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The Impact of the Ouled Naïl's Pledge of Allegiance to Emir Abdelkader on the Course of Popular Resistance in the Region in 1837

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Abstract:

The course of popular resistances following the French campaign against Algeria was an inevitable response by the Algerian population and the various tribes spread across the country. However, what gave these resistances significant strength was the uprising led by Emir Abdelkader, whose movement spread rapidly and powerfully. As a result, the Emir sought alliances with other tribes in different regions of the country, with the southern regions among his key targets.

The Ouled Naïl tribes, known for their strength, strategic acumen, and deep-rooted aversion to French colonization, warmly welcomed Emir Abdelkader. Their strong support for his cause led them to actively participate in his resistance movement and pledge allegiance to him. This allegiance and involvement in the Emir's struggle became a defining moment in the history of the Ouled Naïl tribes.

Keywords:

Ouled Naïl, Ain Madhi, Titteri, Moussa Darqawi, Cherif Belharche.

Introduction:

The achievements of Emir Abdelkader, the founder of the Algerian state, have been documented by historians and researchers from Algeria, the Arab world, and even foreign scholars, particularly the French. This is due to the fact that French colonization coincided with the life of this prominent figure, who is considered one of the most significant national personalities in Algeria's history.

From the very beginning, the Emir stood against French occupation, carrying the banner of jihad in the name of God to liberate the land and its people from French enslavement. As France expanded its occupation across Algeria, the Emir extended his influence throughout the country, calling upon all tribes and clans to join the resistance against French colonization. The Ouled Naïl tribe, which, according to many historians, represents the largest population group in Algeria, played a crucial role in supporting the Emir and resisting colonial expansion in the regions where their tribes were concentrated.

The years 1836 and 1837 are considered pivotal in the history of both the Ouled Naïl and Emir Abdelkader, as they marked the beginning of a strong relationship between them, particularly in the course of the popular resistance in the region.

In this study, we will explore the early relationship between the Emir and the Ouled Naïl tribe through the pledge of allegiance and its impact on the trajectory of the popular resistance in the region.

1/ The State of Resistance in the Region Before 1837

According to historical writings and the traces left regarding Emir Abdelkader's resistance in the southern region and the central desert, the initial correspondence between Emir Abdelkader and the tribes spread across the Djelfa region took place between 1835 and 1836. The Ouled Nail region was among the emir's top priorities after the expansion of the resistance, as well as due to the need for other strategically and economically significant areas. The region of Ouled Nail was particularly rich in:

- **Livestock farming**: The practice of raising various types of livestock was widespread among the tribes in the region, as it formed the basis of their livelihood and economy, making it a vital economic resource.
- **Economic and cultural heritage**: The breeding of livestock represented both an economic and cultural tradition, and this wealth continues to exist to this day.
- **Cereal cultivation**: Due to the necessity of grains for the Ouled Nail tribes, they focused on grain cultivation, which served as a primary source of sustenance. Additionally, it provided fodder for livestock, making it a well-established practice among all tribes settled in Algeria, whether in the Tell region, the high plateaus, or the desert.
- **Trade**: Given the geographical position of the region, most tribes engaged in trade, either among local tribes or with neighboring ones. As a result, commercial activity was widespread and significant, especially with the Beni M'zab, Touggourt, and even the Tell region (Jard, 2009, p. 31).

This is precisely what Emir Abdelkader implemented while building his state—he encouraged farmers to cultivate the land and urged people to engage in livestock farming (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 45).

With the developments in popular resistance, particularly Emir Abdelkader's resistance in the west and Ahmed Bey's resistance in the east, Emir Abdelkader was, at this very moment, negotiating the **Treaty of Tafna**, which became a crucial turning point in his resistance movement. It should be noted that the French colonial forces were determined to eliminate all forms of resistance, especially those led by **Ahmed Bey and Emir Abdelkader**, as they were the only two movements at the time carrying the banner of **jihad** against colonial rule.

During this period, the **Titteri region** (known among researchers as the Médéa region) served as a **military supply hub** for the Ouled Nail tribes. At this

time, these tribes were **ready and prepared to join Emir Abdelkader's cause** (Jard, 2009, pp. 30-31).

In the northern front of the Sahara, particularly in the **Tell region**, the influence of **Moussa bin Al-Hassan Al-Darqawi** was strong. The **Karkib faction** in the Titteri region reached out to him, seeking his support in declaring **jihad** and urging him to join them. This coincided with Emir Abdelkader's signing of the **Desmichels Treaty** with the French in February 1834 (Labaz, 2018, p. 391). Following this path, the **Ouled Nail tribes allied with Al-Darqawi** (Jard, 2009, p. 30) and prepared to **march on and invade the Titteri (Médéa),** where French garrisons were stationed. They also planned to **confront Emir Abdelkader**, believing that he had formed an alliance with the French (Ibid., p. 30).

Thus, the **Ouled Nail tribes actively participated in the resistance** and were among the first to confront the French. They joined forces with Al-Darqawi's army, which consisted of **3,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry soldiers**

In early 1835, facing the massive advance of Al-Darqawi's forces, the city of **Médéa** could not hold out for long. The local population attempted to use their **only cannon**, but it **exploded on the first shot**. They considered this a divine sign in favor of their new leader, and as a result, they **surrendered and pledged allegiance to Al-Darqawi** (Berbrugger, 1856, p. 48).

Following this event in the **Titteri region**, Emir Abdelkader closely monitored **Al-Darqawi's army**, determined to eliminate it. The two forces **clashed in Jendel (east of Jendel) in April 1835**, resulting in a **decisive defeat for Al-Darqawi**. The battle led to the **loss of approximately 300 warriors from Al-Darqawi's army** and about **40 cavalrymen from Emir Abdelkader's forces**. After his defeat, **Al-Darqawi retreated south to the city of Messaad (70 km south of Djelfa)** (Jard, 2009, p. 21).

At the same time, historian **Yahia Bouaziz** notes that **Governor Clauzel** sent **a large French military force** from Algiers to **Médéa (Titteri province)**. There, the French **removed Emir Abdelkader's appointed governor** and **installed one of their collaborators**. However, the **local population later overthrew him** (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 41).

Clauzel's **strategy was clear**—he sought to **occupy cities temporarily, submit the local tribes to his rule, and then abandon them**. Emir Abdelkader **recognized this pattern** and later **turned it to his advantage** (Ibid., p. 41).

2/ Reasons for the Allegiance of the Ouled Nail Tribes to Emir Abdelkader

In our view, several factors contributed to the **Ouled Nail tribes' allegiance** to Emir Abdelkader, given the region's circumstances. It was necessary for both the Emir and the tribes to **reach an agreement**, which ultimately led to their **pledge of allegiance** to him.

Notably, **Emir Abdelkader's first visit** to the region coincided with the **fall of Constantine to the French in 1837**. This visit served as a **reconnaissance and informational mission**, during which he sought to gauge the **response of the local population** to his call for **jihad**. The visit also allowed him to **gain a comprehensive understanding** of the tribes settled around **the Bou Saâda region**, which was precisely what he was looking for.

He was greatly assisted in this effort by **Si Cherif Belharsh**, who provided **valuable services** due to his **deep knowledge of the people and the region's conditions** (Naïbi, 2014, pp. 49-50).

2-1: Reasons for Allegiance – From Emir Abdelkader's Perspective

- **The Battle of Jendel** revealed to the Emir the **strategic importance and instability** of the region, necessitating **urgent measures** to establish control.
- It highlighted the **delayed arrival of his resistance movement** in this area, particularly **northward (where the Ouled Nail tribes resided) and south of Titteri**, making it imperative for him to **assert control over the region**.
- The Emir **needed the support of these tribes** to strengthen his position and to **counter the expansion of colonial forces**.
- He also required **economic resources**, and the **Ouled Nail region was rich in diverse economic assets**.

2-2: Reasons for Allegiance – From the Ouled Nail Tribes' Perspective

- The region **needed security and stability**, which could only be achieved under the leadership of a **strong and capable ruler**. Emir Abdelkader's **reputation, resilience, and widespread resistance** made him the **ideal leader** for the Ouled Nail tribes to support and pledge allegiance to.

As a result, the **Emir initiated correspondence** with the **Ouled Nail tribes in 1836**, and they subsequently **joined his cause**. At the time, their population was estimated at **80,000 to 100,000 people**, spread across **2,000 tents** (Tlemçani, 2005, p. 281).

The **formal allegiance (Bay'ah) of the Ouled Nail tribes to Emir Abdelkader** took place in **1837 at a location known as Al-Karmounia (north of Djelfa)**. **Si Cherif Belharsh played a key role as a mediator** between the Emir and the tribal elders (Jard, 2009, p. 33).

3. Results of the Allegiance

After the **Ouled Nail tribes pledged allegiance** to Emir Abdelkader, he took steps to **organize them into military units**. The tribes were divided into **several divisions**, each led by a designated commander:

- **Mohammed Ibn Zebda** was appointed commander of the **Ouled Aissa**.
- **Mohammed Ben Attia** was appointed commander of the **Ouled Diya**.
- **Telli Belkhel** was appointed commander of the **Ouled Si Ahmed**.
- **Sheikh Harran** was appointed commander of the **Ouled Oum Hani**.
- **Sheikh Ibn Al-Bouhali** was appointed commander of the **Ouled Saad Ben Salem**.

At the head of all the **Ouled Nail tribes** was **Sheikh Abdessalam Ibn Kendouz**, who was later **succeeded by Si Cherif Belharsh** (Jard, 2009, p. 34).

The **Ouled Nail tribes** joined **Emir Abdelkader** in the **siege of Ain Madhi** (in Laghouat) against the **Tijaniyya forces** led by **Ahmed Tijani** in **June 1838** (Tlemçani, 1998, p. 23).

That same year, a **rebellion** broke out, led by **Ben Aouda Al-Mokhtari**, who mobilized the **tribes of Bougara and southern Titteri**, along with **some factions of the Ouled Nail tribes**. The rebels opposed **paying taxes** to the Emir's representatives, using the justification that **he had signed the Treaty of Tafna with the French**.

However, **Emir Abdelkader's forces successfully crushed the rebellion**, forcing **Ben Aouda Al-Mokhtari to surrender**. Seeking **pardon and protection**, he appealed to the Emir, who not only granted him amnesty but also **appointed him as Agha** (chief) over **his own tribe and the other rebellious tribes** (Naïbi, 2014, pp. 51-52).

The **Ouled Nail tribes** played a significant role in **Emir Abdelkader's campaign against the Tijaniyya forces**, contributing **military detachments** composed of:

- **100 cavalrymen** from the **Ouled El-Ghouini and Ouled Si Ahmed** tribes.
- **15 cavalrymen** from the **Ouled Yahia Ben Salem** tribe.
- **30 cavalrymen** from the **Ouled Aissa** tribe.
- **10 cavalrymen** from the **Ouled Saad Ben Salem** tribe.
- **20 cavalrymen** from the **Ouled Faraj** tribe.

The **siege lasted six months** and concluded with **Ahmed Tijani and his followers evacuating their fortified stronghold**, which had been their main defense against the Emir's forces. **Emir Abdelkader subsequently destroyed the fortress** (Tlemçani, 1998, p. 171; Emir, 1903, p. 196).

After securing victory, **Emir Abdelkader focused on state-building**, working to:

- **Subdue his opponents** and consolidate his authority.
- **Acquire weapons** to strengthen his army.
- **Establish arms manufacturing factories** and **build supply depots** in **five key locations**, including **Saïda, Bougara, and Taza**.
- **Appoint governors (Khalifas) to administer newly controlled territories** (Saadallah, 2007, p. 32).

Results of the Campaign

- **Emir Abdelkader's victory** over the **Tijanis**, with the **participation of the Ouled Nail tribes**.
- **Si Cherif Belharsh was appointed as Emir Abdelkader's Khalifa (deputy) over the Ouled Nail tribes**, following the death of **Hadj Al-Arabi**, who had previously held this position for the **tribes of the region and Laghouat**.
- **The Ouled Nail tribes continued supporting Emir Abdelkader**, particularly in **the resistance around Médéa**.

After securing Ain Madhi, Emir Abdelkader expanded his administration, appointing new deputies as he advanced towards the Ziban region and Kabylie (Saadallah, 2007, p. 33):

- Kabylie: Hadj Sidi Saadi, followed by Ahmed Tayeb Ben Salem (Bouira).
- Lesser Kabylie: Mohamed Ben Abdel Salam El-Mokrani (M'Choune).

- Ziban and the southeastern regions: Farhat Ben Said, later succeeded by Hassan Ben Azzouz (Biskra).
- Southern and southwestern regions: Ahmed Ben Salem (Laghouat).

Conclusion

Through their alliance with **Emir Abdelkader**, the **Ouled Nail tribes** played a crucial role in his resistance, achieving several key outcomes:

- The Ouled Nail tribes officially joined Emir Abdelkader's resistance, becoming one of his most important allies in the southern regions.
- Their contribution helped Emir Abdelkader bring Ain Madhi under his control in 1838.
- Their participation in battles under the Emir's leadership enhanced their military and combat experience.
- The Ouled Nail tribes became one of Emir Abdelkader's most vital allies, given their large population and influence in the region.

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