

RESEARCH ARTICLE	French Colonialism and the Arabic Language in Algeria During the 19th Century: "Policies and Implications"	
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Abstract		
<p>This study examines the status of the Arabic language and its role in education in Algeria during the 19th century, as well as the position of the colonial administration toward it. It explores a series of political and cultural measures employed in the field of education, particularly the imposition of the French language as a substitute for Arabic, which in turn was part of a broader effort to suppress the fundamental identity of the Algerian people. The study also sheds light on the means and apparatuses mobilized to control the cultural and intellectual life of Algeria during the colonial period. The central problem revolves around the extent of the French colonial administration's commitment to its anti-Arabic language policies and the foundations of those policies. The methodology follows an objective analytical approach, utilizing various historical, political, social, and psychological tools—especially given that the language issue remains one of the most authentic and deep-rooted aspects of Algerian society. The study concludes with a set of findings and conclusions.</p>		
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Introduction:

This study seeks to reflect on the issue of language in Algeria during the colonial period, viewing it as a question of identity, based on the function that language fulfills within the nation, and as a means of exploring the existential, cultural, and even ethical horizons of the individual. Whether we approach language from the perspective of its technical requirements, or through its deep historical roots and longstanding social authenticity, we find it laden with meanings and dimensions that go beyond what is typically framed by the term "language"—namely, the historical-political dimension. Since language is a social act and a cultural reality, it aims, through the knowledge it produces, to resist vari-

ous forms of domination and opposing social structures—whether overt or covert—especially when the outsider (the colonizer) makes the tense relationship between himself and the local (the colonized) his central concern.

Thinking of language also as an act of cultural resistance reveals a vast reserve of knowledge, sciences, ideas, and visions that seek freedom. These forms of knowledge remain unsettled and unstable for both the individual and society unless they are grounded in their original essence. This explains why French colonialism in Algeria was deeply committed to promoting the French language, encouraging local and vernacular dialects along with the behaviors associated with them—

regardless of the methods and means used—because language, as a social practice, derives its high value and influential presence in local cultures from the role or function it performs: defending positive values and the fundamental rights that citizens must enjoy, such as the right to education and cultural participation.

Accordingly, this study aims to address a deeply rooted reality within the core of the French colonial system in Algeria, posing the problem of the colonial administration's focus on the language issue and its efforts to dismantle the Arabic language and replace it with French, while promoting local dialects. These were the easiest means to control Algerian society—especially since French colonialism was fully aware of how difficult it is to separate language from thought. Thought employs language, and separating them is an arbitrary act—something that holds true in the cultural reality of Algeria given its historical background and its ties to the Arab and Islamic worlds. All of this is approached through a historical-analytical methodology using various tools for examining historical facts. Among the steps I followed to enrich this study were: investigating the role of language in societies and nations, then discussing it within the framework of the French educational policy in occupied Algeria—since education cannot occur without a specific language—followed by referencing the colonial tools and dimensions employed to achieve its goals. I concluded my article with a set of findings and conclusions.

1- Language and Its Role in Society and the Nation

There is general consensus that language is a means of communication and interaction, yet in reality, it constitutes a foundational pillar for the construction of values, heritage, and civilizational identity. It is the vessel that carries and transmits a nation's legacy. It nurtures culture, sciences, and ideas, and is indeed part of the knowledge system. The more prominent the role of language in the life of society, the more it becomes one of the essential tools for the knowledge and educational community—especially since the process of building a national community is more effective and widely disseminated through the use of the mother tongue. Knowledge remains stagnant and dormant if not animated and spread through language. Moreover, language is tied to the dignity of its society, for whenever a society's language is humiliated, the society itself is humiliated, and whenever it declines, its affairs head toward demise and regression.¹

Man has harnessed language to serve his thinking, after it had merely been a translation of emotions and impulses. With the advancement of human civilization, language became the civilizational tool through which

man controls and interacts with all other forces. Hence, everything in life became related to language, bearing in it a symbol and a designation. It is impossible for humans to interact with things without recalling their linguistic symbols. Even the process of human thinking is closely tied to language, as a person cannot think unless they formulate their thoughts in linguistic molds and translate them. This interdependence between thought and language begins with the human's awareness of the truth of their existence.²

Speech is language, whether written or spoken, indicated, hinted, or symbolized... Among Arabs, it is intimate, communal, and social. This is what gives it its significance. More than that, it is never detached from the positions of society, for the speaker can be defeated by the community. This is what Al-Jahiz always believed when he said: "Through language, society awakens, and through another face of it, the individual awakens in their uniqueness."³ And "He who possesses language is worthy of leadership in society... the inability to speak is primarily a social deficiency."⁴

In light of these foundations, it is difficult to consider the duality of language–society as oppositional, for the existence of each is tied to the other. That is why the prevailing belief holds that the Arabic language preserved the identity of society throughout history. Ibn Hazm was accurate in his conclusion regarding the decline of language when society weakens, stating: "Most of a language falls and becomes void with the downfall of its people, the invasion of others into their dwellings, or their displacement and mingling with others. The benefit of a nation's language, sciences, and stories stems from the strength of its state, the vigor and leisure of its people. But those whose state has perished, who have been dominated by enemies, and are preoccupied with fear, humiliation, and serving others, are bound to experience the death of their thoughts. This may lead to the loss of their language, the forgetting of their lineages and stories, and the fading of their sciences."⁵

This statement greatly aligns with the goals of the colonial administration, which imposed the dominance of the French language upon Algerians in schools, administration, and society. That is why the Algerians' aware-

² Abd al-Sabour Shaheen, *In General Linguistics*, Al-Risalah Publishing House, 3rd ed., Beirut, Lebanon, 1993, pp. 95–96.

³ Amr Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyan*, Vol. 1, edited by Abd al-Salam Haroun, Printing Press of the Committee for Authorship, Translation, and Publishing, Cairo, 1949, p. 31.

⁴ Uthman ibn Jimi, *Al-Khasais (the distinctive features)*, edited by Muhammad Ali Al-Najjar, Vol. 1, General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, 1986, p. 34.

⁵ Ali ibn Hazm, *Al-Ahkam fi Usul al-Ahkam*, Vol. 1, (Chapter Four: On the Emergence of Languages), introduction by Ihsan Abbas, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Jadida, Beirut, 1983, p. 31.

¹ Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi'i, *Wahy al-Qalam*, Vol. 3, Hindawi Publishing House, Egypt, 2014, p. 27.

ness of and attachment to their language, regarding it as inseparable from their religion and homeland, was significant. Any disregard for either results in the disappearance of the other—they are alive and inseparable... a stance held against the French cultural invasion and its attempts to uproot and distort these essential components.⁶

In addition to the reciprocal relationship between language and society, the Arabic language holds a particularity derived from being the language of the Islamic religion embraced by Algerians. Islam is a civilizational and humanistic value with its laws and principles. The way out of the Algerian nation's plight requires preserving the foundations of its religion. Thus, the growth and prosperity of the Arabic language and its fulfillment of its intellectual role depend on religious belief, as it serves as a repository of knowledge, a driving force, and a steadfast mechanism for rational thought. Through it, beliefs are understood, judged, and debated. It is also a prominent feature of contemporary life and a primary pathway for building the future.⁷

Language has one essential homeland, and citizenship is belonging to a homeland. Patriotism urges the citizen to cling to and defend their homeland and solve its problems. National culture is produced by national citizens, and its cornerstone is the preservation of their language. Thus, their linguistic patriotism means "using the national tongue in all circumstances, and the cultivation of citizenship is primarily achieved through the official language and by raising awareness of the nation's history and its achievements."⁸

Language remains the most important element and the cohesive force for the fabric of a united nation. It can uphold the principle of citizenship, provided its truth is seriously recognized—because peoples are always attached to their languages. The Arabic language is characterized by its collectivity, as its speakers unite and stand in solidarity to the point of closeness and unity. The shared language may even be responsible, to some extent, for racial unity.⁹ The social significance of language is amplified by its strong connection to the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadith. Whoever learns it earns a higher status, and the strength of one's speech surpasses even one's level of knowledge. He who masters language is fit to lead in society. A deficiency of the

tongue (language) is primarily a social deficiency. Al-Jahiz's saying remains true despite the passage of time: "When a man stops speaking, his thoughts die, his soul dulls, and his senses decay."¹⁰

Moreover, the Arabic language is also a language of resistance. It was through it that the Prophet (PBUH) paved his path toward humanity. It was through it that Emir Abdelkader led his struggle. It was the unifying force alongside Islam for Algerians who resisted the harshest colonial campaign of Francization, missionary work, and Christianization. It is a resistant phenomenon capable of prevailing. There is no language outside society and no society without language. For the Arabs and Algerians, it is the most vital foundation of their collective intellectual production, as it forms a mode of thinking and a method of building and cultivating the human personality.

To halt this current, the French colonial administration began implementing and enforcing a bilingualism policy, establishing two languages in Algeria: the first used in official domains such as education, legislation, decrees, judiciary, and media—the French language, which is primary and official; and the second used for interpersonal and community communication—the local dialects and vernaculars. While Fishman believes that bilingualism is based on functional differentiation between two languages or levels within a single environment, the reality in colonized Algeria was the existence of two different languages: one national (Arabic) and the other foreign (French).¹¹

All of this was aimed at creating barriers between the nation and its language—its source of knowledge and thought—achieving complete rupture with its heritage, erasing its past, fragmenting its present, and setting psychological barriers for its future. This confirms the historical and intrinsic relationship between identity and language, as language is the first constant of societal identity. It is the central element that distinguishes one group—possessing its own traits and characteristics—from others. Accordingly, it is language that gave birth to identity, not the other way around.¹²

2. French Colonial Policy and the Arabic Language

The fall of the city of Algiers on **July 5, 1830** marked a pivotal turning point in modern Algerian history, and

⁶ Ahmed Nouman, *The Future of the Arabic Language Between Fighting Enemies and the Will of Heaven*, Dar Al-Ummah Publishing, 1st ed., Algeria, 2008, pp. 196–197.

⁷ Shukri Faisal, *Contemporary Issues of the Arabic Language*, Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science, Tunis, 1990, p. 32.

⁸ Saleh Belaid, *On Linguistic Citizenship and Other Matters*, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2008, p. 19.

⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *General Linguistics*, translated by Yoel Youssef Aziz, Dar Afaq Arabiya, Baghdad, 1985, p. 245.

¹⁰ Amr Al-Jahiz, *Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyan*, Vol. 1, edited by Abd al-Salam Haroun, Printing Press of the Committee for Authorship, Translation, and Publishing, Cairo, 1949, p. 272.

¹¹ Louis Jean Cavelly, *The War of Languages and Language Policies*, translated by Hassan Hamz, Arab Organization for Translation, 1st ed., Lebanon, 2008, p. 78.

¹² Elias Yelka, Mohamed Haraz, *The Problem of Identity and Linguistic Pluralism in the Maghreb - Morocco as a Model*, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1st ed., Dubai, 2014, p. 23.

its negative consequences continue to reverberate to this day. At that time, the French colonial state had completed its military campaign and entered the phase of direct colonization aimed at full control and subjugation of Algeria. Central to this strategy was the domination of education and its related aspects.

Since language is the root of thought and knowledge, the French colonial authorities sought to weaken its capacity to sustain the momentum of liberationist thought. Freezing the language was akin to freezing intellectual vitality into lifeless molds. It has been said: “*Words are the graves of meanings.*” All of this aimed to uproot Algerian society from its deep historical roots, obliterate its national and civilizational identity, and drag it toward **Francization** and **Christianization**, encouraging assimilation through all available mechanisms and diverse means, including the following:

A. Education

Education cannot exist without language and has always been the foundational pillar for the progress of any nation in all fields. Socrates linked it to virtue, saying: “*Virtue can only be achieved through knowledge,*” while Al-Ghazali regarded it as one of the most honorable crafts, capable of unifying souls and refining minds. Ibn Khaldun saw it as the mind acquiring something it did not possess before, as thought is in constant motion, evolving until it becomes knowledge. Modern theorists, with their contemporary methodologies, see it as behavior, practice, and continuous activity aiming to transmit sciences, knowledge, cultures, civilizations, values, and ethics.¹³

To better understand the relationship between education and language in Algeria during the colonial period (19th century), and the French policies implemented in this regard, it is worth noting that there was complete alignment between general French colonial policy and the educational-cultural movements, which converged, overlapped, and reinforced each other—despite differing political orientations (monarchist, imperial, republican). There was a near-systematic coherence between the ideological foundations and their application.

To more clearly grasp the successive colonial educational plans—fundamentally aimed at shaking the deeply rooted idea among Algerians of “Arabic as the national language”—we may begin with a simple comparative overview of the state of education in Algeria prior to 1830:

- The abundance of educational institutions, starting with Quranic schools (*kuttab*), progressing

¹³ Anwar Mohamed Al-Sharqawi, *Learning: Theories and Applications*, Mohamed Abdel Karim Printing Press, Cairo, undated, p. 12.

through mosques and zawiyas, and culminating in various schools of all types and levels. Notable examples include: the *Ya'qūbiyya School* in Tlemcen, *Khanq an-Natah* in Oran, the *Muhammadiyya School* in Mascara, and the *Mazuna School*, which Muḥammad Abī Rās al-Nāṣirī described as having “numerous scholarly councils, brilliant students, and creative teachers.”¹⁴

- The large number of teachers, scholars, and jurists, including Ahmad bin ‘Ammar, Judge Muḥammad bin Ja’dūn, Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq Afghūl, Ahmad bin Nāfila, and Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tilimsānī. Abī Rās al-Nāṣirī mentions in *Fath al-Ilāh* that he studied under more than twenty scholars and jurists during his academic journey.
- The high social standing, respect, and appreciation for educators and jurists, as wealthy families, nobles, and even some *deys* and *beys* competed in supporting educational institutions and teachers through various means—funds, orchards, bakeries, shops, bath-houses, and more.
- The proliferation of libraries containing rare and precious manuscripts and books across various disciplines, which significantly contributed to the wide dissemination of education and knowledge.

All this occurred in the absence of any educational policy from the then-ruling Ottoman authority, which neither intervened in nor obstructed the spread of education. They did not impose the Ottoman Turkish language in either speech or writing, nor did they seek to “Turkify” the various ethnic and linguistic groups under their rule (over 100 languages were spoken across Ottoman lands). Rather, they preserved the status of Arabic as the primary educational language throughout the more than four centuries of Ottoman rule. Moreover, the Turks of Central Asia wrote their Turkish language in Arabic script and produced significant literature.¹⁵

To present a scientifically grounded historical account, we will focus on the French administration's positions regarding education and language during the 19th century. The colonial authorities viewed education and language as the most effective tools for the continuity of their colonial policy in Algeria. We examine the most prominent contributors—whether ruling authorities or individual figures (military and civilian)—who advocated the Francization of Algeria in line with dominant French political ideologies.

During the monarchist period (1830–1848), education

¹⁴ Mohamed Abu Ras Al-Nasiri, *Fath al-Ilah wa Muntaha fi al-Tahadduth bi Fadl Allah wa Ni'matihi*, edited by Mohamed Abdel Karim, National Book Foundation, Algeria, 1990, p. 43.

¹⁵ Abdul Rahim Benhadda, *The Ottomans - Institutions, Economy, and Culture*, Al-Najah Al-Jadida Printing Press, 1st ed., Morocco, 2008, p. 220.

in Algeria reflected the depths of an old colonial strategy, arguably more linguistically driven than that of other European powers. The French, having endured a series of military defeats in their Crusades against the Islamic world, concluded that mastering the Arabic language was the best strategy for domination. Thus, they began studying Eastern languages, especially Arabic.

It is said that Ramon Llull¹⁶ was responsible for establishing institutes for Arabic studies, followed by monasteries that taught Arabic texts translated into Latin. Petrus Venerabilis,¹⁷ the Abbot of Cluny Monastery, was among those interested in Arabic. This linguistic effort expanded and culminated in the Council of Vienne in 1312, which recommended teaching Arabic in major European universities—including those in France, Italy, and England.¹⁸

This historical perspective pushed the contemporary French colonial administration to artificially transform Algeria's natural reality into an imperial construct, disguised as a sincere effort to educate Algerians, calm tensions, encourage cultural reconciliation, and promote mutual intellectual and spiritual exchange.¹⁹

Thus, the French authorities initiated Arabic teaching sessions—both Classical and Colloquial—in December 1832, under the Genty de Bossier Project, approved by the Ministry of Public Instruction during the rule of Governor-General Duc de Rovigo. This campaign culminated in the founding of three religious schools in

1879.²⁰

Among the most hostile French figures toward the Algerian people was Duke Anne Jean Marie René Savary de Rovigo, a military man and Governor-General of Algeria. He openly declared his linguistic assimilation policy:

“I view the dissemination of education and the teaching of our language as the most effective means to extend our control over this country... The true miracle lies in gradually replacing Arabic with French.”

Another Governor-General later lamented his death:

“Since the death of the Duke de Rovigo, we have done nothing worthwhile in Africa. His death was a loss to the country, preventing him from completing his projects.”²¹

Colonial policy remained consistent, as evidenced by a decree issued by Camille Chautemps, Prime Minister of the French Third Republic, more than a century later. The Decree of March 8, 1838, officially banned the use of Arabic, classifying it as a foreign language and forbidding its instruction by any means, including imprisonment and threats. French was declared the sole official language of Algeria.

Nearly fifty years later, General de Gaulle reaffirmed this stance, stating:

“If I had to choose between the oil of the Sahara and the survival of the French language in Algeria, I would choose the French language.”²²

This raises profound questions for us today: why, how, and to what extent were these leaders' views justified?

Regarding schools, the colonial administration adopted a dual-language education policy (Arabic-French) aimed at integrating Algerians into French culture. The first school was opened in 1833, known as the *Mutual Instruction School (l'enseignement mutuel)* to teach the children of Europeans and Jews. In 1836, the first primary school for Algerians was opened in Algiers to teach French as part of public education policy. This school was named the *Arab-French School (école arabo-française)*, and a similar one followed in Annaba

¹⁶ Ramon Llull (1235–1314 CE), poet, missionary, Sufi, and Spanish traveler; learned Arabic and memorized the Quran, joined the Franciscan order, supervised a school of Arabic teaching that became the Institute of Islamic Studies in Madrid; fought the philosophy of Ibn Rushd but was influenced by the Sufism of Abu Madin Sha'ib, was passionate about Ibn Arabi and founded the doctrine of Illuminationism; died in North Africa. See: Najib Al-Aiqi, *The Orientalists*, Vol. 1, Dar Al-Ma'arif, 3rd ed., Egypt, 1980, p. 133.

¹⁷ Petrus Al-Mubajjal or Al-Mukarram or Al-Muqarrar or Al-Muhtaram (1092–1156 CE), French monk and theologian; joined the School of Translators from Arabic to Latin in Toledo, which translated the Quran with a purely missionary intent; authored books about Islam related to the Prophet (peace be upon him). He contributed to sowing hatred and animosity towards Islam and Muslims. See: Johan Fück, *History of the Orientalist Movement*, translated by Omar Lutfi Al-Alam, Dar Qutaybah for Printing and Publishing, Damascus, 1996, p. 17.

¹⁸ Ismail Ahmed Amayreh, *The Orientalists and the History of Their Relationship with Arabic*, Dar Hanin, 2nd ed., Jordan, 1992, p. 28.

¹⁹ The colonial movement theorists adopted the principle of pacification as a method, as Combes, rapporteur of the investigative committee for the visit to Algeria in April 1892, chaired by Jules Ferry in the Senate, stated that the school is an effective aid for propaganda. See: Louis Vignon, *France in Algeria*, Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1893, p. 432.

²⁰ Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Vol. 6, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 1830–1954, pp. 16–17.

²¹ Saint-Hippolyte, *De l'Algérie – System of the Duke of Rovigo in 1832*, Bourgogne Martinet Printing, Paris, 1840, p. 3.

²² Ahmed Jeroun, *Identity Rift: The Debate of Identity and the Language of Education in the Maghreb from a Historical Perspective*, Toub Press, Rabat, 2015, p. 114.

in 1837. The first girls' school was established in 1845.

The motto of this period was “assimilation”, marked by colonial propaganda justifying occupation and characterized by racial bias favoring settlers over Algerians. The ultimate goal of this policy was summarized by Fellman, Head of the Political Affairs Bureau in Paris in 1846, who stated:

“The purpose of all these efforts is to prepare individuals who will assist us by influencing their fellow citizens to reshape Arab society according to the needs of our civilization.”

However, this policy faced opposition from some French figures, including Pierre Morlan, who rejected assimilation for producing individuals who would ultimately grow to hate France.²³

To ensure permanent colonial entrenchment and ideological conditioning of Algerian children, the French administration promoted religious education alongside schooling to serve colonial capitalist interests. This was apparent from the beginning: colonial leaders instructed clergy to teach Algerian children French and raise them as Christians.

In one of Bugeaud's campaigns in Algiers, he gathered around 250 children and handed them to Father Brumeaud, asking him to convert them to Christianity. In line with the idea that “Arabs will not obey France unless they become French, and they will not become French unless they become Christian,” clergymen and monks were mobilized for missionary work.

By 1835, religious associations such as the Sisters of Saint Joseph began providing medical aid and child care. This culminated in the Ordinance of August 25, 1838, which established a bishopric in Algeria, initiating the founding of seminary schools in Algiers, Constantine, and Oran, which later spread across the country.²⁴

During the Second Republic (1848–1852), led by Louis-Napoléon III, who later declared himself Emperor, many policy changes were enacted in Algeria. Among the most significant in education was the Decree of August 16, 1848, which merged the administration of French and Jewish education under the Ministry of Public Instruction and created the Academy of Algiers. The Rector (*Recteur*) was tasked with supervising all educational levels, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Meanwhile, education for Algerians remained under

the Ministry of War, preserving the status quo established in 1830.²⁵

The second major measure was the Presidential Decree of July 14, 1850, which ordered the opening of boys' and girls' schools in major cities to promote French, alongside Arabic and arithmetic instruction. These were known as *Arab-French Schools*, and their number increased across Algeria as their importance grew. During this period, French secularism in schools also intensified.

As for the second measure, it is represented by the presidential decree issued on July 14, 1850, which stipulated the opening of schools for boys and girls in major cities to support the spread of the French language, alongside teaching Arabic and arithmetic. These schools became known as the Arab-French schools, and their number was increased throughout the national territory as the importance of this measure became clearer. It is worth noting that during the era of this Second Republic, the secularism of the school increased, and religious figures gained greater control over dual education. Despite all that, this policy met strong opposition from settlers as well as from all supporters of this republic who demanded the abolition of Arab-Islamic education (the *Kuttabs* and *Zawiyas*). This reveals an unresolved contradiction and hesitation that exposes the inherent risk of doubt in the colonial policy, which would continue throughout all subsequent stages.²⁶

What characterized education during the Second Empire (1852–1870) was the issuance of numerous laws and decrees that outwardly seemed to serve Algeria and Algerians, but in reality, increased their subjugation and ignorance, especially since Emperor Napoleon envisioned an Arab kingdom inspired by the Sanmonian project. After his visit to Algeria in September 1860, he declared that Algeria was not an ordinary colony but an Arab kingdom, and he reiterated this idea in a letter addressed to Governor-General Pellissier in 1863, stating that Algeria is an Arab kingdom... and that he is, to the same extent, the Emperor of the Arabs.²⁷

However, a close examination of this project, especially in the field of education and the Arabic language, reveals its hidden agenda, which was to eliminate the free Arab-Islamic schools. This was achieved through the prominent role of the Sultan's school (the Imperial College), established by decree on March 14, 1857, to

²³ Pierre Morlan, *Legislation and Regulation of Primary Public Education for Natives in Algeria*, International Review of Education, Vol. 1, No. 80, Dijon, 1903, p. 130.

²⁴ Abdelhamid Zouzo, *Texts and Documents on the Contemporary History of Algeria 1830–1900*, National Foundation for Printing Arts, Algeria, 2009, p. 241.

²⁵ Al-Mubashir Newspaper, Issue 71, 15 August 1850, Printing House of Dar Al-Dawla, Algeria, p. 2.

²⁶ Yvonne Turin, *Cultural Clashes in Colonial Algeria: Schools, Medicine, Religion 1830–1880*, Maspero, Paris, 1971.

²⁷ René Pillorget, *The Two Voyages of Napoleon III to Algeria 1680–1865*, Revue du Souvenir Napoléonien, No. 363, February 1989, pp. 30–36.

graduate teachers of the French language.²⁸

Starting from 1863, the French administration began sending a number of Algerian students to French schools specializing in training French language teachers. Among these students were Muhammad bin Sheikh, Mustafa bin Sadat, and Belkacem bin Sadira, who joined the Versailles school and, after graduation, was appointed a professor at the teacher training school in Algeria in 1865. He carried out a campaign promoting the French language at the expense of Classical Arabic, even renouncing the Arabic language in his speeches and writings.²⁹

One of the political and civilizational principles adopted by the Third Republic (1870–1913), which was declared on September 4, 1870, and featured in its supposed historical ideology, was the responsibility to prepare the colonized peoples, which it considered backward like Algeria, by spreading French language, culture, and civilization. This view required attention to education as the main factor to achieve that goal. Despite the issuance of the August 15, 1875 decision, whose first and second articles stipulated that the same legislation applied in France would be implemented in Algeria and that educational institutions would fall under the authority of the Minister of Public Education, this proved to be an illusion, as Arab schools remained under the control of the Governor-General.³⁰

The second significant event that dominated the educational scene during this period was the total assimilation project that Jules Ferry wanted to achieve through the school, which he considered a pioneering idea and a goal for republicans. He focused especially on the Kabylie region, issuing the November 9, 1881 decree that established eight schools called ministerial schools, which were directly supervised by the ministry rather than the municipality. He also reorganized the pedagogical curriculum of public primary schools by the July 27, 1882 decision, which stipulated that these schools would concentrate on three subjects: intellectual education, cultural education, and physical education.³¹

However, the reality proved that Jules Ferry and his project aimed solely to promote the French secular school at the expense of dismantling the Arab school

through his racist, ethnic positions supporting colonial expansion. It also proved that French colonial policy, despite changes in time and individuals, consistently followed the same methods and strategies.

B- Orientalism and Translation

Discussing *Orientalism and translation* is, in fact, addressing the pioneering project undertaken by the Orientalists in activating the dynamics of European colonialism in general, and French colonialism in particular. This led to the establishment of what became known as Orientalist translation, a sharp-edged weapon through which a socio-cultural phenomenon and intellectual movement took shape, directly contributing to France's ability to impose its control over Algeria. It also allowed them to gain insight into the historical, religious, and cultural characteristics of Algerian society and subsequently reshape the acquired and inherited landmarks of its identity. This strategic use of Orientalists was something Napoleon Bonaparte was aware of early in his colonial campaigns when he formed a body of Orientalists known as the "Translators of the French Army".³²

Although the French interest in Orientalism and Orientalists dates back to their discovery of the importance of Eastern languages in the late 18th century—when the *School of Living Oriental Languages* was founded, particularly the Arabic section, which gained even more significance after the occupation of Egypt in 1798—their interest in Arabic specifically intensified with their growing colonial ambitions in Algeria at the beginning of the 19th century. Historical sources indicate, however, that the French—as with other Europeans—had shown interest in Arabic as early as the 10th century, due to contact with Eastern peoples during the Crusades (1097–1291). Orientalists, traders, and European consuls worked to transfer various Arabic manuscripts and translate them into their own languages. King Louis IX of France (1226–1270), along with many nobles and French pilgrims who accompanied him during his visit to the holy sites, brought back Arabic and Coptic manuscripts from the Egyptian city of Damietta.³³

It is worth noting that the efforts of French monarchs were no less than those of other European kings and Popes of the Vatican in acquiring treasured manuscripts stored in schools, churches, mosques, and monasteries. They established libraries, including the Bibliothèque de la Nation in Paris, which became one of the world's greatest libraries due to the rarity of its books and the abundance of its precious manuscripts, espe-

²⁸ Maurice Paulard, *Education for Natives in Algeria*, Algiers, 1910, p. 92.

²⁹ Al-Mubashir Newspaper, 22 August 1864 and 22 August 1865, Printing House of Dar Al-Dawla, Algeria.

³⁰ *Bulletin Officiel du Gouvernement Général en Algérie*, Year 1875, Organization of Public Education Service, Vol. 18, No. 374, Paris, 1875, p. 60c.

³¹ Annie Buter, *Teaching History in Primary School from the Revolution to Present (Decree of July 27, 1882, Order Regulating the Pedagogical Organization and Study Plan of Public Primary Schools)*, TI, National Institute of Pedagogical Research, Paris, 2007, pp. 274–277.

³² L.-Ch. Férault, *Interpreters of the African Army*, Jourdan, Bookseller-Editor, Algiers, 1876, pp. 50–57.

³³ Philippe de Tarrazi, *Relations of the Kings of France with the Kings of the Arabs*, Lecture delivered on 30/10/1939, Radio Orient Broadcast, Beirut, pp. 4–5.

cially under the leadership of the Arabist De Guïnes.³⁴

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of French Orientalist interest in everything Arabic—whether classical or vernacular—was the enthusiasm and competition to join the first delegation of Orientalist translators. This delegation was established by the Ministry of War in January 1830 under the supervision of General De Loverdo (De Loverdo), and included around one hundred translators and guides who had passed a special government examination. Most were students of Baron Silvestre de Sacy, and among them were many who had accompanied Napoleon on his campaign in Egypt in 1798. To achieve their objectives, a society of Orientalists was formed in 1787 for the purpose of publishing and translating Oriental manuscripts preserved in the Bibliothèque de la Nation in Paris, and also to train clergy (bishops) for religious schools. All this became evident in the translation of the first vernacular text on the eve of the French occupation of Algeria.³⁵

Military officers made up the first wave of Orientalists who served French colonialism through their publications on Arabic studies. Among them were Arnaud, Brousslard, Heriot, Rimozza, and Vignard. One of the most prominent Orientalists was Marcelin Beausnier, known for his contributions to Arabic studies. He compiled a comprehensive Arabic-French dictionary that included linguistic expressions in North African dialects, titled *Dictionnaire Pratique Arabe-Français*, published in Algeria in 1871. It was considered the best dictionary of modern Arabic at the time.³⁶

All cultural observatories and educational institutions, in particular, attracted the attention of Orientalists from the very beginning of the French occupation of Algeria, as they were rich sources for the inventory and study of Algerian national heritage. Orientalism was organically linked to colonialism and expanded as colonialism expanded. On this relationship, Bresnier remarked that it is a fixed one, and that it is pointless to question the relationship itself. Instead, research should focus on the studies addressing this relationship, provided they approach intellectual production in a neutral and serious manner, without justifying the ends by the means.³⁷

Accordingly, French Orientalists in Algeria were politically and ideologically tied to the colonial administration. They were supported by colonial leaders, notably Eugène Étienne, the French Africa Committee, and

French universities. The French occupation gave Orientalists a strong push to begin collecting, studying, and translating Algerian manuscript heritage into French. They primarily specialized in literature, history, anthropology, and language. This orientation became the hallmark of the French Orientalist school, distinguishing it from other schools, and it produced a framework that took shape as early as the 16th century and persisted throughout the French occupation of Algeria.³⁸

Among the most renowned French Orientalists who played a major role in studying and translating Algerian heritage was Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838), considered the founder of practical French Orientalism and one of the co-founders of the Institute of Egypt, established by Napoleon Bonaparte in Cairo in 1798. Under his influence, France became a center for Orientalist scholarship. He studied Latin and Greek, as well as Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, and translated numerous Arabic works into French. He also translated the proclamations issued during the French campaign on Egypt in 1798 and the proclamation of the occupation of Algeria in 1830. He worked closely with the French colonial government, and his name became associated with all French political circles pursuing the idea of empire-building. Despite this, some still consider him one of the more "fair-minded" Orientalists.³⁹

The second prominent French Orientalist was Louis Jacques Bresnier (1814–1869), a student of de Sacy. He was nominated to work in Algeria, which he entered in 1836 and where he spent 33 years teaching Arabic. He authored textbooks and several anthologies and introductory materials for the Arabic language. The third is René Basset (1855–1924), a linguist specialized in Arabic and Berber, a member of the Arab Scientific Academy, and various Asian societies in Paris, Leipzig, and Florence. He served as an assistant at the Journal Asiatique and directed the School of Letters in Algiers, founded in 1879.⁴⁰

It is essential to emphasize that the colonial administration's employment of Orientalist translators across various posts was not limited to linguistic and translation proficiency. Rather, the objective was to form an administrative corps capable of mastering the customs and legal systems of Algerians to better control them. After the colonial authority had secured its hold over coastal cities, it became more than ever in need of intermediaries who could penetrate deeply into Algerian society and understand its conditions and behaviors.

³⁴ Philippe de Tarrazi, *The Arabic Language in Europe*, Hindawi Foundation, United Kingdom, 2013, p. 22.

³⁵ Same reference, p. 23.

³⁶ Clément Huart, *Arabic Lessons in France*, Journal of the Arab Scientific Academy, Vol. 5, Issue 4, Damascus, pp. 165–178.

³⁷ L. Bresnier, *Practical and Theoretical Course of the Arabic Language*, Algiers, Bastide, Paris, Challaniél and Benjamin, 2nd ed., 1855, p. 18.

³⁸ Sassi Salem, *Critique of Orientalist Discourse*, Vol. 1, Dar Al-Madar Al-Islami, Beirut, 2002, p. 107.

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: The Orient Created by the West*, translated by Catherine Malamud, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1997, p. 129.

⁴⁰ Gy Basset, *Basset René (1855–1924), Algeria and France*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 2009, pp. 96–97.

Therefore, the administration did not limit itself to Christian Arabs from Syria, such as George Gury and Jean Zakhar, nor to Algerians with French citizenship like Abraham Deninos and Gany Faroun, among others from the Jewish community. It also issued new ministerial decrees, such as the decree of November 3, 1845, which called for the establishment of a corps of translators specifically for the Service de l'Algérie. These translators roamed regions to gather information, monitor districts, listen to informant reports, and accompany military units, writing correspondence in Arabic.⁴¹

As French colonialism expanded across the country over time, the ambitions of the translators also grew. Many of them assumed important positions at the heads of sensitive departments in the colonial administration. For instance, D'Aubignose became general lieutenant in charge of the police; Gérardin headed the State Domain department; and Jean Mirante became Director of Indigenous Affairs in the General Government of Algeria. Others transitioned into roles as teachers, historians, and ethnographers, conducting exploratory and academic field research that produced new scientific knowledge. Among these were Maurice Benharizah's studies on the Hoggar region and the Tuareg people; Charles Férault's study, one of the most important works on the Kabyle region and its inhabitants' traditions; and De Salles' ethnographic-philosophical memorandum, a survey of the customs and traditions of Maghreb peoples. Also notable is Charles Brosselard's study on Sufi religious orders in Algeria. These studies and publications helped build a colonial understanding of Algeria and played a significant role in the success of the colonial project. At the same time, the Arabic language and Orientalist literature benefited greatly from these studies through works such as *Grammaire Arabe à l'usage des élèves de l'école spéciale des langues orientales vivantes* by Silvestre de Sacy.⁴²

To conclude this discussion of Orientalism in general—and French Orientalism in particular—it is important to present a critical reading of it. Orientalism and Orientalists were subsumed by politics, subjected to it, and served its negative aims. Their readings of Eastern heritage laid the foundation for a discriminatory paradigm: Western knowledge was described as rational, while Eastern knowledge was labeled mythical and

incapable of linking premises with conclusions.⁴³

3. Objectives of the Colonial Educational Policy in Algeria

Language is influenced by the factors of historical development and nourished by political and social events; it thus always reflects the state and image of a society. Therefore, it becomes easy for researchers to understand the reality of any given society through examining its language, which acts as a record of its social life. This is evident in the case of Algeria, where, although the Algerian people ceased resistance and submitted to the new reality, they remained steadfast in their attachment to their language. A linguistic struggle emerged between the invading language (French) and the colonized language (Arabic), each with its own unique circumstances.

- Francization

Francization of Algeria became one of the foremost priorities of the French colonial administration, which mobilized all available means to achieve it, primarily by issuing instructions to all officials to replace Arabic with French. Algeria would only truly become a French kingdom once French became the national language and Algeria was considered an inseparable part of France. Among the colonial objectives was the erasure of the Algerians' past, history, and authentic culture, uprooting their Arab identity and severing ties with their origins. This could only be achieved by excluding the Arabic language and Islamic culture and replacing them with the French language and Western culture. This objective was advocated by Napoleon III through his well-known "Arab Bureaus" policy. He opened the door to French citizenship, considering Algerians as French subjects—though they would not enjoy full French rights unless they renounced their personal status and adhered to the French civil code. In the same vein, French names were imposed on cities, villages, streets, and public squares, sometimes even Roman names.⁴⁴

- Assimilation

The features of the French assimilation policy in Algeria emerged from the early years of the occupation, particularly through laws such as the 1834 decision to annex Algeria to France. The central idea behind this policy was expressed by Napoleon III in 1852, when he declared that there was a vast kingdom opposite Marseille that must be assimilated. However, real assimila-

⁴¹ Abri Bat (Commander Interpreter), *Notice on Officer Interpreters*, Bourg: Imprimerie Victor Berthod, France, 1931, pp. 7–9.

⁴² Alain Messaoud, *Informing, Teaching: Military Interpreters and the Constitution of the First Algerian Scholarly Corpus 1830–1870*, 19th Century History Review, No. 41, France, 2010, pp. 97–112.

⁴³ Said Edward, *Orientalism—Knowledge—Power—Construction*, translated by Kamal Abu Deeb, 2nd ed., Arab Research Foundation, Beirut, 1995, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Rabah Turki, *National Education and the Algerian Personality*, National Publishing and Distribution Company, 2nd ed., Algeria, 1981, p. 124.

tion policies began during his first visit to Algeria in 1860 under the pretext of integrating the local population into colonial institutions.⁴⁵

A close examination of the assimilation policy reveals that it extended across nearly all fields—economic, social, cultural, and military. The military aspect was initiated by the campaign commander *de Bourmont*, who sought to employ local elements by forming indigenous military units that would reinforce the occupying army's control over the rest of the country. The decree issued in April 1866, which defined the military status of Algerians and considered them part of the French army, exemplifies this policy.⁴⁶

Education was regarded as the most effective means of integrating Algerian society into French civilization. This was affirmed by General *Houttepol*, who stated: "The most successful means of establishing security is to assimilate Algerians into Christianity." Thus, efforts were made to create a class of collaborators placed in the education and military systems, with the aim of erasing Algerian identity and its core foundations: Islam, Arab identity, and nationalism.⁴⁷

– Missionary Activity

One of the main motivations behind France's invasion of Algeria was religious. France viewed itself as the protector of the Catholic Church, and the occupation of Algeria was seen as a gift to the Christian world. Missionary expeditions and the Jesuit Order received full support from King Charles X, who saw himself as the true defender of Christianity, following in the footsteps of his ancestor Saint Louis IX. The decision to invade was encouraged by Bishop Frayssinous, the Minister of Religious Affairs, with backing from the Vatican in Rome.

Since Christianization and missionary work were among the primary objectives of the colonial administration, Deputy Fernand Ingrand declared:

"The missionary works for the prosperity of the colonial idea in the country he evangelizes, uplifting the spiritual and moral morale of the natives... Missionary activity and colonial activity are two intertwined ele-

ments..."⁴⁸

Campaign commander *de Bourmont* brought with him sixteen priests to spread Christian teachings. Missionary campaigns continued even after the military rule ended and the civil administration began, which marked the peak of missionary efforts. This phase was dominated by Christian associations, such as the White Fathers Association, founded in 1868, and individuals like François Bourgade and Cardinal Lavignerie, who regarded the spread of Christianity as a foundational pillar of the colonial project. In some instances, the Church held authority over the scope and content of education.⁴⁹

However, despite all these measures and the vast resources mobilized by the colonial administration, these efforts ultimately failed. This was acknowledged by the orientalist Jacques Berque, who said:

"The number of Algerians who converted to Christianity during Lavignerie's era did not exceed one thousand."⁵⁰

Moreover, all previous educational projects, though they may have flourished under the Empire, were later suspended or cancelled starting in 1870.

Conclusion

Opinions differ regarding the effectiveness of the French educational policy in Algeria and the spread of Western culture and ideas. Some argue that it failed in achieving its strategic goals during that period, as neither its policies nor its language were organically rooted in Algerian society. The French language could not assert itself due to the complexity of its curricula and the inefficacy of its teaching methods. Consequently, advocates of Francization resorted to using local dialects and vernacular languages.

Others believe that the Algerians—particularly the educated class—benefited from this policy by learning how to confront the colonial French educational system. The conclusions reached in this study include:

- The French school influenced Algerian society by producing a class of intellectuals (the elite) who voiced the Algerian people's demands before successive French governments.

⁴⁵ Ibrahim Lounisi, *The Integration Idea in Algeria Between the French Proposal and the Algerian Position*, Al-Ru'ya Journal, Publications of the National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement, Issue 3, Algeria, 1997, p. 115.

⁴⁶ Pas Sols Antoine-Vincent, *Algeria and the Assimilation of Muslim Natives*, Military Edition, Paris, 1903, p. 36.

⁴⁷ J. P., *Algeria Governors (1830-1881), Chronological List*, R.A., Year 1887, No. 31, p. 427.

⁴⁸ Salman Salama Abd Al-Malik, *Lights on Missionaries and Missionary Work*, Al-Amanah Printing, Egypt, 1994, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Abdul Jalil Al-Tamimi, *Missionary and Religious Thought Among Several French Officials in Algeria in the 19th Century*, Moroccan Historical Journal, Issue 1, 1974, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Mohamed Al-Ta'her Wa'li, *Missionary Education in Algeria 1830-1954*, Dahlab Publications, 1st ed., Algeria, 2009, p. 72 ff.

- The French school fostered national awareness through contact with the European and French sides in wars and battlefronts, especially during World War I.
- Algerian education oscillated between French colonial ideology and national efforts rooted in Arab-Islamic education and identity (Islam-Arabic-Nationhood).
- The French authorities limited Algerian education to its early stages, while national efforts established educational institutions at various levels.
- French educational legislation in Algeria was subordinated to both metropolitan policies and extreme colonial factions, with tight control over public and independent Arab education.
- Algerians did not reject education or the French language per se, but they opposed efforts to strip them of their identity and to instill submissiveness to occupation and domination, leading them to reject colonialism entirely.
- The French colonial theory that denied Algerians' readiness for civilization and justified repression through a policy of "pacification" was fundamentally flawed. Algerians never accepted foreign beliefs or languages and were fully aware of the trap set to strip them of their homeland and history.
- The colonial authority skillfully maneuvered within the field of linguistic and educational policy, employing every available means in hopes of keeping Algeria French.

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