

The History of Emigration in Kabylie: Between Obligation and the Preservation of Identity.

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Abstract:

Migration is a topic that has attracted a considerable number of researchers seeking to understand the history and reasons that led the Algerian population to leave the country. This movement accelerated after the French colonization of Algeria in 1830. In Kabylie, migration is part of the culture, and this phenomenon existed long before the colonization of Algeria. During the French presence, thousands of Kabyles left the country for France, primarily to work in mines, factories, and to participate in the two World Wars. After independence, this movement did not stop, but it took on a new form-family migration. In this article, we aim to trace the history and evolution of migration as a social phenomenon in Algeria. In the second part, we discuss Kabyle migration and its impact on culture and identity.

Keywords: Algeria, Colonization, Emigration, Identity, Kabylie.

Introduction:

Since the revolt of 1871, Algeria has transitioned into an even more intense and difficult stage. France had planned to implement an aggressive policy against the population that had supported this revolt against French colonialism (Servier, 1990, p. 23). The sabotage measures adopted by the authorities aimed to change the demographic landscape of all regions of the country, forcing the people to adopt new survival strategies. Emigration, which had existed since the era of the Turks, became a necessity to ensure the survival of entire families.

The exploitation of Algeria's wealth by France was a major policy during this period. The local population had no choice but to find a means of survival. Many chose to leave the country for France in search of a better future that would guarantee prosperity and financial stability (Ageron, 1968, p. 42). Many Algerians preferred to leave their homes for France, where working conditions were extremely harsh-especially in mines and factories. Despite the difficulty, poor conditions, and misery endured by Algerian workers in France, they persevered and continued working to send some money back to Algeria.

Algerian immigration, which began at the end of the 19th century, is inseparable from the colonial phenomenon. French colonization in Algeria since 1830 was based on the complete collapse of its political, economic, cultural, and social structures. The establishment of colonization dismantled agriculture, causing an unprecedented displacement of rural populations (Sahoui, 2021, p. 30). The consequence was forced emigration; as Algerian cities were unable to accommodate the displaced. Once this mechanism was set in motion, the country as a whole fell into a spiral of underdevelopment. This phenomenon affected the entire country under colonial rule. Algeria's ancient heritage was trampled upon by France's repressive policies, which sought

by all means to establish a new order by replacing the existing one.

Kabylie was already the center of the "largest and most persistent" emigration for understandable reasons (Chaker, 1998, p. 48). It is a mountainous area with a relatively dense population, which was obviously not self-sufficient (hence the long-established practice of peddling) and a natural labor reserve for work, particularly in French mining operations. Thus, Kabyle emigration intensified after the 1871 revolt, which was a bitter turning point for this population (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 80).

In Kabylie, each tribe constituted an independent nation. Driven by a spirit of independence, villagers practiced self-sufficiency, cultivating mountain polyculture on small plots of land through crop rotation. However, the Kabyle peasant fell into poverty, forced to leave his family, village, wife, and children to become proletarianized. He became a farmhand on colonial estates, a foundry worker in Lorraine's steel industry, or a coal miner in the North or East of France. The departure of men led to the impoverishment of villages, and year after year, the population became increasingly dependent on their emigrants in France (Mahé, 2001, p. 45).

1.The History of Algerian Emigration:

Since the dawn of time, human populations have moved and emigrated in search of a better life. Emigration is the term used by scholars to describe the phenomenon of leaving one's country to settle elsewhere, regardless of the motive (economic, political, climatic, fiscal, etc.).

The history of Algerian emigration is not a new phenomenon; it predates French colonization. Many Algerian families left the country for Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya to work and explore new regions. Over time, a network of Algerians formed across the Maghreb and the Orient, including countries like Egypt and Syria. The reasons for this movement were diverse: lack of livelihood opportunities,

unemployment, and internal conflicts. These factors collectively pushed the Algerian population to migrate. The choice of destination was influenced by available information and personal networks. Most emigrants preferred Tunisia and Morocco, as they shared similar traditions and had once been part of the same region. However, political developments led to the establishment of borders separating the three Maghreb countries (Sayed, 1977, p. 74).

In the contemporary era, migration movements intensified following French colonization in 1830. These included the displacement of local populations, forced deportations, and expulsions resulting from popular resistance. Algerian emigration to mainland France also grew, driven by the colonial authorities, particularly during the two World Wars. Many Algerians were recruited by colonial France, either as soldiers in the French army or as essential laborers contributing to France's economic expansion. Historians have documented these events, with Meynier, P. & Meynier, G. (2011: 220) noting: *"It was in 1913 that free movement was established for Algerians-particularly Algerian laborers* (Ageron, 1968, p. 156).

With the war, France needed workers and soldiers-military service became mandatory with the decree of February 3, 1912. It should be noted that the service duration was twice as long for Algerians as for French citizens. In total, 120,000 workers and nearly 175,000 soldiers went to France between 1914 and 1918. Around 25,000 Algerian soldiers were killed there." This wave of emigration continued even after the Second World War. *"During this time, migration from the Maghreb to France persisted beyond the war. By 1945, the number of Algerian workers and their families in France had reached approximately 350,000"* (Ageron, 1968, p. 145).

This pattern of migration prevailed throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods. Algerians moved to France

primarily for work, with most belonging to the laboring class and often referred to as "indigenous" workers. Migration pathways were not only South-North but also South-South, involving inter-Maghreb movements, as well as North-South shifts resulting from French colonization of Algeria. Algerian migration evolved over time, adapting to changing national circumstances. As a result, migration conditions underwent natural reconfigurations. Algerian migration to France became a historical legacy and a natural extension of colonization-a continuous process with contextual variations (Khellil, 1979, p. 107).

A retrospective look at the history of Algerian migration reveals a fundamental shift in its nature. A revised framework for understanding this phenomenon has become necessary. Initially, migration was driven by economic necessity, with laborers seeking better working conditions and fleeing poverty. Over time, it transformed into an intellectual and skilled migration, driven by education and mass literacy, increased female participation, and demographic growth.

Migration has become an integral part of Algeria's collective memory. In the context of globalization, it no longer conforms to the traditional perception of emotional rupture, where migrants leave behind their social and cultural environment in search of a better future. Instead, migration today takes multiple forms, influenced by global connectivity, technological advancements in communication, and modern transportation. These developments have allowed academics and researchers to be present in multiple locations within short timeframes.

Sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad identified three key phases in the history of Algerian migration:

1.1 The First Phase of Emigration:

This generation consisted of impoverished peasants struggling for survival. They migrated in search of means to improve their lives while maintaining their rural identity.

These migrants continued to live in France as peasants, preserving their traditional lifestyle, ethics, and community bonds. Sayad (1977) described them as:

"Migrants of that time were peasants who had not truly separated from their families, land, and activities-only physically and temporarily. They were sent by their families and, more broadly, by rural society to fulfill a specific, time-bound mission."

This generation remained firmly attached to peasant and communal traditions.

1.2 The Second Phase of Emigration:

Over time, emigration became more widespread, leading to the decline of peasant traditions among migrants. This generation gradually detached from their original communities, integrating into French society while seeking personal fulfillment rather than collective well-being. Migration lost its initial collective objective and became an individual pursuit. Sayad (1977) observed:

"They managed to secure permanent jobs in the industrial sector. This generation consisted of young bachelors from rural and even urban areas. Their visits back home was limited to annual holidays, with some remaining in France for years without returning, unlike the first generation of migrants."

1.3 The Third Phase of Emigration:

In this phase, Algerian migration took on a new dimension. The volume of migration increased and expanded across all regions of Algeria, affecting people of all backgrounds-peasants and non-peasants, young and old, families, and even children. Migration became a family-based phenomenon. Algerians from this generation were relatively educated and engaged in different professions compared to earlier migrants. Mixed marriages between Algerians and the French also became more common and were no longer considered taboo (Sayad, 1977, p. 78).

2.The Tradition of Emigration in Kabylie During the Colonial Era:

Kabylie has a long tradition of emigration. In fact, internal migration already existed before 1830, that is, before the beginning of French colonization in Algeria. Before this date, young Kabyles would go to work for short periods in major Algerian cities. For example, a significant portion of the workers in Turkish factories in Algeria were Kabyles. According to Chaker, a tradition of commerce linked to migration already existed among certain Kabyle tribes before colonization began.

During this period, exile was often met with fear by the Kabyles. Simply leaving one's native village was enough for a Kabyle to feel like a foreigner. In Kabyle villages, the most severe punishment was not the death penalty but exile. A punished man would seek refuge in another village, where he could only take on low-prestige, despised jobs, such as being a butcher (Khellil, 1979, p. 103). These were forced and permanent departures. As for short-term emigration for economic reasons, it was always met with sadness by those left behind, particularly wives and mothers. In popular Kabyle poetry, the theme of emigration holds an important place, often carrying a tragic tone. The strength of a family depended on the number of men it had, so the temporary absence of some was deeply felt. Additionally, emigration was traditionally seen as a test of manhood (Mohia-Navet, 1997, p. 31).

The year 1871 was a significant date for Kabylie and the history of Kabyle emigration, marking the "pacification" of Algeria by the French army. Kabylie was the last region to resist French colonization. In 1871, the French army successfully repressed the rebellion in which Kabylie had actively participated (Chaker, 1998, p. 75). Kabylie was forced to pay a war tax, many people were executed or imprisoned, and the most fertile lands (particularly in the valleys) were confiscated and given to French settlers. These changes

disrupted an already fragile economic and demographic balance. Due to archaic mountain farming methods used on infertile, acidic land, agriculture was unable to meet the food needs of a rapidly growing population.

This situation pushed some Kabyle men to seek elsewhere the means necessary for their survival and that of their families. Dirèche-Slimani expressed it as follows: "This overpopulation of an extremely fragmented, poor land, living off primitive mountain agriculture, leaves only one alternative: starvation or emigration" (Direche-Slimani, 2004, p. 48). After the events of 1871, some Kabyles took refuge in Tunisia. Some stayed there for life, others returned to Kabylie, and others continued on to France. Until World War I, Kabyle departures to Tunisia were regular, driven mainly by economic reasons.

In these early emigration movements, the Algerian population abroad was composed almost exclusively of Kabyles (Direche-Slimani, 2004, p. 20). Chaker writes that in 1914, 13,000 Algerians were in France, more than 10,000 of whom were from Great and Small Kabylie (Chaker, 1998, p. 67). During World War I, when the French industry needed labor to compensate for the mobilized male workforce, Algerian workers were employed in factories dedicated to national defense. During this period, Kabyles continued to dominate Algerian immigration to France, although Algerians from Arabic-speaking regions were also present. According to Dirèche-Slimani, in 1923, 80,000 Algerians were living in France, of whom 84.1% were Kabyles (Direche-Slimani, 2004, p. 54). Until the beginning of the Algerian War of Independence, the number of emigrant workers continued to grow. According to Chaker, their number reached approximately 212,000 in 1954, including 120,000 Kabyles.

To analyze this emigration to France, one can also refer to Sayad's article, *Three "Ages" of Algerian Emigration to France* (Sayad, 1977, pp. 59-80). During the period discussed,

men emigrated for short durations. Since not everyone who wished to emigrate could do so, Kabyle communities entrusted certain individuals with this task, sending them abroad with a specific mission. Dirèche-Slimani lists some of the reasons for this type of emigration: feeding the family, paying off debts, earning money to buy livestock, build a house, or finance a wedding. These emigrants were villagers who adhered to traditional values, such as the importance of the group.

In their lives, *Tamurt* (which means the homeland, the family, the group of men, the village, or the community in general) played a crucial role. All their behaviors were subordinated to their belonging to *Tamurt*. Thus, despite being in France, these individuals had to prove they respected group solidarity and maintained the village sense of honor. They had to refrain from imitating city men, who "love themselves too much" and "work only for their own stomachs" (Sayed, 1977, p. 63). These Kabyles lived in France alongside their relatives, grouped according to their family and region of origin, which was tied to their sense of belonging to *Tamurt* (country).

Within these groups, internal solidarity reigned, as well as social control that preserved village norms. Contact with European culture was minimized. "The emigrant took refuge in this kind of 'small country' recreated in France to extend the 'great country' of his homeland, thereby manifesting his generalized refusal to integrate into a universe (that of emigration) that he discovered as fundamentally foreign" (Sayed, 1977, p. 63).

Thus, immigration was the result of cultural, social, and economic changes in Kabyle society. In addition to the previously mentioned upheavals, new economic mechanisms such as monetization, the market economy, and wage labor played a significant role. Similarly, just as internal changes in Kabylie influenced emigration, immigration in turn altered Kabyle ways of life and thinking. Sayad referred to this

phenomenon as the "second 'age'" of Kabyle emigration, described as "the loss of control".

Gradually, without a precise date, emigration became a more individual matter. Individuals were no longer carefully selected by the group and no longer needed its permission to leave. For many emigrants, exile became an adventure into the unknown. The ability to compare their own society to another led some young emigrants to question traditional village values upon their return to Kabylie, exacerbating generational conflicts.

For some, emigration was also a way to escape Kabyle society's strict surveillance, allowing them to evade the behavioral obligations imposed by the group. "It took exile for the Kabyle to realize the suffocating environment surrounding his life. The elements of comparison he encountered in France would serve him to improve his immediate environment; his first goal would be to build himself a house, but a modern house" (Khellil, 1979, p. 125).

The immigration of Kabyle families changed how Maghrebi immigrants were perceived by French society. Before this phenomenon, they were seen by the French administration and society primarily through an economic lens-as cheap labor. The situation changed when it became clear that these immigrant families were staying in France. The encounters and conflicts between French and Algerian cultures introduced a new theme into French political and social debates: integration.

The issue of integrating Maghrebis in France remains relevant today. Islam has become the second-largest religion in France, and cultural confrontations are widely covered by the media. This is evident, for example, in the debates sparked by the law banning public school students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols in adherence to the principle of secularism.

3. The True Causes of Emigration in Kabylia:

The departure of Kabyles to France after 1871 served two purposes: on one hand, it aimed to empty Kabylia of potential resistance fighters, allowing France to impose its colonial order; on the other hand, it helped revitalize the French economy, particularly after the strikes of Portuguese workers in Marseille's soap factories. With the arrival of other laborers, they worked in the mines of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, in car manufacturing factories, and, during the two World Wars, also served as fierce soldiers for France. Initially, this emigration was an individual endeavor, with the myth of return, but over time, women joined their husbands, children followed through family reunification, and others were born in France. Through naturalization, a significant number became French (Zehraoui, 1994, p. 40).

The analysis of this phenomenon will now focus on the reasons behind the desire to leave. As previously highlighted, the traditional reasons for emigration to France are mainly economic: for example, a father's stay in France ensures an income for his family remaining in Algeria. The second reason for staying in France is expressed by Khellil: "The young Kabyle of today, on vacation in France, will tell you nine times out of ten that he is on a mission." (Khellil, 1979, p. 85). The term "mission" is important: it signifies the intention of some Algerian students in France to improve the situation in their country of origin once they obtain their diplomas. Indeed, among the young Algerians who pursue higher education in France, some remain there, while others return to Algeria. As for Kabyle intellectuals, they emigrate to France to develop their intellectual activities, which is more difficult in Algeria.

3.1 The Political Situation:

In 1991, the first round of parliamentary elections was won by the Islamist party "Islamic Salvation Front" (FIS). The second round was canceled, and a High Council of State was installed by the military. Members of the FIS and those

suspected of sympathizing with the FIS were persecuted. Following these events, Algeria experienced a climate of civil war marked by terrorism. Although the most intense waves of violence have subsided, violent acts continue. It is estimated that 150,000 people have been killed since the start of the civil war. This insecurity pushed many Kabyles to leave their country to seek shelter or refuge in France.

3.2 The Social Situation of Young Kabyles:

The social crisis in Algeria is profound. It is particularly characterized by corruption, unemployment, and housing problems. Young people feel powerless to change this situation. They lack prospects and often lose hope for improvement. One reaction to this lack of hope is emigration.

3.3 The Issue of Social Freedom:

Kabyle immigrants grew up in a village environment where people know each other well. Social control mechanisms play an important role. An individual's behavior is subject to unwritten societal rules. As Bourdieu expresses it: "A person... is first and foremost seized as a 'being for others,' who is constantly under the gaze of others and feels the omnipotence of public opinion. If the group meticulously controls behavior, particularly in social interactions, it is satisfied with this 'appearance' that the individual presents and seeks to ensure outward conformity from the outside" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 58). Behavioral norms and language use are subordinate to the code of honor (*Nnif or isey*). The social control criticized by immigrants mainly concerns intimate life. The judgment of society is seen as oppressive, and immigrants wish to free themselves from it. Traditional Kabyle society condemns intimate relationships between unmarried young people, making them difficult to realize.

3.4 The Tradition of Emigration in Kabylia:

Finally, an important factor influencing emigration is Kabylia's strong and long-standing tradition of migration, as previously mentioned statistics indicate. The idea that

emigration is an escape from hardship in Algeria is widespread in Kabyle society. The fact that many Kabyles have already emigrated influences young Kabyle's' thinking. If their relatives succeeded in emigrating, why shouldn't they? Emigration has thus become a model to follow. Kabyles living abroad also persuade their friends and relatives to leave. This persuasion is facilitated by the solidarity among emigrants, improving the conditions for new arrivals.

4. The Attachment of Kabyle Emigrants to Their Identity in Host Countries: The Case of France:

The region-Kabyliya-represents the homeland from which the Kabyles come. It is a symbolic native land. As previously stated, this regional criterion is not absolute. However, language is a central criterion. Language is the visible marker of Kabyle identity abroad. In Algeria, it is primarily language that distinguishes Berber speakers from Arabic speakers. Tamazight has become a fundamental element of Kabyle identity construction. The activities of Kabyle activists abroad-cultural, educational, and scientific-focus on language. Even among Kabyles in Algeria, language plays a central role in their fundamental priorities (Zehraoui, 2002 , p. 75).

Nevertheless, language is not an absolute criterion of "Kabyleness." Some immigrants in France or elsewhere claim that even those who do not speak Tamazight can be considered Kabyle. These are individuals with Kabyle ancestry. The third explicit criterion is lineage. In evaluating a person's "Kabyleness," this factor is decisive; it constitutes an absolute criterion. The awareness of Kabyle origin is limited over time by intergenerational transmission. Region, language, and ancestry do not form a complete emic definition. What matters is the declaration of belonging to Kabyle identity and the acceptance of this declaration by other Kabyles.

The sense of Kabyle identity is strong among

immigrants. The primary reason for this is that, abroad, the question of geographical origin is frequently raised. Declarations of "Kabyleness" are also made due to the French public's lack of awareness of Kabyles and Berbers. These assertions of Kabyle identity are most frequent immediately after arrival in Europe, particularly in France, and manifest during initial interactions. Over time, in dialogues with other Kabyles, these declarations diminish. However, external factors, especially events in Kabylia, occasionally rekindle identity sentiment.

Kabyle identity is the most commonly asserted identity among immigrants. Kabyles began to develop a modern sense of their identity at the end of the 19th century. At that time, a modern conceptualization of Kabyles as a Berber ethnic group was constructed. "Previously, Kabyle communal awareness was based on a system of traditional references: a network of tribal relations, an ethics linked to an acephalous (or 'segmentary') socio-political organization, a vigorous literary (notably poetic) tradition, and symbolic centers that transcended segmentary divisions: brotherhoods and local saints... In the 20th century, the primary reference became language, followed by an awareness of the Berber historical presence in the Maghreb, which predates Islam» (Chaker, 1998, p. 100).

The comparison with French society reveals, on one hand, the differences in living standards between the two countries. On the other hand, discovering French society highlights the rigidity of traditional Kabyle customs. Specialized literature sometimes discusses the "cultural shock" experienced by Kabyle emigrants, particularly when they first see a woman in a miniskirt or a couple holding hands or kissing in public. As for whether the emigrant has consumed alcohol in France, this question is often avoided, as it is a taboo subject: everyone knows that most emigrants have at least tasted or regularly consumed alcohol abroad

(Mohia-Navet, 1997, p. 30).

Conclusion:

This study has provided a historical overview of Algerian emigration from the beginning of French colonialism to today. Social hardship caused by colonial practices accelerated this phenomenon. Algerian emigrants arrived in France to work and send money to their families. From the 20th century onward, Algerian emigration took on a new dimension, with integration into the French army and Algerian participation in both world wars. After independence, emigration changed in nature, becoming more family-oriented due to the successful integration of Algerians into the French way of life. The massive presence of emigrants in foreign territories led to new generations and the adoption of new attitudes in host countries.

Emigration in Kabylia is not a new phenomenon. Even before colonialism, the region had already experienced it. After the war of 1871, Kabyle emigration accelerated as a result of colonial policies. The most educated Kabyles were also those with the highest emigration rates. Thus, the Kabyles became the first Berbers in France, migrating spontaneously as men who had lost hope of making a living in their homeland. Many were former artisans—some ruined, such as gunsmiths—belonging to honorable families, among the least poor, possessing enough savings to finance their journey, and open-minded enough to embrace modernity by educating their children and undertaking this migration project.

This initial period was followed by more permanent immigration, where men made a living by "working to send money," as was commonly said in the villages. During the Algerian War of Independence, male migration continued, and some were joined by pioneering women. Later, due to rising unemployment, "labor immigration," involving men traveling alone, was banned in 1975. However, family reunification, the

only permitted form of migration, allowed the close relatives of workers-both laborers and merchants-to join them in France, where their children were born.

Kabyle immigration has now stabilized. However, Kabyles in France have always maintained village solidarity and ties with their homeland, often working for the same employers and settling in the same neighborhoods. They keep in touch with their families in Kabylia and regularly return to their villages for vacations.

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