The Extremist Assimilated Algerian Elite and the Algerian National Movement (1819-1945)

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Abstract: The one who studies the contemporary and modern Algerian history in general and the history of the Algerian national movement in particular, a number of subjects will attract his attention because they require more deep studies. The main subject is about studying the extremist assimilated Algerian elite and its role in the Algerian national movement. Among the main reasons for our choice of this subject is the desire to understand the secret aspects of this type of active figures in the national movement and attempting to know the ideas and references of this school of assimilation through answering the following question: What is meant of the elite group? What is the apex of extremism in it? What is the cognitive and ideological reference of the extremist assimilated elite? What are the characteristics of its attitudes towards the various political issues? What are its pioneers? What are its most important roles and attitudes as part of the Algerian national movement?.

Key words: The Extremist Assimilated Algerian Elite · The Algerian National Movement · The Islamic Reformist Movement in Algeria · Intelligentsia · Ideology of the Extremist assimilated Elite

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism was trying to suppress the Algerian culture before thinking of establishing its alternate cultural institutions which were oriented to the Europeans and some naturalized Algerians. It cut all the effluents which were nourishing it. It also tried to make people believe that the local cultural heritage does not exist or it perished as a natural result of its weakness. Consequently, some kind of complex was created in the young people who were deprived of their culture and this took various forms oscillating between doubt, disorientation and alienation among a lot of those who graduated from the French educational institutions. They constituted what is called the intellectual elite of the French culture which announced expressively its attachment for the values of the civilized France. It was asking for adopting the choice of assimilation as a preliminary solution to the problem of Algeria. Nevertheless, some figures among them were active as part of “the Algerian youths’ movement” and occupied leadership posts in it.

They became extremists and opted for naturalization either having the French nationality and abandoned their Islamic personal status and this is what constituted the axis of conflict, taking place between the Algerian Muslims on the one hand and this was one of the claims of “The Algerian youths’ movement”, on the other hand.

In fact, those extremists naturalized assimilated had preoccupations and attitudes that should be taken into account because of their important role in the study of the history of the Algerian national movement.

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**Elite Group Concept and Beginnings:** Most of the historical studies interested in the history of the Algerian national movement insist that the signs of the first elite go back to a period before the first World War and here we find “ALI MERRAD”, ABOU EL KACEM SAAD ALLAH and GAY PEREVELY who insist on the appearance of what is known as the elite group in this period.

In fact, when someone studies the book “The Islamic Reformist Movement in Algeria (1925-1940)” by ALI MERRAD, he finds that the term elite according to the latter comprises all the intellectuals who had a French training and the Arabic-speakers who had a reforming orientation. He described the two trends on the basis that they worked to overcome and suppress the popular lethargy and vanquish marabout and conservative forces [1].

The same researcher insists that those intellectual Muslim young people of a French training are worth studying, especially because the different roles moving the wheels of the public opinion in Algeria particularly, being responsible for claims in front of the French administration.

In fact, in addition to the French training of those people, they were impressed and in favour of the way of thinking and life style of the French in particular and the advantages of the European civilization in general [2].

The doctor ABOU EL KACEM SAAD ALLAH under the title “The Elite Group” says “The members of this bloc had their programs and theories about the Algerian politics” [3].

The follower of the studies related to the subject of the Algerian elite notices the diversity and difference of its definition within the historians as far as the essence and structure are concerned. CHERIF BENHEBILES, one of the members of the elite group, defines it as follows “It is the Pleiades of the Algerian young people graduated from the French Universities” [4].

There are those who called them, those of young turbans different from old turbans. Some others called them, using the term “intelligentsia” [5] and some others used the term “liberals”. This difference is due fundamentally, as it was aid previously, to the components of this category. There are those who define it on the basis of the social class to which it belongs, i.e. the middle class and the lower middle class. Another group took a cultural criterion to differentiate between them and other social classes [6].

The most precise definition related to the subject of the Algerian elite is the one provided by André Servier one of the editor of the newspaper “La Dépêche de Constantine” in his book “The Danger of the Future”. He believes that the Algerian youths were the modern class which was less than forty years old. It had a bilingual French cultural training. It was characterized by its tendency, aiming at reaching an economic and social reforms and by the end political rights [7].

ALI MERRAD states for this purpose that those intellectuals were called Algerian youths and the training of the elite was not an object of consensus among the historians. The members of this class consider themselves an excellent minority and the farmers, marabouts, scholars, communists and leaders had nothing to do with it, however some writers have confirmed that it also comprises translators and doctors. The socialist French writer JEAN JOURYIS describes the Algerian elite as being a mixture of lost people between Arabic and European civilizations [8].

The teacher SAADALLAH says that the elite group did not only adopt the ideas of the west, its means of living and culture according to BENHEBILES, but they wanted to change the Algerian society into a European one. That’s why, in most of the time, they got married with French women, talked French language and sent their children to French schools.

As a matter of fact, this group was very slow in emergence and small in number. It started appearing at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. When JULES FERRY visited Algeria, supervising the French parliament committee in 1892 which was charged of the enquire into the situation of Algeria and Algerians. He met some Algerian youths such as the advocate BOUDARBA and TAYEB MORSLI who talked to him about the administrative abuses and raised the issue of citizenship and parliament representation of the Muslims [9].

The activity of the elite consisted in the form of individual and collective initiatives in the cultural and social domain, especially newspapers, issuing newspapers such as “AL MISBAH” (Torch) in Oran in 1907 an “ISLAM” in Annaba and then in the capital in 1910. It used titles that indicate its attachment for France like MISBAH newspaper which had a secondary title “Min Ajl Firansa Biwasitat Al Arab Min Ajl Al Arab Biwasitat Firansa” (For the sake of France through the Arabs for the sake of the Arabs through France)” [10].
Teacher SALAH FERKOUS says “The Algerian intellectual elite, which had a French culture, focused its claims in this period on the idea of assimilated Algeria with France with the full representation of the Algerians to the extent that some of them required for fulfillment of the assimilation the maintenance of the Islamic personal status.

In fact, when studying the activity of the elite group, it must be made clear that it was active before the first World War as part of “the Algerians youths’ movement” and after that as part of it is called “the movement of AMIR KHALED 1919-1925) and the latter started his political movement by the end of 1919 when he was separated from the elite, asking his partisans to apply the politics of assimilation with the preservation of the Islamic personal status [11].

It can be said that this attitude concerning the Algerian researchers can be considered as the top of moderation in the Algerian youth’s movement with the leadership of AMIR KHALED and his adepts like FARHAT ABBES and some others.

But concerning abandoning the Islamic personal status is considered the apex of extremism with the leadership of IBN TOUHAMI and his adepts like MOHAMMED SALAH BENDJELOUL, BENCHERIF BENHEBILES, HANAFI LAHMEK and others.

The Extremist Assimilating Elite- its Origins and Beginnings: The one who studies the history of the extremist assimilating elite finds himself dealing with the conception of one of the main thinkers of assimilation “ FARHAT ABBES” who précised in one of his sayings: “Some blame us for the fact that the berber Arab students had their training as part of the French culture and when differences are revealed concerning the viewpoints among them and their French friends, they attribute that to the Islamic extremism (…); the French thinking represents the platform on which our moral principles are based. In spite of this the Islam remains our spiritual citizen, is keeping one’s identity extremism?” [12].

When considering what FARHAT ABBES put forward in 1972 to recognize himself that among the important subjects and issues about which there was much talk and Algerian elite’s sweat at the same time during the beginning of the 20th century, we find the issue of “the Algerian identity and the French one”.

The teacher ABOU AL KACEM SAADALLAH says that the idea of replacing the Algerian identity by the French one appeared and developed gradually because of a number of factors on the Algerian ground like the idea aspiration and adopting the European French mode [13].

In fact, the idea refers according to SAADALLAH to the human nature mentioned by ABDERRAHMANE IBN KHALDOUN in the introduction which means that the vanquished is fond of the vanquisher and he adds to that in his temporal determination on the basis of the fact that by the end of the 19th century and the establishment of the colonization in Algeria, the new orientation became an attempt to integrate the Algerian society into the French one [14].

In this period exactly which was characterized by very decisive circumstances like the beginning the tyranny of the civil regime at the expense of the military one in Algeria and the appearance the complete domination of the colonist in Algeria [15]. France tried to create a nucleus which will be the means that will be responsible for calling for assimilation and estrangement in the appropriate time.

In fact, the word “assimilation” attracted a group of the Algerian elite, especially those who had a French culture and who worked as part of “The Algerian youths’ movement” for claiming some reforms in order to realize the global assimilation.

Those youths didn’t know that the French law [16] doesn’t allow that to the Algerian Muslims without abandoning their Islamic personal status, but on the contrary, they looked at the problem of assimilation as an inevitable necessity imposed by their culture, political and scientific training. This will qualify them to enjoy all the French, civil and political rights and their accessories [17].

The idea of assimilation constituted a big obsession and a dream that is not easy to realize for the Algerian youths for whom this idea almost constitutes a school inherited by those Algerians who graduated from French schools and this was passed on from one generation to another. They were doctors, advocates and teachers who integrated into the French family by getting the French citizenship [18].
KARIMA BENHOCINE talked about that by saying “They are a very limited minority of those intellectuals of the French culture and they represent some of the former graduate pupils from the French educational institutions, the military schools, the Islamic French schools, secondary schools and faculties. Concerning their occupations, we find among them the category of soldiers and teachers in addition to some employees, translators, doctors, advocates, journalists, traders, ....” [19].

We can distinguish between those Algerian youths, especially the naturalized ones through their religious beliefs and their cognitive orientations. There were those who were atheists or those who didn’t care about their Islamic religion and those whose practice of their duties was limited to their simple manifestations.

There were those who embraced Christianity and some of them joined the political parties, especially the socialist party and the league of human rights; some others joined the masonic movement and sided with the secular ideas and believed that the colonialist existence is an eternal existence and considered France their mother land [20].

**Idiology of the Extremist Assimilated Elite:** The colonizing administration exposed the idea of assimilation in Algeria at the first years of colonization and this could be determined temporally in 1834, when the African committee, which came to Algeria in 1833, finished enquiring into the general situation of Algeria and which recommended connecting Algeria with the mother land (France) and this is what pushed France to work for finding the means that ensure tying the destiny of Algeria with France. As it was said previously, the idea of assimilation was the most important means [21].

General PEUGEOT [22], after being appointed governor in Algeria between 1841-1847, was alluding through general expressions to the possibility of integrating the Algerians into the French society, saying “After having dominated the Arabs, we have to spread our civilization and forces in the mediums of the berber native population”. The same method was adopted by the cardinal “LAVIGERIE” when he started Christianizing the children of Algeria, saying “We have to promote this people and pardon the mistakes of the past. The first thing that we should do is to lay obstacles between them and the Coran instead of other mistakes like reviving an Arab Kingdom” [23].

This idea of integration was taken care of by “NAPOLEON III” and reached its apex after the promulgation of the law of “SENATUS CONSULT” in 1865 [24].

Nevertheless, during the era of the second republic, the concept of assimilation took another direction, especially, with “JULES FERRY” who suggested assimilation through school as it is the best way to Franchify all the country; this concerning the idea of assimilation according to the French development and exposition.

Concerning the native population’s attitude towards that is expressed through GAY PERVILLÉ who confirmed that the book of CHERIF BENHEBILS entitled “The French Algeria as it is Seen by one of the Natives” is considered the best document that translates sincerely that ideology, he also said “This judgment is considered a humble acknowledgement that comes from a native Algerian who grew up in the French chairs and loved that beautiful name consisting in the word French; he had his education thanks to the French administration and its duty to acknowledge this reality; he didn’t want to hurt the one who did something good for him” [25].

GAY PERVILLÉ also adds that the book is about the ideas of bringing together the French and the native societies and their assimilation and it deals with the achievements in Algeria, especially his insistence on establishing security and its role concerning bringing together and realizing assimilation, in addition to its instance on the need of the colonizer of the natives and their services [26]; BENHEBILES praised the intentions of the superior administration concerning education and asked for encouraging immigration and Franchifying the natives.

In return, BENHEBILES encouraged his people, especially farmers who had good pupils for the French school, believing that they were ready for assimilation.

The professor SAADALLAH says the assimilation that was not realized in spite of those who were asking for it was the assimilation of the extremist assimilated elite and through them the assimilation of the whole Algerian society will be accomplished after reaching the stage elitism; the apex of attachment for this type of assimilation was the project of BLUM VIOLLETTE1936 [27].
Professor MAHFOUD KEDDACH noticed that all the Algerian elites during the twenties were thinking as part of the French framework, including “the Algerian youths”, the federation of the elected, most of the Algerian intellectual figures who had a French culture such as IBN JELLOUL, FARHAT ABBES, IBN TAMI, TAMZALI and others [25], but the difference between these figures lies, as it was said, in the summit of moderation represented by the assimilated who were attached for their personal status and the extremists who decided to naturalize even through abandoning the Islamic personal status system.

As we are dealing with the ideology of the extremist assimilated elite, we may share the doctrine of GAY PERVILLÊ in his insistence on the fact that the extremists refuse completely their Islamic Arabic past and look at the biography of the French for a new identity, aspiring to acquire it and they were most of the time among the inhabitants of the Kabily and GAY PERVILLÊ adds that this was on the basis that France made of the region Kabily a field of experiments, aiming at operating a crack in the Islamic Arabic bloc through assimilating the minority by the means of separating it from the Arabic majority [29].

CHERIF BNEHEBILES believes that assimilation does not contradict with the objectives of the Islamic religion. It was an act that was accepted by all the elites who thought that the religious feeling is a mere personal conviction [30].

In fact, BENHEBILES exposed to us the sincere orientation of this elite concerning patriotism and the feeling of belongingness to the Arab nation represented by MOKHTAR AL HADJ SAID who most of the time replied to the accusations of those who hid the hostility towards the Arab saying “We do not have two citizens Istanbul and the caliphate represent for us as Muslims what represents Rome and Pop for the Christians… without Islam, we don’t find what puts us, the Turkish, Persians and Egyptians together” [31].

Nevertheless, GAY PERVILLÊ believes that the test of naturalization indicates clearly that the assimilated Algerian youths abandoned the nation to integrate into another group on a ground that had nothing to do with religion and by this they venture to be excluded by their relatives because they were considered as unbelievers in spite of their sincere faith.

The follower of the mileage of those extremist assimilated whether the assimilated or seculars may notice their deplorable situation either concerning their predilection to France and their attachment for Islam or through some of their political attitudes towards the exposed problems at that time which were attributed in most of the time to their ideology and this is what affected their thinking and development as part of what is known as the Algerian national movement.

**Development and Revival of the Extremist and Assimilated Elite:** The Algerians who were graduated from French schools were pushed more than anyone else to claim the French nationality whether this stemmed from their belief related to the domination of the western civilization that would realize their ambition in justice and equality in political rights with the French, having the desire to reach a high position or for these two reasons together. They were very ambitious asking for the integration of Algeria into France and having its nationality, especially the decision of “SENATUS CONSULT” opened the door in front of those who had the desire to get the French nationality even if this were conditioned [32].

If we admit the notion of the desire of the ones who wanted to be promoted to administrative posts, it may be noticed that most of those who naturalized had very important positions. Many of them were figures who got the first place on the Algerian scene. CHERIF BNEHEBILES headed them. He is considered one of the influential members within “The Algerian youths’ movement”; he was a judge and an excellent member in the club of “SALAH BEY” in Constantine. “MORSLI” was also one of the best leaders of this movement in Constantine. He was the head of the league of the citizens of a native origin.

We also find the ophthalmologist IBN TOUHAMI OUALD HAMIDA the founder of many Algerian associations. He supported the global naturalization of the Algerians throughout the pages of the newspaper “Progress” [33].

In addition to the advocate at the court of appeal in Algeria, Ahmed Boudarba the president of the youth delegation to Paris in 1908, as part of the committee of the defense of the rights of the natives. The teacher SOUALAH MOHAMED wrote many books about teaching and he was the founder of the newspaper “l'Avenir de l’Algérie” and “En.Nacih” [34].
CHARLES ROBERT AGERON supplied us with a statistical study about the number of those who were naturalized. He considered the number very limited. They were about 30 naturalized between 1865-1890 and 35 between 1890-1899 [35].

MAHFOUD KADDACH tells us about the number of those presented naturalization requests from 1865 till 1916 where the number reached 2207. There was an approval about awarding naturalization to 1725 of them and 492 requests were refused [36]. Concerning the naturalized who appeared after the first World War, we find a group of teachers graduated from the French schools or what is called by GAY PERVILLÈ “the French-speaking [37] Algerian elite”.

Those people expressed their attitudes concerning asking for naturalization and assimilation as part of the “the associations of the native teachers” which used the newspaper “The Voice of the Oppressed” which was founded in 1922 by the naturalized teacher SAID FASSI and its administration was presided over by the socialist teacher AL ARBI TAHRAT who was an active member in many association in Constantine [38].

One of the greatest teachers was the naturalized teacher RABAH ZENNATI who moved from the region of Kabily to Constantine in 1913 for teaching and he was considered according to KARIMA BENHOCINE the leader of the naturalized; most of the time, his newspaper “Voice of the Natives” a space for expressing his opinions which defended between 1925 and 1942 naturalization and it considered it as the only means to improve the situation of Moslems and realize the development of the society.

This newspaper claimed in its first number issued on June 13th, 1929 to accelerate Franchifying the country saying “Algeria must become French, but concerning the attitude of the extremist assimilating elite towards the Algerian political problems, it stemmed from their ambitions, aiming at getting political posts and having the leadership in managing the general affairs of the colonized Algeria. In their continuous work as part of the movement of Algerian youths previously mentioned, they raised the problems of citizenship and the extension of the representation in the parliamentary assemblies and the necessary rights for every human being [39]. ALI MERRAD insists on those extremist assimilated interest in the matter of the compulsory enlistment and they considered this an opportunity that permits them to get the citizenship.

The one who studies the history of the Algerian youths will notice its complete reliance on the way of complaint, demands and delegations to notify its requests to the colonizing authorities in accordance with what is known in its deontology as “revolution by law” [40].

In the light of this method followed to get their claims to the colonizing administration, we notice that when the Algerian youths decided to go to Paris to identify their claims, the extremist assimilated appeared within the first delegation which was sent to Paris in 1908 to the head of the government “CLEMENSO”. It also appeared among the second delegation which was sent in 1912 to RAYMOND POINCARE the president of the republic of France and this was in the as part of getting what permits political compensations to the natives in return to the military service [41].

Those claims were considered in that period of time very legitimate, especially in the circumstances which characterized that period and its influence on the situation of the Muslim natives, especially in the tyranny of the hateful law of the natives.

The advent and the development of the political activity of those became more intensive as a result of the comic reforms of 1919 [42]. Because of the ideological and personal conflicts; the youths’ movement was exposed to division during the communal elections which took place in Algiers in December 1919. One of its causes was the matter of maintaining or abandoning the personal status [43].

CONCLUSION

Throughout our study of the subject of the extremist assimilated elite and its role in the national movement, we reached a number of outcomes, the most important ones are:
Most of the studies interested in the history of the national movement insist that the signs of the advent of the elite go back to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and that the intellectuals who had French training had very important roles in moving the wheels of public opinion in Algeria, especially taking in charge the task of claims before the French administration.

The matter of naturalization with the French nationality had constituted and caused French and Algerian reactions in the sense that it widened the gap between the assimilated elite and the leaders of reformation and the citizenship. The most conflicting and disputing axis between the parties constituting the Algerian political movement was the Islamic personal status which was seen by the assimilated that it doesn’t constitute an obstacle to get the French nationality, whereas all the inhabitants believed that abandoning it is disbelief and deviation from the national identity and melting in the French one to realize the wish of the colonizer who tried to exploit it to realize his personal objectives.

The matter of naturalization that was claimed by some of the Algerians aimed in their opinion at improving the situation of the Algerians and promoting it to the level of the developed societies. However, the opponents considered it melting and fusing in the crucible of the colonizer and this is what aggravated the conflict between the trends of the national movement. This disagreement which continued until the liberation revolution and which expressed the instance on the dynamism of the values of the Algerian state as far as Islam and Arabic are concerned.

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20. IBID.
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