

Algerian society in French anthropological studies

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Abstract:

Anthropology was the vehicle of colonialism that enabled Western countries to occupy many peoples because it studies human societies on the scale of civilization, by researching life forms, the ancient historical era, and local languages, which imposes on researchers in it the necessity of getting closer to the study sample to understand it in depth.

The 19th century witnessed colonial expansion as countries sought to expand their occupation, while anthropology developed and these countries attempted to employ it to serve their interests, such as France, which employed explorers, travelers, geographers, and officers to study social structures to strengthen colonial hegemony.

Keywords: Anthropology, colonialism, ethnic studies, local communities, cultural research.

1. Introduction

Since their occupation of Algeria, the French became interested in numerous issues related to Algerian society. Some of these concerns were linked to religious, cultural, and linguistic aspects, while others focused on women and the social system. Consequently, they conducted numerous and diverse studies throughout the colonial period to serve their colonial objectives, which primarily consisted of controlling both the Algerian population and its territory. These studies were not confined to theoretical investigations; they also included extensive field research aimed at understanding the nature of local society and, subsequently, consolidating French influence and presence. French anthropological studies in Algeria were designed to place their findings at the service of the colonial administration. Anthropology was considered an autonomous scientific discipline whose principal function was to support colonialism. Through it, colonial authorities accumulated a substantial body of valuable knowledge about various human societies, while also engaging in an in-depth examination of the origins of ethnographic knowledge and the analysis of its dimensions in both past and present contexts.

Against this background, the central research problem of this study can be formulated as follows:

To what extent did colonial anthropological studies contribute to the understanding and analysis of Algerian society?

This main question gives rise to several subsidiary questions, including:

What were the foundations upon which these studies emerged?

To what extent did they succeed in achieving colonial objectives and ambitions?

What were the principal issues on which they focused in order to understand Algerian society?

Research Hypothesis

The French use of anthropology as a colonial instrument for implementing their political and strategic plans constitutes a subject worthy of scholarly attention and investigation. Examining this issue allows for a deeper understanding of the key aspects emphasized by colonial researchers in their efforts to comprehend the particular characteristics and nature of Algerian society. Despite its considerable scientific and historical significance, this topic has not yet received the level of academic attention and analysis it deserves.

Objective of the Study

This research paper aims to examine the various French ethnographic and anthropological studies that sought to analyze and characterize the features of Algerian local society, particularly from social and civilizational perspectives. It does so by highlighting issues related to the foundations of Algerian national identity, foremost among them Islam and the Arabic language, as well as the fundamental structures of society, especially the role of women and the tribal system.

Methodology

Since history and anthropology are disciplines concerned with describing human societies and analyzing their social and cultural structures, this study adopts both the descriptive and analytical approaches. These methodologies are employed to interpret the historical phenomenon by investigating the various aspects of life within Algerian society and providing an analysis of the distinctive issues that characterize it within the field of anthropological studies.

2. Anthropological Studies of the Components of Algerian Identity

French anthropologists were particularly interested in several distinctive features of Algerian society, especially those related to religion and the prominent status of Islam among Algerians. Islam represented the primary factor behind social cohesion and cooperation in various spheres of life and was one of the main reasons why Algerians accepted Ottoman rule for more than three centuries. In addition, language constituted an essential means of communication within society and served as a key to understanding its ideas, customs, and rituals.

For these reasons, French scholars concentrated their studies on such issues in an effort to understand and analyze the mentality of Algerian society, thereby facilitating its penetration and eventual domination by colonial authorities.

2.1. Religion

Islam is considered one of the most important foundations of Algerian society and a fundamental pillar upon which Algerians relied in confronting every foreign element that sought to penetrate their society and land. The French colonial authorities quickly recognized this reality and therefore concentrated their studies on Islam, considering it

the primary key to understanding the character and identity of the Algerian people. Consequently, they produced a substantial body of research in this field, particularly on the institution of Islamic endowments (Awqaf).

Islamic Endowments (Awqaf)

Islamic endowments, also known as Habous, constitute a clear expression of the Algerian Muslim's commitment to charity and benevolence, as well as a desire to leave a lasting religious and philanthropic legacy that benefits society both during one's lifetime and after death. For this reason, the practice of endowment gained remarkable popularity among all segments of Algerian society, especially during the Ottoman period. The revenues generated from endowed agricultural lands were estimated to account for nearly half of the total agricultural income. (Saïdouni, 1986, p. 53)

These endowments eventually covered approximately two-fifths of Algerian land, representing about 20% of the country's total area (Ben Aoun, 2019, p. 38)

Most of these lands were among the most fertile and productive, characterized by rich alluvial soils and strategically advantageous geographical locations.

Immediately after occupying Algeria, the French perceived these endowments as a valuable economic resource that could greatly benefit their national economy. At the same time, they regarded them as a significant obstacle to colonial expansion and a direct threat to their plans in Algeria, since Awqaf constituted the principal source of funding for religious institutions such as mosques, zawiyas, and Qur'anic schools. Consequently, they played a major role in the widespread dissemination of education among Algerians.

For this reason, the French devoted considerable attention to the endowment system, undertaking extensive studies and assigning specialized researchers to examine it. Among the most prominent of these scholars was Ernest Mercier, who produced six comprehensive studies on the subject. One of his notable works, entitled *The Law of Habous According to Islamic Legislation*, consists of eleven chapters in which he examined the theoretical foundations of the waqf system, including its definition, principles, conditions, and legal framework. He also addressed its practical aspects by analyzing various disputes and cases related to endowments that were brought before French courts. The book concludes with an appendix containing seven legal cases that had been presented to Algerian jurists and judges, accompanied by Mercier's own analyses and conclusions regarding them (Chbira, 2021, pp. 328-329)

Mercier criticized the system of Awqaf in Algeria, arguing that it would not have succeeded had it not concealed itself behind a veil of piety and religious devotion (Ben Aoun, 2019, p. 53)

In other words, he believed that the primary reason for its widespread acceptance was its close association with Islam. Nevertheless, he expressed astonishment at the rapid expansion of endowments and the importance they acquired within Algerian society, stating: "When one traces the origins of this institution, one cannot help but be amazed by the remarkable development it achieved within society". (Carette, 1849, p. 127)

Mercier further emphasized that the waqf institution was a distinctive feature of Islamic societies, with no equivalent in European legal systems. He stated: "The waqf had no counterpart in our laws," and elsewhere observed that "Europeans were unable to fully

understand endowments and the principles upon which they are based” (Carette, 1849, p. 10)

In addition, Mercier attempted to influence Algerian perceptions by focusing on what he considered the negative aspects of the waqf system. From his perspective, it even contradicted Islamic teachings because it deprived heirs of their rightful inheritance. He therefore argued that it primarily served the interests of the donor rather than providing genuine benefits to the poor and needy. Consequently, he viewed such endowments as a form of ostentation and hypocrisy that, in his opinion, was not endorsed by Islamic law. (Ben Aoun, 2019, pp. 53-54)

Sufi Orders and Zawiyas

These institutions attracted the attention and perplexity of the French due to the absence of comparable models in France or Europe in general. This is evident in their attempts to find suitable designations for them according to their own perspective, referring to them at times as “associations,” at other times as “organizations,” and sometimes as “brotherhoods.” Studies on these institutions began during the early French colonial period in Algeria, particularly after the establishment of the Arab Bureaus in 1834, when their officers started examining these institutions in order to understand their significance and influence within Algerian society. However, most of these studies lacked objectivity and were primarily ethnographic in nature (Berguia, 2022, p. 305)

Sufi orders in Algeria performed numerous religious and social functions. They contributed to the spread of Islam both within and beyond Algeria, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. They also played a major role in resolving social disputes and strengthening solidarity and religious brotherhood among members of society. Consequently, these orders maintained a direct relationship with the ruling political authorities, who sought to benefit from their religious and popular influence by attempting to win over their leaders and prevent them from opposing the government. Among the French historians who showed the greatest interest in Sufi orders and zawiyas within Algerian society was the officer De Neveu, who authored a book in 1845 entitled *Sufi Orders among the Muslims of Algeria*. In this work, he highlighted the importance of Sufi orders in popular revolts and resistance movements. His study is particularly valuable because it drew upon information acquired through his various official duties, his Algerian Muslim wife, and his interactions with numerous Algerians, which enabled him to develop extensive expertise regarding Algerian society. He held senior positions in indigenous affairs (Chehbi, n.d, p. 92), Other notable figures included Louis Rinn, Octave Depont, and Xavier Coppolani, among others, whom the French administration relied upon to understand the Sufi order system and uncover the realities of these spiritual institutions.

These historians observed that, even after the French occupation of Algeria, Sufi orders remained well-organized institutions with considerable influence over the population. They sought to mobilize the people and led numerous resistance movements and uprisings against French rule, effectively filling the vacuum left by the Ottoman authority in Algeria.

Through their studies, particularly those conducted by military officers, these researchers unanimously concluded that religious motivations constituted the primary driving force behind the Sufi orders’ support for resistance and popular revolts. The

zawiyas and their shaykhs functioned as the principal religious authorities in Algeria (Trumelet, 1884, p. 03)

Consequently, French observers regarded these Sufi orders as secret organizations pursuing political objectives (Ageron, 2007, p. 549) Zawiyas were viewed as a constant source of danger because they were considered the main catalysts of resistance and centers for encouraging Algerians to engage in jihad (Ferkous, 2007, p. 09) This view was reinforced by the officer De Neveu in his book *Les Khouanes*, where he stated that certain orders, particularly the Darqawiyya and Rahmaniyya, were the principal instigators of popular revolts and uprisings (-El Achouri, 2022, p. 54) The French exploited this perception to portray Islam as a religion of violence and bloodshed, claiming that Muslims were inclined toward warfare and incitement against non-Muslims. They further distorted Qur'anic verses relating to jihad in support of this narrative (Sabatier, 1882, pp. 20-25) . On this basis, French authorities considered the continued presence of Islam in Algeria to be their greatest direct threat and associated this perceived danger with the widespread influence of Sufi orders, zawiyas, and their religious leaders.

Louis Rinn reinforced these conclusions in his book *Marabouts and Brotherhoods*, stating that “revolts were always widespread in regions dominated by religious organizations that supported rebellion” (Rinn, 1884, p. 111)

The same idea was expressed by Noillat, who argued that the shaykhs of the zawiyas and Sufi orders encouraged Algerians to revolt because they were hostile to and rejected French colonial rule .

French writers continued to focus on Islam in Algeria, attempting to understand its significance and the reasons behind the Algerians' strong attachment to it. In 1900, Edmond Doutté published a book entitled *Algerian Islam*, consisting of ten chapters. In this work, he sought to provide a comprehensive overview of Islam in Algerian society, including its beliefs and religious practices. He devoted an entire chapter to religious zawiyas and conducted a detailed survey of the various Sufi orders and their widespread presence, not only in Algeria but throughout the Islamic world from East to West . (Doutté, 1900, p. 73)

In an effort to weaken the authority of the zawiyas and Sufi orders within Algerian society and eliminate the threat they posed to French colonial rule, the French administration sought to portray them as “states within a state.” It therefore targeted their financial resources, including donations, religious endowments (waqf), and pilgrimage visits. The administration confiscated the endowments from which these institutions benefited and restricted visits to them, claiming that such practices placed a financial burden on Algerians, who had become unable to pay taxes to the French authorities because they were directing their resources toward these religious institutions. (Rinn, 1884, p. 450)

2.2. Language

The French recognized the importance of language in Algeria as a means of communication with the indigenous population and as a fundamental component of Algerian identity alongside Islam. Language was regarded as the repository and spirit of popular culture. Consequently, understanding the Algerian people required learning their language and communicating with them through it. On this basis, the French administration invested in linguistic studies from the very beginning of its presence in

Algeria, recruiting a corps of translators to accompany its military expedition. This demonstrates that the occupation was not merely military in nature but evolved into a comprehensive colonial enterprise targeting people, environment, and culture.

The corps of military translators that accompanied the French expedition to Algeria included translators from Syria and Egypt, as well as a number of Orientalists, particularly students of the renowned scholar Silvestre de Sacy, who served as the dean of the School of Oriental Languages in Paris. (Saadallah A. E., 1998, pp. 22-23), He specialized in Arabic studies and was among the strongest advocates of understanding and learning the Arabic language in Algeria as a means of facilitating the French presence in the country.

This institution was highly active and played an influential role in training numerous Arabists and Orientalists, many of whom were sent to Algeria to teach French officers Arabic and certain local Algerian dialects. These individuals provided substantial support in facilitating the expansion of French colonial rule. Additionally, segments of the Jewish community played an intermediary role that helped ease the implementation of the colonial project. (Saadallah A. E., 1998, p. 06)

Classical Arabic

The French administration sought to implement a policy of Francization in Algeria, replacing Arabic with French in all fields and domains. The objective was to transform Algerian society into a French-speaking and French-cultured society. This policy formed part of a comprehensive and integrated strategy shaped by politicians, intellectuals, military officers, Orientalists, and local collaborators working alongside the colonial administration.

Following extensive French studies of the Arabic language and its status within Algerian society, French authorities concluded that Arabic enjoyed a sacred position among Algerians because it was the language of the Holy Qur'an. As the language and symbol of Islam, any attack on Arabic would be perceived as a direct attack on religion and a form of disrespect toward the Qur'an. From this perspective, the French regarded the destruction of the Arabic language as one of their primary objectives. They therefore sought to suppress it and replace it with French, providing all necessary means to achieve this goal, including educational curricula, institutions, textbooks, and an educational policy aimed at stripping Algerians of their national identity.

To eliminate the Arabic language, the French authorities adopted a plan centered on three main areas: schools, the press and books, and manuscripts. (Egretaud, 1961, p. 45)

They also relied on many Algerians, particularly members of the urban elite, to help them understand Arabic and local dialects, thereby facilitating their penetration into different regions of the country. This explains the appointment of certain prominent figures from Algiers to administrative positions, such as Ahmed Boudierba (Saadallah A. E., 2005, p. 58) Other individuals who assisted in this regard included Mohammed Ben Cheneb, El-Hafnaoui Ben Cheikh, Ali Ben Smaya, Mahmoud Kahoul, and Aba Yaala Al-Zawawi (Saadallah A. E., 2005, p. 141)

As part of efforts to expand the number of French learners of Arabic, the French administration established in 1846 three chairs for the teaching of both Classical and Colloquial Arabic. The first was created in Algiers, the second in Oran, and the third in Constantine, all of which had been major centers of cultural activity and intellectual

influence before the French occupation. These institutions were later transformed into Franco-Arab schools in 1850. To further encourage the study of Arabic, French authorities introduced prizes in 1851 for European students who excelled in the language. Furthermore, the Ministry of War announced its preference for individuals proficient in Arabic, granting them priority in appointment to various civil service positions (Saadallah A. E., 1998, p. 37)

Local Dialects (Berber/Amazigh)

In order to gain a deeper understanding of Algerian society, the French colonial authorities relied on studying various local dialects, particularly the Amazigh language and its different branches and derivatives, including the Tuareg language known as Tamahaq (Targui). This language attracted early attention from General Hanoteau, who learned it and, in 1860, authored a book entitled *Grammar of the Targui Language* (Benesghir Hadri, 2018, pp. 402-403)

The language also drew the interest of the religious missionary and military officer Charles de Foucauld, who compiled both an Arabic–Targui dictionary and a French–Targui dictionary. He is further regarded as the first person to translate the Bible into Targui in an effort to attract the Tuareg population to Christianity. This initiative was perceived as a means of winning their confidence by valuing their language and providing them with a sacred text in their own tongue—an undertaking that had not previously been carried out by Arab or Muslim scholars.

Déparmes was likewise among the strongest advocates of studying and learning the Algerian vernacular dialects. He argued that promoting the local dialects would convince Algerians of the difficulty of Classical Arabic and encourage its replacement with a simpler spoken language. Over time, he believed, this vernacular could emerge as a rival to Arabic itself. In his book *Benefits Concerning Customs, Rules, and Beliefs*, addressing French students, he stated:

“For this reason, every Christian pupil should learn this vernacular language so that he may communicate with all Muslims and understand what they wish to say.” (Rekibi, 1986, p. 26)

René Basset also devoted considerable effort to learning and studying Algeria’s local dialects. He played a major role in conducting extensive linguistic research and was among the founders of the Chair of Berber Language Studies, which focused on the dialects of the Mزاب region, Kabylia, and the Aurès. In 1885, he was commissioned to expand his research to the dialects of the Mزاب Valley and Oued Righ in southeastern Algeria with the aim of collecting additional linguistic data (Boujemaa, 2023, p. 12). These studies served French colonial objectives, particularly the expansion of colonial control and the broader dissemination of Christianity. Basset successfully mastered these dialects and produced numerous scholarly works on them, including *Berber Lexicographical Notes*, *Guide to the Kabyle Language*, and *A Study of Berber Dialects*. (Boujemaa, 2023, p. 92)

As part of their efforts to promote local dialects, the French authorities also relied on several Levantine figures who accompanied the French expedition to Algeria, including Jouni Pharaoh, Louis Brunot, Cherbonneau in Constantine, and Machuel in Oran. These individuals produced numerous educational works in both Algerian

colloquial Arabic and French. Notably, these publications were written and read from left to right. (Boukhaouache, 2013, pp. 51-52)

It is important to note that French strategies aimed at weakening the status of the Arabic language in Algerian society operated through two decisive measures. The first consisted of neglecting the teaching of Classical Arabic by cutting off its primary source of financial support, namely the waqf (endowment) system. The second involved encouraging the teaching of colloquial and vernacular dialects to military officers and individuals seeking administrative positions. This policy sought to achieve a social objective: identifying and classifying local dialects while uncovering Algeria's ethnic and linguistic origins. Ultimately, the broader goal was to reshape Algerian thought and cultural consciousness according to the French colonial vision and worldview.

3. Anthropological Studies of Local Social Organization

3.1 The Tribe in Algerian Society

The tribe constituted the core of the political and social structure of local Algerian society. Since most tribal leaders were also religious figures and heads of Sufi orders, they became prominent leaders of resistance against the French, who were perceived as a Christian and foreign force invading Muslim lands. Consequently, the French administration exerted considerable efforts to dismantle this social nucleus, alter Algeria's political and social system, and reshape it to serve French interests and objectives. This was pursued through the domestication of local leadership, the reduction of its political and social influence among the indigenous population, and, when necessary, attempts to win over tribal elites.

The French initially assumed that conquering and expanding their control over Algeria would be an easy task, largely based on the position of the political authority represented by the first ruler they encountered, Dey Hussein, who declared his surrender and departed from Algeria. However, they soon realized that their calculations were entirely mistaken, as the Dey's decision reflected only his personal stance and not that of the Algerian people. The latter confronted the French with widespread and determined resistance, supported by strong religious and spiritual motivations and led by various tribes and clans with differing forms of authority and influence.

The French understood that their continued presence in Algeria required the establishment of an administrative system capable of controlling this tribal society, which was largely unfamiliar to them linguistically, socially, religiously, and geographically. Algeria's vast territory and diverse climatic and topographical conditions, stretching from north to south, further complicated this challenge. As a result, they sought to create an administrative framework specifically designed to manage Algerian tribes while taking into account their social characteristics and particularities, thereby facilitating colonial control.

Algerian tribes varied according to several criteria. Ethnicity distinguished between Arab and Berber tribes, while patterns of mobility produced both sedentary and nomadic groups. Economic activity gave rise to agricultural, religious, and commercial tribes. In addition, the nature of relations with political authority resulted in the

emergence of allied tribes and makhzen tribes that were linked to the ruling power. (Nasr Eddine, 2020, pp. 28-29)

From this perspective, French authorities encouraged extensive research on tribal organizations and social structures in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses and uncover their internal dynamics. Numerous geographers, anthropologists, and military officers responded by producing in-depth colonial studies on the tribe as a central institution in Algerian society. (Hamdani, 2010, p. 70) Upon assuming power in Algeria in 1841, General Bugeaud adopted a system of local indigenous administration based primarily on the principle of “governing Arabs through Arabs”

This policy meant governing Algerians through influential Algerian intermediaries who possessed religious and spiritual authority within local communities. The concept was further institutionalized a year later through the establishment of the Arab Bureaus (Bureaux Arabes) under the decree of 1 February 1844, with the objective of securing the complete subjugation of Algerian tribes.

The French concentrated on winning the support of traditional local leaders because of their extensive knowledge of Algerian society, its social strata, customs, and traditions. These leaders could therefore serve as valuable allies in monitoring the movements of local populations, particularly those collaborating with popular resistance movements. This approach is reflected in the statement of Alexis de Tocqueville, who declared: “We will not be able to break Emir Abdelkader’s power unless we begin with the tribes and clans loyal to him and turn their lives into a living hell” .

Charles Féraud also devoted considerable attention to the study of tribes, focusing particularly on those of eastern Algeria. He wrote about the Ben Achour family, which ruled the region of Ferdjioua, provided the genealogy of Miehoub Ben Chenouf, leader of the Beni Slimane tribe in Eastern Mzab, and conducted a study of the Ouled Abd Ennour tribe, tracing its origins and the lineage of its tribal leaders (Kaouane, 2020, p. 660) Likewise, Émile Masqueray produced a comprehensive study of the concept of the tribe in the regions of Djurdjura, the Aurès, and the Mzab. In his dissertation entitled *The Formation of Cities among the Sedentary Populations of Algeria* (1886), he argued that these tribes represented a population of “pure blood and race” because they formed closed communities that did not intermingle with foreigners or outsiders (Ageron, 2007, p. 44). According to his analysis, these groups constituted a distinct and homogeneous society characterized by exceptional individual and family structures unique to their respective regions.

After obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the Algerian tribes and clans, and within the framework of implementing and promoting the colonial policy of “divide and rule,” the French came to what they considered a fundamental conclusion: that Algeria consisted of two distinct peoples rather than a single nation, namely the Arabs and the Berbers. In their writings, they claimed that profound differences and antagonisms existed between these two groups and that they shared neither religious nor linguistic commonalities. They further argued that while the Arabs were generally subject to the ruling authority, the Berbers tended to resist it and govern themselves independently. This perspective is reflected in the statement of Fabre Daumas:

“Kabylia is a primitive Switzerland because it is composed of tribes that are independent from one another and govern themselves through various provinces and administrations.” (Daumas, 1847, p. 44)

The military officer Carette reinforced the studies and ideological assumptions of his contemporaries aimed at separating the Berbers from the Arabs. In his work *Scientific Exploration of Algeria during the Years 1840, 1841, and 1842: Studies on Kabylia as It Really Is* (Carette & Ernest, 1849, p. 119), he addressed numerous themes related to the social characteristics of the major tribal formations. He asserted that the Berbers differed fundamentally from the Arabs in their customs, traditions, and socio-political organization (Hamdani, 2010, pp. 35-36)

Likewise, the studies conducted by Hanotaux and Letourneau sought to reinforce colonial scholarship and the French thesis that Kabylia differed from the rest of Algeria in all respects, particularly in the social sphere. They argued that the village constituted the principal political and administrative unit of Kabyle society, thereby conferring upon the region a distinct character and an autonomous identity. This view was expressed in their statement:

“The cornerstone of Kabyle society is the village, where all its constituent elements are found. Consequently, the development of this society depends on the development of the village itself. Studying the village is sufficient to understand Kabyle society in all its characteristics and details.” (Letourneux, 1893, p. 07)

As a result, Algerian tribes, regardless of the extent of their influence or geographical distribution, came under the control of the French colonial authorities. The latter succeeded in relying on numerous local leaders, particularly those belonging to the Makhzen tribes, who assumed various functions within the Arab Bureaus under French administrative supervision. This enabled the colonial administration to exercise greater control over the local population and its tribal and clan-based structures. It also facilitated the implementation of policies aimed at integrating indigenous communities into French civilization, based on the colonial assumption that they were primitive and backward.

3.2. Women in Algerian Society

Algerian women remained largely unknown to the French due to the customs and traditions governing local society, which were fundamentally based on notions of honor and sanctity concerning women. Women were regarded as the source of family honor, the nucleus of the family, and the foundation of society. This reality attracted the attention of French observers studying Algerian society, prompting them to seek ways to gain access to women in order to examine their social conditions and status.

The French administration soon realized that it was nearly impossible to reach Algerian women directly, as they rarely appeared in public regardless of circumstances. Consequently, efforts were directed toward accessing them within their homes by sending European women to teach them new activities and skills previously unfamiliar to them. Through this approach, the French hoped to achieve their objectives by breaking down barriers of fear and establishing channels of communication with indigenous women.

Within this framework, European women established workshops dedicated to embroidery and weaving instruction (Saadallah A. E., 1998, p. 238) Since Islam constituted

the principal pillar of Algerian society and represented the greatest obstacle to the French colonial presence, European efforts focused heavily on undermining it through misrepresentation, distorted interpretations of its teachings, and attempts to convert as many Algerians as possible to Christianity. Given the considerable influence women exercised within their families and in the upbringing of children, missionary campaigns specifically targeted them. This objective was pursued through the establishment of the White Sisters Association in 1869, which publicly provided charitable services and assistance while discreetly seeking to draw closer to Algerian women and spread Christianity among them (Saadallah A. E., 1998, p. 117)

Algerian women remained a central concern within the colonial program because of their profound influence on men, children, families, and, ultimately, society as a whole. French authorities believed that if they could transform the beliefs of Algerian women, win them over to Western values, and liberate them from what they perceived as the oppressive conditions imposed by a patriarchal society, they would gain significant influence and almost absolute authority over men. In their view, this would provide the most effective means of dismantling Algerian society, undermining its values, and eroding Algerian culture. (Fanon, 1975, p. 20)

French anthropologists observed that Algerian society was structured around a principle of separation between men and women, establishing clear boundaries between the sexes from birth. Girls were raised according to standards and methods different from those applied to boys from an early age. They were subjected to strict supervision because parents feared any mistake that might compromise family honor. In general, girls were perceived as potential sources of shame for the family and therefore remained under the constant watch of male relatives. Consequently, the educational framework governing girls emphasized moral concepts such as modesty, sanctity, decency, and reserve.

Within this context, Algerian women were often deprived of educational opportunities due to prevailing customs and traditions, which sought to keep them isolated from the outside world and prevent contact with men. The French concluded that the absence of education inevitably affected women's religious understanding. Indeed, knowledge constitutes a fundamental component of religious learning, a principle emphasized in Islam itself, as the first revealed word of the Qur'an was "Read." Nevertheless, local society often operated according to customs and traditions rather than the authentic principles of Islamic law.

This difficult reality facilitated French penetration into Algerian society by targeting women, whose limited religious knowledge sometimes led them to seek solutions through magic, superstition, visits to shrines, and the veneration of saints in the hope of fulfilling various needs, particularly during times of illness or hardship (Doutté, 1900, p. 110). According to several Orientalist accounts, some women even learned magical practices and participated in various forms of syncretic rituals to assert their influence and establish their position within the family and society, a phenomenon attributed to the widespread ignorance prevailing among them. (Gaudry, 1998, p. 225)

As Algerian society was predominantly agrarian and relied heavily on agricultural labor—including planting, cultivation, harvesting, and crop collection—tasks that required considerable physical effort, male labor was highly valued. Consequently,

families often welcomed the birth of boys and viewed the birth of girls less favorably, since sons were perceived as future economic and social assets to the household.

From this perspective, daughters were frequently regarded as factors contributing to the fragmentation of the family structure because their expected future involved marriage and integration into another family. For this reason, girls were sometimes deprived of their inheritance rights in order to preserve the unity of land ownership and prevent family property from passing into another lineage.

In line with colonial writings that portrayed Algeria as consisting of two distinct societies—an allegedly closed and backward Arab society and a Berber society depicted as more open and less constrained by Islamic traditions—colonial authors argued that Kabyle, Chaoui, and Tuareg women neither wore the veil nor covered their faces. They therefore presented these women as fundamentally different from Arab women in other regions of Algeria. According to these accounts, Arab women lived under difficult conditions due to a rigid and patriarchal social order. (Luca, 2002, p. 171).whereas they were portrayed as aspiring to liberation and a better life similar to that allegedly enjoyed by Berber women.

4. Conclusion

The anthropological studies conducted by military officers, geographical explorers, administrative officials, as well as French monks, clergymen, and academics, were exploited by the French colonial authorities to formulate a carefully designed colonial policy aimed at permanently integrating Algerian society into French society, stripping it of its identity and its social, cultural, and civilizational affiliations. This strategy sought to create a rupture between Algerians and their historical past, thereby facilitating the penetration and control of Algerian society in both the present and the future.

The main findings reached at the conclusion of this study can be summarized as follows:

The French occupation did not rely solely on military force to subjugate Algeria; it also employed anthropology, a discipline closely associated with colonial expansion, as a tool serving purely expansionist objectives.

Anthropological studies, particularly academic research, enabled the French authorities to closely examine the local social structure and gain a comprehensive understanding of the hidden dimensions and complexities of Algerian society from multiple perspectives.

Despite being shaped by a colonial ideology, these studies succeeded in penetrating deeply into Algerian society and provided detailed accounts of various issues related to it.

The findings of these studies were utilized in the formulation of policies designed to serve the overt and covert objectives of colonialism in both the short and long term.

French interest in studying Algerian society was primarily intended to bring about profound transformations within it by introducing French thought and values, particularly through the promotion of division and discord. This included attempts to privilege the Berber element over the Arab element and portray it as being more receptive to progress and more inclined to adopt Western and French ideas.

Therefore, researchers in the humanities and social sciences should intensify in-depth investigations into these anthropological studies, as their colonial objectives and repercussions continue to exert influence up to the present day. Such research is essential for raising public awareness of the risks these studies may pose to local society, especially regarding policies aimed at distorting religious identity and fostering racial divisions.

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