued resisting colonialism¹⁹.

Here is the author of “*French Algeria as Seen by One of the Natives*,” a representative model of this school, Sharif Ben Habbiles, who praised the civilizing role of France in Algeria, saying:

“To be satisfied with only these two things—security and development—for the liberation of this people, their progress, and their social advancement²⁰, would be a deficiency in the generosity of a civilized nation like France. In order to bring people closer, to unite them, to harmonize their aspirations, and to improve their interactions, it was necessary to conquer minds through a moral and spiritual conquest... The primary mission of France is a civilizing mission, and there can be no civilization without education and formation, that is, without teaching—the teaching of the victor to the vanquished.”²¹

It thus becomes clear to us that the colonial school did not work only for the teaching of the French language. Rather, according to Robert Ageron, the spreading of the French language remained only as a first stage:

¹⁶ Abou Elkacem saad Ellah : *Etarikh Ethakafi 1830-1954* , T3 , dar Elbasair , Eldjazair , 2009, p285 .

¹⁷ Abou Elkacem saad Ellah : *Elharaka Elwatania* , T2 , El mardjaa Essabek, p61 .

¹⁸ Roger Garaudy: *hiwar El hadharat* , taaribe : adel Elawa , Manchourat Awidat , Bayrout Lebnane ,p48.

¹⁹ Mohamad ben chouche : *Ataalim fi Eldjazair iban El ihtilal El firansi* , Rissalate Madjister , djamiat ben youcef ben kheda , Eldjazair , 2007-2008 , p 49.

²⁰ Cherif be habilesse : *Eldjazair Elfiransiya* , El mardjaa Essabek , p 31.

²¹ Cherif be habilesse : *Eldjazair Elfiransiya* , El mardjaa Essabek , p31.

“For there will never be any agreement nor solidarity possible without a kind of unity between thought and tongue.”²²

That is to say, the aim was to spread French culture—or what was called *Francisation*.

Francisation was not an ideological goal, but above all, a political tool necessary for the realization of the idea of “*French Algeria*.” Therefore, we find that the policy of *Francisation* extended to most, if not all, domains and sectors. For this reason, France had to activate all its direct and indirect cultural instruments to achieve that goal. In this regard, we shall mention only some of these instruments, which we believe had a deep effect in preparing a new environment more receptive to French thought and its developments.

Algerian society contained a bourgeois and national class composed of scholars, landowners, merchants, and religious leaders (muftis, judges, and imams). This traditional elite was condemned to disappearance by colonialism, as all Algerian intellectuals—men of opinion and politics—were subjected to exile and expulsion²³. This led to the drying up of Algeria from its educated class, which could have played a decisive role in preserving the national entity, national and cultural values, and the political existence of Algeria²⁴.

Among the methods of the *Francisation* of Algeria was the establishment of a special civil status for Algerians. The French justified its creation by claiming that administrative, statistical, and financial interests were the apparent reasons behind issuing the *Civil Status Law* during the era of Tirman (1881–1891). However, the hidden purpose of this law was to erase Algerian features and eliminate the national identity by tampering with Algerian names, cutting the ties between families and ancestors, and even severing the belonging to the homeland. This was explicitly stated by *Compeul Sabatier*, who declared that it was “a law preparing the natives for integration,” and he called it *Dénationalisation*, meaning the stripping of their national identity²⁵.

Furthermore, the erasure of civilizational landmarks and the distortion of history played a role in eliminating the “Algerianness” of Algeria. Colonialism planned to obliterate Algerian urban features and replace them with European architecture. This is what was reported by an eyewitness during his visit to Algeria in the years 1832–1833, when he stated that the face of the city of Algiers had begun to change from an Oriental to a Western character. Among the results of this transformation was the replacement of the names of streets, institutions, and neighborhoods with Roman, European, and Christian names²⁶.

²² Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair Almoasira min intifadhate 1871 ila indilaa harb etahrir* , tarjama : djamale fatmi wa Akhroune , mojalade 2 , charikate dar el ouma , Aldjazair , 2008, p266 .

²³ Among them are those referred to as “*al-Haddar*”, such as Hamdan bin Uthman Khoja, Hamdan bin Amin Al-Sikka, Mustafa bin Amar, and Ahmed Boudarba. / among others. ‘ Abou El Kacem Saadallah : Mohadharat fi tarikh Aldjazair El Hadithe bidayate El ihtilale , dar Eraide , alam El Maarifa , Aldjazair , 2009 p38 .

²⁴ Abou El Kacem Saadallah : *Elharaka El wataniya El jazairiya* , T1 , elmardjaa essabik , p58 .

²⁵ Abou El Kacem Saadallah : *Elharaka El wataniya El jazairiya* , T1 , elmardjaa essabik , p460.

²⁶ Farid hadji : *essiyassa el firansiya fi aldjazair 1837-1937 , almontalak – asayroua – almaale* , dar al khaldounia aldjazair , 2013 , p101.

The French colonial authorities also realized that the national history of any country is the framework that shapes the intellectual, psychological, and ideological orientation of nations and peoples. Therefore, they sought to control the minds of Algerians by creating biased interpretations of historical events that contradicted the essential components of the Algerian personality. Colonial writings aimed to make colonialism successful by implanting doubts in people's minds, raising questions among scholars, and diverting the orientation of the group influenced by French culture from the civilizational dimension of Algerian history—so that they would accept the colonial reality and work to promote and serve it, directly or indirectly²⁷.

Thus, the interest of French historians and archaeologists was confined to researching Algerian history during the Roman period, in an attempt to convince Algerians that their country was Roman in its past, French in its present, and would remain French in its future.

This explains, to some extent, what made *Ferhat Abbas* write in the newspaper *Al-Wifaq* on February 24, 1936, an article entitled “*La France c’est moi*” (“France is me”), in which he denied the existence of the Algerian nation, saying:

“... I will not die for the Algerian homeland, because this homeland does not exist. I have not discovered this homeland. I searched in history, asked the living and the dead, and visited the cemeteries, but no one spoke to me about this homeland.”²⁸

Thus, the policy of *Francisation* had reached the achievement of what it had been designed for — at the very least, instilling the spirit of doubt and questioning about origin and identity. And since these steps were not sufficient to completely eradicate the foundations of the Algerians' identity, France searched for other means to dominate the spirit of society and strike at its faith and religious frame of reference²⁹. Although France was a secular republic since the establishment of the First French Republic, the colonial authorities were aware of the effectiveness of Christianization in changing the essence of the individual, his beliefs, ways of thinking, convictions, and constants³⁰.

The colonial authority knew well how to benefit from the activity of clergymen in various fields³¹, as these played a major role in spreading French culture and introducing cultural practices, particularly those of a social nature, with the aim of confusing and distorting the original features of the society. The Church, through its presence and activities, also contributed to the dissemination of the French language and to preparing the ground for the “natives” to accept new ideas and institutions — such as the opening of shelters, the provision of humanitarian services, the establishment of hospitals and educational centers — in which Christianity was promoted under the slogan of evangelization. In contrast, *zawiyas* were closed,

²⁷ Naser edine saidouni : *eldjazair Montalakat wa Afak , Mekarabate lilwakia aldjazairi min khilale kadhaya wa Mafahim tarikhiya* , alam el Marifa , aldjazair , 2009 ,p79.

²⁸ L’entente n° 24-2-1936

²⁹ Farid hadji : *essiyassa el firansiya fi aldjazair* , elmardjaa essabik , p127

³⁰ Mostafa El Achraf : *Eldjazair El Ouma wa Modjtama* , tardjama : hanafi ben aissa , Elmouassasa El Wataniya lilkitab , eldjazair, 1983 , p 275 .

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mosques were turned into churches, Islamic jurisdiction was subjected to French courts, and various Islamic rituals were placed under surveillance and legal control³².

Here we find General *Bugeaud*, known for his policy of scorched earth and cultural and civilizational destruction, nevertheless offering all necessary assistance to the missionaries, whose influence increased during his rule. In one of his raids on villages, he seized 250 children from a village in *Boufariq* after dispersing their families and brought them to a priest, handing them over and saying:

“Try, Father, to make Christians out of them; and if you succeed, they will never return to their religion to shoot at us again.”³³

The policy of Christianization was not limited to the monarchical period (1830–1848), as is often claimed, but was also adopted by the Second Republic (1848–1852) and the Second Empire (1852–1870), with a difference only in the strategy of its implementation. The ideology of these regimes was to uproot the foundations of Islam whenever possible, and to convert Muslims to Christianity—or at least to empty Islam of its content, especially as a system protecting values and beliefs³⁴.

3. The Emergence of the Assimilationist Elite :

Historical sources and references differ concerning the exact period of the emergence of the assimilationist elite in Algeria, which became commonly known as *the Young Algerians*. This divergence arises from the differing perspectives of historians regarding this elite. Some view it as a political elite and therefore date its emergence to the beginning of its political activity, while others consider its appearance linked first to its intellectual or cultural activity, and then to the political one³⁵.

There are those who associate the emergence of the assimilationist elite on the political scene with the year **1892**, the date when *Jules Ferry* visited Algeria as president of the Senate Committee. The committee stayed in Algeria for two months, studying the conditions of the Algerians, during which *Ferry* met with a group of young Algerians. He found them to be good interlocutors and well aware of the conditions of their people, and he also noticed their mastery of the French language and their ability to converse in it³⁶. Several sources mention that *Jules Ferry*

³² khadidja bektache : *El Haraka Etabchiriya fi Aldjazair 1830-1870* , El Matbouate Al Djamiaya , Aldjazair , p31.

³³ Salah farkousse : *El Mokhtassar fi tarikh Aldjazair Min ahde Elfinikiyine Ila khorodj alfiransiyyine* , dar Alouloum , Aldjazair , 2002 , p208.

³⁴ Farid hadji : *essiyassa el firansiya fi aldjazair* , elmardjaa essabik , p42.

³⁵ Safer fatiha : *harakat achabab aldjazairiyine dhouhouroha ; tataouroha fima bayn 1900 – 1930 , otrouha doctorat fi tarikh el hadithe wa Moasir* , djamia Ahmed Ben bella , wahrane , aldjazair , p78.

³⁶ In this meeting in Algiers, he listened to Ahmed Boudraba, a naturalised lawyer and an advocate for the preservation of personal status laws, as well as Ben Ktawi and Ben Brihmat, both translators, and in Constantine he listened to Dr. Mersli, who had come as a municipal advisor wearing European attire, to the extent that Jules Ferry . /was astonished by them. Charl rober Ageroun : *Elmouslimoune El jazairiyoune*, p 704.

was the first to name this elite “the Young Algerians” in the report he drafted after the return of the investigative committee to Paris, in which he stated that he had listened to “the movement of the Young Algerians.”³⁷

Some historians trace the emergence of this elite back to the era of the Governor-General of Algeria, *Charles Jonnart*, in 1901, when he initiated a new policy that relied first on developing the colony economically — in order to satisfy the *colons* — and then sought to involve Algerians in political activity and to bring them out of their isolation, “granting them the rights essential to every human being.”³⁸

However, their political positions became clearly visible in **1908**, when the decree of **July 17, 1908**, was issued, stipulating the census of Algerian youth who had reached the age of eighteen for the purpose of conscription into the French army. The “Youth Movement” presented a petition protesting against France’s decision concerning conscription³⁹.

Some historians trace the emergence of this assimilationist elite to the early appearance of their ideas and activities within newspapers, clubs, and associations. In reality, the assimilationist elite carried out enormous activity in the cultural and intellectual fields, particularly in major cities, since they mastered the French language, mingled with French thinkers, and defended principles that, to them, represented progress and advancement.⁴⁰

They expressed their ideas and opinions through various means and methods, such as writing memoirs or small books — for example, Dr. *Mercier* and his work *Contribution to the Question of the Natives in Algeria* (1894); *Ismail Hamid* and his book *The French Muslims in North Africa*; and *Cherif Ben Habiles* in his book *French Algeria as Seen by One of the Natives*⁴¹. They also founded newspapers through which they expressed themselves, in both French and Arabic, such as the newspaper *Al-Haqq* (The Truth) in 1893, directed by *Khalil Qaid al-‘Ayyun*⁴²; *Al-Misbah* (The Lamp) in 1904, supervised by *Al-Arabi Fakhar* and *Hamdan Bourkaib*; and *Al-Islam* in 1909, under the supervision of *Abd al-Aziz Tabil*, followed by *Sadiq Dandan* and *Al-Rashidi* in 1911.⁴³

Among these as well was the journal *The Voice of the Oppressed* (*La Voix des Humbles*), founded in 1922, which most members of the assimilationist elite adopted as a platform to present their ideas and to publicize their activities. Among its founders were *Said Fassi*, *Rabah Zenati*, *Mohamed Saïd Lachani*, *Al-Arabi Tahrat*, and *Omar Boudierba*.

Ibn al-Tihami, Mohamed al-Saleh Ben Jelloul, Ferhat Abbas, and others — the assimilationist elite continued publishing newspapers and journals, despite the fact that the French

³⁷ Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair*, elmardjaa essabik , p372.

³⁸ elmardjaa nafsoh , p 373.

³⁹ Ammar Bouhouche : *Etarih Essiyasi* , elmardjaa essabik , p203.

⁴⁰ elmardjaa nafsoh,p203 .

⁴¹ Nikolaye dyakouve harakate alfityane Aldjazairi fi Matlaa El karne alaichrine , tardjama abdelazize boubakir , Manchourate Amdoukale , Aldjazair , pp51-52.

⁴² Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair* , elmardjaa essabik , p373.

⁴³ Zouhir Ihdaden : *Assahafa Almaktouba fi Aldjazair* , Diwane Almatbouaate Aldazairiya , Aldjazair , 2012 p-p 49-59.

administration, on many occasions, suspended their publications, up until the second half of the twentieth century⁴⁴.

The assimilationist elite were also concerned with establishing associations and clubs, which served as meeting places for modern ideas and for spreading awareness among the general public. They contributed effectively to awakening Algerians and provided them with a space to follow new ideas that began to spread, especially in the major cities⁴⁵. Among these associations and clubs, we mention *the Tawfiqiyya Association* (1908), which the elite reorganized in April 1911 under the presidency of Dr. Ibn al-Tihami. Among the clubs, there was *the Salah Bey Club*, founded in Constantine in 1907, whose members included the lawyer *Omar Ben Moufaqq*, the physician *Mercier*, and *Hajj Ben Sadiq*. The *Revue du Monde Musulman* described it as a “popular university.”

There was also *the Young Algerians Club* (March 1910) in Tlemcen, whose members included *Abu Bakr Abd al-Salam Ben Shuqayb*, the teacher *Bu‘ali Gouti*, and *al-Khuja Ibn Turkia Mohamed*, in addition to *the Iqbal Club* and *the Muhtadhibiyya Association*. Among them as well was *the Algerian Brotherhood Association* (1922), formed with *Emir Khaled* as president, and *Dr. Ben al-Tihami* and *Dr. Bel‘arbi* as his deputies⁴⁶.

According to those who followed the activities of this elite, they exploited every possible opportunity, method, and means to spread their ideas — even if it required resigning from their positions as a form of protest, or forming alliances and cooperation with the French “liberals,” creating together a liberal current defending common ideas⁴⁷.

The Assimilationist Elite’s Positions on Certain National Issues up to 1919

Since the year 1870, a profound silence prevailed in Algeria before some isolated voices began to rise at first, gradually becoming clearer at the dawn of the twentieth century, heralding the emergence of a new elite⁴⁸. This elite appeared suddenly and soon, through its dynamism and vitality, surpassed the traditionally inclined circles and outshone them. Before long, discussions in both Algeria and France revolved around a movement of young Algerians with a modernist inclination, as Robert Ageron described them⁴⁹.

If we rely on the definition that identifies this elite as “a group of young men who were not only of French education but also completely loyal to the French way of thinking and lifestyle, aspiring to grant their co-religionists the benefits of Western civilization,”⁵⁰ then all that these young Algerians did was to demand that France abide by the application of the laws, decrees, and

⁴⁴ Bachir Sahouli : *AlKadhaya Assiyassiya wa Elidjtimaiya El Djazairia min khilal Sahafat Enoukhba El Indimadjia « madjllat saoutte Al motawadhiaine 1922-1938 Anmodhadane »* , *ElMadjalat Elmagharibiya ldirassat Etarikhiya wa El Idjtimaiya* , vol13, t2 , decembre 2021 .

⁴⁵ Safer fatiha : *elmardjaa essabik* , p150.

⁴⁶ *elmardjaa nafsoh* , p151.

⁴⁷ *nafsoh* , p154 .

⁴⁸ Charl reber Ageroun : *Elmouslimoune El jazairiyoune*, p 95.

⁴⁹ Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair*, *elmardjaa essabik* , p363.

⁵⁰ Ali Merad : *elmardjaa essabik* , p53.

senatorial decisions (Senatus-Consulte) concerning Algeria. This is because the assimilationist elite, in their thinking, differentiated between democratic and civilized France and colonial despotic France; therefore, they appealed to the former against the latter⁵¹.

This does not mean that this group did not participate in realizing what is called the awakening of Muslim Algeria; on the contrary, they were eager to play a national role that could transform the traditional and backward Algerian society into a modern and advanced one. This was expressed by Ben Habyli when he said, "In fact, these young men dream of playing some role in the affairs of the country, out of conviction, to reach the highest degrees of civilization, driven by what fills their souls with ambition."⁵²

He then raises a question about the importance of good education if these capacities are not employed in a mission that combines nobility and generosity of spirit⁵³. Thus, they demanded equality in political rights with the French, the abolition of the "Indigénat" law and other exceptional laws, parliamentary representation for Algerians, and equality in education, taxation, and employment opportunities⁵⁴.

To clarify, with a certain degree of precision, the positions of the assimilationist elite regarding national issues of that period, we will address the matters of compulsory military service and naturalization, given their profound impact not only on the development of the assimilationist elite but also on the foundations of the Algerian national movement and the definition of its orientations and demands.

As for the issue of compulsory military service, once the decree dated July 17, 1908, was issued — stipulating the census of Algerian youths who had reached the age of eighteen with the intention of conscripting them into the French army⁵⁵ — this matter aroused the resentment of Muslim Algerians. The French authorities had long persisted in despising them and depriving them of political rights under the pretext that they were Muslims who would not renounce their religion, culture, customs, and traditions. Yet, those same authorities imposed upon them, at the same time, the duty to enlist in the army of that very state which oppressed them in their own country, so that they might defend its flag⁵⁶.

In all regions of Algeria in the year 1908, spontaneous and collective demonstrations took place opposing compulsory military service. This opposition varied, ranging from street riots, the submission of petitions and delegations, to even hiding from the French authorities⁵⁷. Meanwhile, the assimilationist elite found in the implementation of the conscription project an irreplaceable opportunity to obtain the right to French citizenship. They even sought to convince the general public of this, as one of their members expressed regarding the project, saying:

⁵¹ Such ideas were previously proposed by Hamdan ben Othman Khouja in his book *Al-Mir'aat*

⁵² Cherif be habilesse : *Eldjazair Elfiransiya* , El mardjaa Essabek , p 94.

⁵³ elmardjaa nafsoh , p95.

⁵⁴ Abou Elkacem saad Allah : *Elharaka Elwatania* , T2 , El mardjaa Essabek, p163.

⁵⁵ Ali Rezigue : Sada Etadjnide El Idjbari fi Essahafa El Ahliya , Otrohat Doctorat Tarikh Eldjazair El Hadithe wa Moaasir , Damiaat El Amire Abdelkader , 2020-2021 , p49.

⁵⁶ Ammar Bouhouche : *Etariikh Essiyasi* , elmardjaa essabik , p203.

⁵⁷ Abou Elkacem saad Allah : *Elharaka Elwatania* , T2 , El mardjaa Essabek, p177.

“The natives are ready to defend France in this ordeal; however, in order for her to deserve the blood tax, she must grant us our political rights and give the conscript the right of citizenship.”⁵⁸

With the support of some French liberals, lawyer **Ahmed Boudierba**, **El-Hadj Saïd Mokhtar**, **Dr. Ibn Al-Tuhami**, jurist **Ben Ali Fakhar**, and the two officers **Qalati** and **Qad**, took the initiative to draft a petition which they presented to the Governor-General **Jonnart**, in which they proposed granting Algerians the right to French citizenship in exchange for compulsory military service⁵⁹.

The assimilationists also formed a delegation led by **Omar Boudierba**, an Algerian member of the Municipal Council of the capital, who travelled to Paris to meet **Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau** on **October 3rd, 1908**, and presented to him a petition on behalf of the Algerians. The members of the delegation protested before him against the conscription project and insisted that Algerians must obtain political rights before being called to military service. The meeting concluded with the Prime Minister’s promise that compulsory military service was inevitable, but that he was ready to study proposals granting Algerians a reasonable margin of rights and freedom⁶⁰.

The issuance of the decree of **February 3rd, 1912**, confirmed that all efforts through petitions, delegations, recommendations, and the promises of **Jules Ferry in 1892**, **Clemenceau in 1908**, and **Poincaré in 1912**, had not moved France even slightly forward toward satisfying the hopes of the assimilationist elite⁶¹.

It is worth noting that the *colons* (European settlers) were among the fiercest opponents of this law, since, in their opinion, it would give the *indigènes* the opportunity to occupy political positions and thus compete with them in decision-making centers — such as local municipal councils, general councils, and financial delegations⁶². Likewise, “the Algerians expressed their rejection of this law through disobedience, emigration, and sometimes violence.”⁶³

As for the issue of **naturalization**, the **Senatus-Consulte** law issued on **July 14th, 1865**, led to the emergence of a debate among Algerians at that time between supporters and opponents, due to the conditions set forth by this law. According to *Ali Merad*, during half a century (1865–1914), French nationality attracted only a small number, consisting mainly of soldiers aspiring to promotion in ranks and positions⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ It is Al-Sadiq Dandan at a gathering in the city of Annaba in 1908. / looking at ; Ali Rezigue : *El mardjaa Essabek* , p54.

⁵⁹ Safer fatiha : *elmardjaa essabik* , p170.

⁶⁰ Saadallah points out that this delegation was the first since the 1833 delegation to France, the same page. / Abou Elkacem saad Ellah : *Elharaka Elwatania* , T2 , *Elmardjaa Essabek* , p182.

⁶¹ Abou Elkacem saad Ellah : *Elmardjaa nafsoh* , p61

⁶² Bachir Sahouli : *Anoukhba Aldjazairiya Elmofarnassa bayna thonaiyate hkde El Mostawtinine El ouropiyine wa ounsouriyate El Idara firansiya fi Eldjazair mabayn 1908-1937* , *Madjalat oussour* , vol20, t2 , juillet 2021 .

⁶³ Ali Rezigue : *El mardjaa Essabek* , p154.

⁶⁴ Ali Merad : *elmardjaa essabik* , p491.

However, after the First World War (1914–1918), the French administration presented to the Muslim Algerians a so-called “reformist” project, which was, to say the least, a great disappointment to the aspirations of the Algerian elite. The law of **February 4th, 1919**, did not abolish the disciplinary powers exercised by the administrative authorities, nor the penalties connected to the *Code de l’indigénat*, and it maintained the existence of special courts, as well as the absence of any representation for Muslim Algerians in Paris⁶⁵.

Nevertheless, this law revived the debate concerning the issue of **naturalization** for the “*indigènes*” in Algeria⁶⁶. The assimilationist elite seized upon their various media platforms to discuss this project and to present their ideas and proposals. This ideological struggle eventually evolved into a **division within the assimilationist elite itself**: one current called for the adoption of the French model and integration into its society, as well as alignment with Western societies to escape the state of backwardness, but while preserving the Islamic framework, especially concerning personal status matters. Among this group were **Emir Khaled** in the beginning, **Ibn Jelloul**, and **Ferhat Abbas** later on⁶⁷. The second current, on the other hand, called for **complete assimilation**, even if that required renouncing their identity and their Arab-Islamic civilization, such as **Rabah Zanati**, **Saïd El-Fassi**, **El-Arbi Touhrat**, and **Saïd Lichani**⁶⁸.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the **assimilationist elite in Algeria** emerged within a complex context marked by a **duality of identity** and a **cultural division** between Arabic and French, between Islam and secularism, and between national loyalty and openness to the French republican values. This elite represented an intellectual attempt to seek peaceful solutions through legal, political, and cultural channels. Its members endeavored to develop the social and political movement of society through new ideas and prospects for progress, seeking to overcome obstacles and to formulate new concepts—even if these concepts were foreign to their society.

However, the price they paid was the loss of their language, customs, and the respect and friendship of their own society. They turned their faces toward French life, lived according to its patterns, often married French women, and sent their children to French schools—all in the hope of transforming themselves from *Algerian indigènes* into *French Algerians*. They raised slogans of coexistence and called upon France to fulfill its declared republican promises of liberty and equality.

Yet, their project of assimilation continuously collided with the **colonial reality**, which was based on **racial, religious, and legal discrimination**. Thus, Algerians continued to be treated as second-class citizens. With the passage of time, and as repression intensified and ideas of liberation and independence began to rise, the assimilationist elite lost much of its influence and credibility—especially after the **Second World War**—as **radical and independence-oriented thought** came to dominate the popular

⁶⁵ Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair, elmardjaa essabik*, p443.

⁶⁶ The issue of naturalisation in the 1919 law is considered more restrictive than the law of 14 July 1865. / according to Charles-Robert Ageron: *Tarikhe Aldjazair, elmardjaa essabik*, p443.

⁶⁷ Naser edine saidouni : *Almasalla Ethakafiya fi Aldjazair , Anokhbe Alhowia , Allougha , dirassa tarikhiya wa nakdiya* , Elmarkaze El Arabi lilAabhathe wa dirassate Assiyassiya , 2021 , p99.

⁶⁸ Naser edine saidouni : *elmardjaa nafsoh* ,p100.

base, which had become convinced that the only solution to all of Algeria's problems was **complete independence from France**.