

Algerian cultural imprints in the Levant between the two centuries19-20M

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Abstract

The historical relations between the two basins of the Mediterranean, the West and the East, are very ancient, first by virtue of the presence of holy places in the East for Muslims. Therefore, we see Moroccans and others often traveling there to visit those places for essentially religious motives, and for various other motives such as the pursuit of knowledge, trade, tourism, and others. Most of the immigrants went to the country of Hijaz to perform the Hajj and Umrah rituals and see the major shrines. Others went there with the intention of seeking knowledge or obtaining jurisprudential licenses from some of the leading Islamic scholars and jurists settled there, while some of the Algerian immigrants headed to Egypt and the Levant to see other shrines. To increase knowledge, culture and practice trade. Wherever these immigrants went, they left their mark in various fields and fields, especially intellectual, cultural, military, and judicial...

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I- Introduction :

The subject of cultural interactions is extremely complex and broad due to the connections between different facets of human life. However, in this study, I aim to address the intellectual and cultural relationships between Algeria and the Levant. What encouraged me to delve into this topic is that most of the existing studies primarily focus on political issues and often fail to acknowledge the Algerian origins of influential Arab figures. In cases where these origins are mentioned, they are often mistakenly referred to as Moroccan. What further provoked my interest is the common emphasis in Oriental academic studies on the influence of the center (the Machreq) on the periphery (the Maghreb) while neglecting the reverse effect. The historical material available to me, or to which I had access, compelled me to shift the spotlight onto the role of Algerians in the cultural and intellectual life of the Levant. This study seeks to shed light on this relationship and explore why Algerian immigrants chose to settle in the Levant, especially in Syria. How did the Ottomans and later the French authorities deal with these immigrants, and what lasting cultural and intellectual impacts did they make? Additionally, I will delve into the specific cultural fields in which they excelled.

I will begin by discussing the historical background and roots of the relationship between Algeria and the Levant, dating back to the Fatimid era. I will focus on notable scholars and figures from Algerian culture who left significant marks on the cultural and intellectual landscape of Syria, spanning from the late tenth century AD to the seventeenth century. Following this, I will provide a brief overview of the political climate in both countries during the 19th and 20th centuries AD to contextualize this interaction. Subsequently, I will examine the subject of Algerian immigration to the Levant, discussing who these immigrants were, their origins in Algeria, and their settlements in the Levant. Finally, I will delve into the cultural and intellectual domains in which they made their mark.

It is worth noting that there are limited sources and references that specifically address cultural relations between Algeria and Syria. I found noteworthy works such as "The Levant in the View of the Maghrebians" by Salah Al-Munajjid and an article about the Maghrebi presence in the Mediterranean Levant by Dr. Laila Al-Sabbagh, although they primarily focus on Maghrebians. Additionally, Dr. Ali Al-Muhafza's "Intellectual Trends among the Arabs in the Renaissance Era" touches on the Arab Renaissance in general with passing references to some Algerians active in collective fields. Dr. Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah's "The Cultural History of Algeria (Part 5)" provides a brief presentation of Algerian figures in the cultural field in Syria. I also came across a master's thesis by researcher Nadia Tarshoun titled "Algerian Migration to the Levant between 1847-1911," which delves into immigration as a social-historical phenomenon. Furthermore, the book "Algerian Migration towards the Levant" by researcher Ammar Hilal provides a more in-depth exploration of this subject.

In addition to these academic sources, I have also considered the works of Suhail Al-Khalidi, a researcher and journalist of Algerian-Syrian origin, especially his book "Maghrebian Radiation in the East," which contains valuable insights into the role of Algerians in the Levant. Another noteworthy figure is Kamal Bouchama, a researcher, minister, and former diplomat in Syria, whose writings serve as valuable testimonies documenting his interactions with generations of Algerians who lived in the Levant since the mid-nineteenth century. They share family and intellectual ties with the early Algerian settlers in the Levant. Some of his prominent works include "Les Algerians of Bilad-Echam" and other related books. I acknowledge that my exploration of this topic may not provide a definitive conclusion but rather aims to gather accurate and focused information by building upon the work of those who preceded me. It is my hope that this study will stimulate further research and inquiry in this field.

I.1. Background: Communication between Algeria and the Levant

Undoubtedly, discussing the relationship between Algeria and the Levant, or what was historically known as the Levant countries, is an integral part of the broader context of the relationship between the Maghreb and the Levant. In this context, researchers encounter a significant challenge, as ancient historians who documented the history of the Levant, such as Ibn Khallikan, Ibn Asakir, and al-Dhahabi, used the term "Maghrebians" to refer to individuals originating from the western regions, spanning from Egypt to Marrakesh and sometimes even Andalusia. This complex nomenclature makes it exceedingly intricate for researchers to ascertain the precise origins of these individuals, including Algerians, within our scope.

Since the Islamic conquest, the Arab East has held profound significance for Maghrebians. It has been the "apple of their eyes" and a place of deep affection, as it houses sacred sites such as the Holy Kaaba, the tomb of the Prophet, major shrines, and other significant locations connected to the early spread of the Islamic message (Sabbagh 1977). Maghrebians did not exclusively seek destinations in the Hijaz and Egypt for religious purposes; the Levant also emerged as an attractive option, despite its relative distance from the traditional Hajj path. Some Maghrebians even preferred the Levant, establishing their homes, marriages, learning centres, and teaching endeavours there. In some instances, individuals would temporarily reside in the Levant before returning to their homeland (Al-Munajjid 1963).

Beyond religious motivations, natural geographical similarities between the two regions encouraged Maghrebian migration to the Levant. Visitors often found it easy to adapt due to the resemblances in environmental conditions (Braudel, 1949). Al-Maqri, in his book "Nafah al-Tib," noted the striking resemblance between the cities of Damascus, Tlemcen, and Fez (Al-Maqri, 1988).

Moreover, scientific aspirations played a pivotal role in attracting Maghrebians to the Levant, particularly the capital city of Damascus, renowned as a hub of knowledge and culture. Additionally, economic factors, particularly commercial opportunities, acted as significant drivers for Algerians and others to explore prospects outside their native regions.

Tracing the presence of Algerians in the Levant reveals their historical significance dating back to the Fatimid era in Egypt and the Levant during the late 4th to 6th centuries AH (10th to 12th centuries AD). During this period, the Maghrebi Kutama tribe held administrative, judicial, and military roles, including governors, judges, and officers (Tadmouri, 2009).

Some of the most noteworthy Maghrebian figures in the Levant, beginning from the Fatimid era, include:

10th Century AD:

- Jaafar bin Falah al-Kutami (360 AH - 971 AD), a military commander who governed Damascus by the order of al-Mu'izz the Fatimi.

12th Century AD:

- Abu Muhammad Al-Ashiri Al-Sanhaji (661 AH - 1165 AD), a hadith scholar and grammarian in Damascus.
- Abu Al-Hassan Al-Qusentini (519 AH - 1125 AD), a scientist specializing in silver chemistry in Damascus.
- Muhammad bin Mahrez bin Muhammad Al-Wahrani (575 AH - 1179 AD), a preacher in Damascus (Bouamran, 1995) (Nouaihad, 1980).

13th Century AD:

- Abu Al-Faraj Al-Boni (612 AH - 1215 AD), Imam of the Hanafi mihrab in Damascus.
- Diaa al-Din al-Zawawi (644 AH - 1245 AD), a teacher at the Malikite Zawiya in Damascus.
- Zain al-Din al-Zawawi (564-628 A.H. - 1169-1231 A.D.), a teacher in Damascus.
- The esteemed Ibn Al-Afif (668 AH- 1289 AD), Governor of the Treasury in Damascus.
- Abu Muhammad al-Zawawi (589-681 AH - 1193-1282 AD), reciter and judge in Damascus.
- Al-Afif Al-Tilmisani (610 AH - 1213 AD), Governor of the Damascus Treasury.
- Abu Bakr Al-Wahrani (615 AH - 1219 AD), a preacher at the Daraya Mosque in Damascus.

14th Century AD:

- Ibn Abi Hajlah (776 AH - 1375 AD), who studied in Damascus and left more than 80 books there.
- Abu Al-Ruh Al-Mankalati Al-Zawawi (664-743 AH - 1261-1342 AD), Deputy Judge of Damascus.
- Saeed Al-Milani (771 AH - 1369 AD), a reciter in Damascus.
- Muhammad bin Yahya al-Tilmisani (794 AH - 1392 AD), judge in Hama, Tripoli, and Damascus.

15th Century AD:

- Abu Jaafar Muhammad al-Biskari, the Maghrebian Malikite jurist (804 AH - 1402 AD), who studied the Malikite school of thought at the Umayyad Mosque.
- Ahmed Al-Senussi (9th century AH - 15th century AD), Judge of Damascus.
- Salem Al-Sunhaji (777-873 AH - 1375-1468 AD), Maliki judge in Damascus and Jerusalem.
- Abu al-Abbas al-Maghrawi (820 AH - 1417 AD), a teacher at the Zanjili School in Damascus.

17th Century AD:

- Ibn Qunfud al-Qasantini (1015 AH - 1606 AD), researcher and historian in Damascus.
- Yahya Al-Shawi (1030 - 1096 AH / 1621-1684 AD), who relocated to the Arab Levant in 1074 AH - 1663 AD, initially to Egypt and then to Damascus, where he held a prestigious scientific council in the Umayyad Mosque. His expertise spanned hadith, philosophy, and logic (Bouamran, 1995) (Nouaihad, 1980).
- Ahmed Shihab al-Din Al-Maqri (986-1041 AH - 1578-1631 AD), one of the most prominent Algerians who left a lasting impact in Damascus. Al-Maqri documented the session in which al-Maqri completed "Sahih al-Bukhari" in the Umayyad Mosque, emphasizing the eagerness of Damascenes to attend and their admiration for his teachings (Sabbagh, 1977). None of the scholars who arrived in Damascus garnered the same level of favour and acceptance (Al-Muhibi, Nd).

I. 2. The Political Situation in the Two Countries:

A- In Algeria:

At the outset of the 19th century, Algeria found itself nominally and spiritually under the influence of the Ottoman state, which was then described as weakened and ailing. This period in Algerian history, known as the Deys dynasty (1671 AD - 1830 AD), marked a phase of relative independence from the Sublime Porte but was marred by intense political conflicts among its rulers. During the initial three decades of the 19th

century, a series of Dey rulers came to power, with the exception of the last Dey, Hussein Pasha, who succeeded his father following his death due to illness (Jilali, 1980).

These Dey rulers were primarily preoccupied with countering foreign aggression, engaging in maritime conflicts, and collecting taxes. Consequently, they paid limited attention to intellectual pursuits and culture. This situation wasn't unique to Algeria but rather a common theme in most Ottoman provinces, as noted by Muhammad Kurd Ali in his book "al'islam walhdarh al'erbyh" He writes, "The Turks entered Damascus, where there were more than one hundred and fifty schools for the Quran, Hadith, and jurisprudence according to the four schools of thought, as well as schools of medicine and engineering, in addition to various religious schools and hospitals. However, they abandoned them after nearly four centuries, leaving behind only a few functioning schools." (Mohamad Kurd, 2003)

It can be said that the cultural landscape in Algeria reflected the pain and hope experienced by Algerian intellectuals due to the neglect and marginalization of culture. Better circumstances were needed to nurture culture and intellectual endeavours. Even though the final Dey, Hussein, ruled for an extended period, spanning 12 years from 1818 to 1830, during which he constructed fortresses, mosques, palaces, and implemented administrative and military reforms, he failed to achieve any significant cultural accomplishments. Eventually, he surrendered the keys of the Algerian state to General de Bourmont, the leader of the French colonial campaign, in the summer of 1830 (Jilali, 1980).

Upon their initial occupation of Algeria, the French were primarily focused on expanding their influence, consolidating their hold on interior regions, and quelling sporadic popular uprisings. This preoccupation allowed cultural activities to continue, albeit modestly, through various groups, associations, clubs, newspapers, mosques, and cultural corners. These activities were primarily religious and social in nature.

With the establishment of the French colonial civil regime in Algeria in 1870, the French began enacting legislation and establishing structures to monitor and control cultural life. This was done within the framework of furthering the interests and objectives of the colonial administration, ultimately aimed at erasing the distinctive features of the Algerian identity as part of the broader policy of assimilation. French authorities closely monitored the cultural landscape in Algeria, and as the signs of the Arab Renaissance in the Arab Levant began to emerge on the horizon, coupled with the tensions preceding World War I, restrictions on cultural activities increased.

B- In Syria:

Historically, both Algeria and Syria fell under Ottoman influence at the beginning of the 16th century, with Syria coming under Ottoman control in 1516 and Algeria in 1518. However, their experiences under Ottoman rule differed. While the Algerian population had invited the Ottomans to help counter the Spanish and Portuguese threats, Syria was forcibly subjected to Ottoman authority, along with the entire Fertile Crescent region and Egypt following the battles of Marj Dabiq and Ridaniyah. This region remained under Ottoman rule for over four centuries. The Ottoman Empire pursued similar policies in Syria and Algeria, including the imposition of taxes and suppression of anti-Ottoman movements.

The personality of the rulers played a significant role in shaping their relations with the local population. While rulers like Jamal Pasha and Ahmed Pasha were notorious for their brutality, the reigns of Midhat Pasha, Hamdi Pasha, and Nazim Pasha were characterized by better conditions, more amicable relations, and greater harmony with the population. However, even these exceptions to the rule of conflict with Ottoman

authority had the unintended effect of sowing the seeds of awakening and cultural renaissance, benefiting from the openness that Syria experienced during Muhammad Ali's rule (1831-1840) to Western civilization.

Cultural life in Syria flourished thanks to the Arab Renaissance movement, the Islamic League movement, and their proponents. Additionally, Arab Christians, who were often critical of the Ottoman Islamic state influenced by British and French European propaganda, played a significant role in this atmosphere. This period saw the emergence of thinkers and reformers who enriched the cultural and intellectual scene in Syria, making it a beacon and destination for many Arab immigrants.

As World War I drew to a close, France embarked on a strategy to extend its influence over Syria and Lebanon through the implementation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In 1920, Syria and Lebanon fell under French colonialism, marking a significant turning point in their histories.

I. 3. The Migration of Algerians to the Levant:

The destinations of Algerian immigrants varied; some preferred neighboring Tunisia and Morocco, while others headed to the Hijaz, and another group made their way to the Levant. It can be said that the migration of Algerians towards the Arab Levant during the Ottoman era was driven by voluntary motives, including religious, scientific, or commercial pursuits, and often a combination of these. However, after the French occupation, migration became a forced necessity for many Algerians to safeguard their lives, honor, and religion. Consequently, many sought refuge in the lands of Islam and Arabism, particularly in Syria, which attracted the largest number of the earliest Algerian immigrants. This movement gained momentum following the defeat of Emir Abdelkader. Initially, his followers made the journey, and later the Emir himself joined them in 1856, maintaining communication with these early immigrants and their families in Algeria (Khalidi,1997).

According to researcher Suhail Al-Khalidi in his book "alash'ea'e almghrby fy almshrq" the migration of Algerians can be categorized into four distinct waves, beginning in 1847 and extending to 1914. The defeat of al-Muqrani and al-Haddad in 1871 marked a significant turning point. The third wave was influenced by the colonial regime's efforts to confiscate immigrants' lands and allocate them to European settlers. This policy was especially prominent during the reigns of Governor-Generals "Bugeaud" and "Jules Cambon," aimed at both exploiting the immigrants (or rather, the displaced) as French subjects within the Ottoman Empire and curtailing their activities (Saadallah, 1983). The final wave, occurring between 1900-1914, was a response to increasing pressure and repression, particularly under the rule of Governor-General "Jonnart."

It's important to note that the number of those forcibly displaced (directly or indirectly) exceeded the number of voluntary immigrants. Initially, most of the first immigrants during the latter half of the 19th century were scholars, jurists, sheikhs, and affluent families. Subsequent waves included a more diverse array of individuals, such as soldiers, farmers, merchants, and impoverished families. It's worth noting that the Emir, his family, and his followers played pivotal roles in attracting Algerians to Syria. Additionally, the majority of these immigrants hailed from eastern Algeria, particularly from tribal regions. Between 1909 and 1911, significant migration from Tlemcen in western Algeria stirred concern among the French authorities (Saadallah, 1998), prompting an investigative committee to be dispatched to assess the situation. The French Consulate estimated the number of Algerians in Damascus at 4,000, while Prince Omar estimated the number at 17,500 (Tarchoun, 1980).

Most of the Algerian immigrants settled in Damascus, Ghouta, and Hauran. These immigrants and the displaced individuals engaged in various activities. Some were involved in education, issuing fatwas, serving

as judges, and contributing to the army. Others pursued careers in agriculture and trade. Among these Algerian personalities who migrated and gained recognition in the Levant, the following are worth mentioning:

- Muhammad Al-Mahdi Al-Saklawi
- Muhammad Al-Tayeb Al-Mubarak
- Muhammad Al-Mubarak bin Muhammad Al-Mubarak
- Saleh Al-Samouni
- Taher Al-Samouni (Taher Al-Jazaery)
- Salim Al-Samouni (nephew of Taher)
- Ahmed Al-Tayeb bin Salem
- Hajj Ali Boutaleb
- Muhammad Al-Mustafa bin Al-Tohamy
- Muhammad Al-Kharoubi Al-Qalai
- Muhammad bin Yallis bin Shawish
- Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman Al Hashemi

In addition to these individuals, the family of Prince Abdul Qadir Al-Jazaery also made significant contributions. Notable figures among his sons, brothers, and grandchildren include:

- Prince Muhammad bin Abdul Qadir
- Prince Abdul Malik bin Abdul Qadir (who lived, struggled, and passed away in Morocco)
- Prince Ali bin Abdul Qadir
- Prince Omar bin Abdul Qadir
- The Hashemite Prince bin Abdul Qadir
- Prince Muhyiddin bin Abdul Qadir

Emir Abdelkader Al-Jazaery's brothers included Muhammad, Al-Saeed, Mustafa, Ahmed, and Al-Hussein(Saadallah, 1998). Some of his famous grandchildren include Prince Khaled and Prince Muhammad Saeed Al-Jazaery.

I.4.Contributions of Algerians to Intellectual and Cultural Life in Syria:

Following their settlement in the Levant and their assimilation within its communities, Algerians experienced a sense of belonging and did not feel estranged, as they shared common Arab and Islamic heritage with the Levantine people. Among them were individuals who made significant contributions to the cultural landscape, which is unsurprising considering that many of the initial immigrants were scholars, jurists, and Sufis, as previously mentioned.

The overall atmosphere in the Levant was highly conducive to intellectual and cultural developments due to the various interactions between political, intellectual, and religious currents. These interactions served as reactions to Ottoman policies and were further enriched by the diverse composition of Levantine society. Consequently, Algerian immigrants found their place in various domains of thought and culture.

A - The Field of Education:

Numerous Algerians, particularly those from the Emir's family and his followers, emerged as educators in the Levant. They engaged in studies, teaching, and the establishment of schools, which produced numerous scholars and influential thinkers. Notable figures in this field include Prince Ahmed bin Muhyiddin, Prince Muhammad bin Abdul Qadir, Ahmed bin Muhammad Al-Tilmisani, Ahmed Al-Gherissi Al-Jazaery, Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Khalidi, Muhammad Al-Mubarak, Abu Ali Al-Zawawi, Ahmed Jawdat Al-Hashemi, Ahmed Zarouk, and Saleh Al-Samouni. Sheikh Taher Al-Jazaery stands out among them for his extensive contributions to founding schools and cultural institutions, as well as libraries in the Levant(Khalidi,1997).

Prominent schools that Algerians played a role in establishing or supervising include:

- "Amber" School
- School of Counseling and Education
- Al-Rayhaniyah School
- Ibn Khaldun School
- Al-Nahda Scientific School
- Dohat Literature School(Khalidi,1997).

B - The Field of Journalism:

The Ottoman Empire aimed to isolate the Levant and hinder communication with the broader East, particularly Egypt, which was experiencing significant media activity, as well as Europe, undergoing the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution. Paradoxically, this isolationist policy served as a catalyst for breaking down barriers. Algerians contributed to this by establishing newspapers such as "Al-Muhajir" by Prince Said Al-Jazairi, "Al-Wahda Al-Islamiyya" sponsored by Salim Al-Jazairi, and "Al-Mufid" run by Abdel-Ghani Al-Gharisi. Algerians also enriched Syrian newspapers with their writings on political, intellectual, religious, and educational topics of the time.

Prominent journalists of Algerian descent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries included Muhammad bin al-Tohamy, Saeed bin Qasim al-Jazaery, Suhail al-Khalidi, Yahya Yakhlef, al-Tohamy Shatta, Muhammad Mortada al-Hassani al-Jazaery, Muhammad Bouazza, Adnan al-Rashdi, and Abd al-Hadi Mubarak(Khalidi,1997).

C - The Field of Associations:

The Levant witnessed the emergence of numerous secret and public associations in the 19th century, playing significant roles in raising awareness, education, and countering Ottoman policies. Algerian families, including the Al-Samouni family and the family of Prince Abdul Qadir, contributed to the revival and financial support of these associations. The "Maghrebian Islamic Charity Makassed" Association remains active today. In the early 20th century, these associations multiplied and their activities encompassed political, cultural, and religious roles. Some of these associations included:

- The Arab Renaissance Society (1906), influenced by the circles of Sheikh Taher Al-Jazaery

- The Arab-Ottoman Brotherhood Society (1908), featuring Prince Mohieddin Al-Jazaery
- The Literary Forum (1908), featuring Salim al-Jazaery
- Al-Qahtani Society (1909), where Salim Al-Jazaery was also involved
- Al-Ahed Society (1913), where Salim Al-Jazaery played an important role (Elmouhafada, 1978).

D - The Field of Literature and Arts:

Notable figures of Algerian origin excelled in literature and the arts. For instance, Yahya Ikhlef, known for his short stories and novels, authored numerous books. Additionally, music teacher and vocalist Ahmed Zarrouk, who taught at the "Anbar" School for over two decades, gained fame in the Arab Levant and even in Turkey, where the Ottoman Sultan summoned him and hosted him for an extended period (Khalidi, 1997).

II- Conclusion:

This historical account reveals the deep-rooted relationship between Algeria and Syria, tracing back to the late 10th century AD, when Algerians played a significant role in empowering the Fatimid state in the Levant. The historical intersection and shared experiences during the Ottoman era highlight the challenges faced due to Ottoman policies, which curtailed cultural activities. However, these circumstances did not deter Algerians in Algeria or Syria from actively engaging in intellectual and cultural pursuits in various forms. Instead, they acted as a catalyst for challenge and resistance.

The composition of Algerian immigrants to the Levant was diverse, and their departures from Algeria and destinations within the Levant varied. The first wave in the late 19th century, mainly consisting of scholars and jurists, and its connection to Emir Abdel Qader and his family, formed the core group that initiated cultural work in the Levant. The immigrants made substantial contributions in various fields, with a particular emphasis on religious and secular education. These contributions hold significant historical importance for both countries.

Many questions remain, including the reasons behind the selection of Syria as their destination and their relationship with their homeland. Additionally, further research should explore the role of Levantine individuals in cultural life in Algeria. Moreover, information about cooperation agreements between the two independent countries in education and the arrival of teachers and professors to teach in Algerian schools would provide valuable insights.

- Appendices:

1. Levant: Levante or Levant means the sunrise or the country of the East, and it is a designation launched in the Middle Ages by the people of the two cities of Genoa (Genova) and Venice (Venise), Italy, on the part located on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The name became popular during the nineteenth century, and those interested in the region stopped using it in the second half of the twentieth century. See: Zain Nur al-Din Zain, the international conflict in the Middle East and the birth of the two states of Syria and Lebanon, p. 10.
2. The Battle of Marj Dabiq took place on August 24th, 1516, between Ottomans and the Mamluks near Aleppo in Syria. The Ottomans, led by Salim the First, won, leading to the Ottoman rule of Syria.

3. The Battle of Ridaniyah occurred on January 22, 1517 AD, between Toman bey and Sultan Salim, resulting in the end of the Mamluk rule and the beginning of Ottoman rule in Egypt.

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