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Factors of Civilizational Exchange Between Algeria and Tunisia in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract:

Algerian-Tunisian relations have historically been strong due to their geographical and cultural ties. Trade, politics, and intellectual exchanges have deeply influenced both nations. Their shared history fostered resistance to colonialism and the development of reform movements to preserve their identities. Arabic newspapers played a crucial role in strengthening their connections. Religious institutions like the University of Ez-Zitouna educated Algerian students. Sufi zawiyas provided both shelter and education. Trade routes and pilgrimages further encouraged cultural exchange. Intellectual movements from the Levant inspired their renaissance. Despite colonial efforts, these ties remained unbroken. Their relationship continues to be deeply rooted in history.

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Introduction

Algerian-Tunisian relations represent a successful model in the Maghreb region due to their historical depth and strategic significance, justified by crucial issues affecting both countries.

Tunisia has always served as Algeria's strategic depth, from the early days of history, as evidenced by the mutual influence of events that shaped this shared space—from Roman rule to the fall of Carthage, Byzantine occupation, the Islamic conquest, and the emergence of independent Islamic states. Given these historical ties, it is essential to study the impact of French colonial control over both countries and highlight their shared characteristics in resisting this common threat. This study aims to examine the forms of civilizational and intellectual communication between the two nations during this difficult period of struggle against French colonialism.

1. Factors of Communication

The interaction between the Algerian and Tunisian peoples has never been interrupted throughout history. Geographic unity, common language, social and economic ties, and deep-rooted intellectual connections have all contributed to strengthening the relationship between the two nations (Shetra, 2013, p. 130).

Shared scientific and cultural heritage, along with geographic and political similarities, played a crucial role in shaping relations between Algeria and Tunisia. These factors fostered long-lasting ties, leading to a sense of harmony and alignment in various aspects of life. The most prominent factors that contributed to this connection include:

1.1. Geographic Proximity

The Maghreb region forms a naturally cohesive unit, without significant geographical barriers separating its territories (Al-Akkad, 1993, p. 09), despite the political divisions that affected the region over different historical periods (Al-Nasiri, p. 195).

This geographical proximity has historically unified their interests. The renowned historian Ibn Khaldun emphasized this by stating: "**Environmental unity ultimately leads to unity in morals and customs.**" (Ammamra, National Education and Algerian Identity, 1981, p. 44).

A geographical analysis of Algeria and Tunisia reveals that they constitute a continuous and interconnected geographical entity (Shetra, Contributions of the Algerian Elite to Tunisian Political and Intellectual Life (1900-1939), 2008, pp. 57-58). Their mountain ranges share similar features, and both countries are part of the Mediterranean basin, influencing their cultural and historical development (Shetra, Algerian Students at Al-Zaytuna University (1900-1956), 2013, p. 142).

Additionally, both nations have similar terrain, such as the Tellian and Saharan Atlas mountain ranges, as well as vast plains like Algeria's High Plateaus. Their comparable climate has led to similar agricultural practices, further strengthening economic and social interactions. This resemblance fostered trade and cultural exchanges, enhancing mutual understanding and shared perspectives on various matters.

1.2. Political Factors

Throughout history, the Maghreb region has experienced significant political similarities, particularly after the decline of the Almohad dynasty. The region faced political fragmentation, making it vulnerable to European and Crusader invasions, especially by Spanish and Portuguese forces (Bouaziz, 2009, pp. 7-9).

During this period, the Ottoman brothers Aruj and Khair al-Din Barbarossa emerged in the western Mediterranean, using the Tunisian island of Djerba as a base for their naval campaigns against European pirates. Their actions aligned with the Ottoman Empire's broader strategy to expand its influence in the Mediterranean.

Algerians sought Ottoman protection, and in **1519**, Sultan Selim I responded to their call, marking a decisive moment in the region's history. After liberating Algeria's coasts from Spanish threats, the Ottomans extended their efforts to Tunisia, expelling the Spanish in **1574** and integrating Tunisia as an Ottoman province (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 67).

In the **19th century**, both countries faced similar colonial threats. France invaded Algeria in **1830**, marking the beginning of its expansionist ambitions in the region. Tunisia later fell under French colonial rule in **1881**. These shared colonial experiences led to increased political collaboration and solidarity between the two nations despite harsh conditions.

1.3. Cultural Factors

Discussing civilizational and scientific communication between Algeria and Tunisia requires examining the deep cultural ties that have united them for centuries.

Throughout history, Algeria and Tunisia have influenced each other culturally through shared perspectives, intellectual traditions, and artistic expression. The Ottoman period, in particular, saw a significant overlap in cultural and scientific developments between the two provinces (Bouaziz, 2009, p. 156).

Although Ottoman rulers in Algeria paid little attention to cultural and intellectual advancements, many Algerian cities preserved their scholarly traditions. Renowned scholars emerged (Saadallah, 1998), particularly in **Tlemcen, Arzew, and Annaba**, contributing to the intellectual landscape of the Islamic world.

Despite the lack of official support, Algerians actively pursued Islamic and human sciences, establishing libraries, copying manuscripts, and ensuring the preservation of intellectual heritage.

Meanwhile, Tunisia experienced a relatively vibrant cultural life, indicating that it was on the brink of a **cultural renaissance**. Cities such as **Kairouan, Sousse, and Sfax** became centers of religious scholarship, where scholars from both the Maliki and Hanafi schools of thought flourished.

Wealth generated from maritime trade contributed to the construction of numerous mosques and schools, blending local, Andalusian, and Eastern influences. Examples of such

architectural achievements include the **Sidi Youssef Mosque** and the **Hammouda Pasha Mosque** (Sherif, 1985, p. 92). Additionally, the Andalusian community left a lasting impact on Tunisia's urban development, establishing cities like **Selouqia and Al-Aliya**.

However, Ottoman rulers in both Algeria and Tunisia did not prioritize sending students abroad to acquire European knowledge. Consequently, both provinces lagged behind Europe's economic and scientific advancements (Al-Qafsi, 1988, p. 593). The 19th century saw no significant intellectual revival or cultural renewal in either country.

1.4. Cultural Factors

Among the most influential factors in Algerian-Tunisian relations is their **civilizational connection**, which encompasses **language, religion, trade, and pilgrimage routes**—all of which played vital roles in shaping this shared space.

1.4.1. Language and Religion

Language played a fundamental role in supporting scientific communication between Algeria and Tunisia, serving as an effective tool for cooperation. The inhabitants of both provinces adopted the language of the Quran, Arabic, as their official means of communication (Laroui, 1984, p. 202). Regarding religion, both Algeria and Tunisia experienced the same religious beliefs throughout history, from paganism to Christianity, and finally to Islam. However, the bond of Islam was the defining feature of the Maghreb region. The Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence was dominant in both countries, holding a distinguished place among the population and unifying their religious principles and legal foundations (Al-Filali, 1989, p. 32).

The mosque institution in both provinces played a dual role, serving religious and cultural functions. It was not an exclusive or elitist institution but was open to the general public. This contributed to the emergence of a unified intellectual framework in both countries. Mosques were the hubs of scientific activity, while Sufi brotherhoods (zawiyas) played a leading role in uniting the two provinces by fostering a sense of belonging to a shared spiritual path. This created a feeling of spiritual unity among Tunisians and Algerians, transcending political disputes and territorial boundaries.

1.4.2. Trade and Pilgrimage

Both Algeria and Tunisia were central hubs for commercial caravans, leading to significant trade movements. This enabled students and scholars to take advantage of trade routes, earning a living while simultaneously seeking knowledge. This dynamic greatly contributed to scientific exchange between the two provinces (saidouni, 1984, p. 42).

Additionally, the pilgrimage journey to Mecca played a crucial role in cultural communication between the two regions. Scholars and authors frequently included mentions of one or two trips to Mecca in their writings. These journeys provided opportunities for

scholars and students to exchange ideas and transfer knowledge, forming a vivid example of intellectual and cultural interaction among Islamic nations. Furthermore, Tunisian rest stops along the pilgrimage route for Algerian pilgrims became centers for scholarly discussions and lessons, further reinforcing cultural and religious similarities.

The historical record of both provinces proves that their peoples shared a deep-rooted common culture, shaped by a shared history, language, and religion. Despite all the challenges and conflicts aimed at disrupting their connection, the powerful civilizational bond between them remained intact. This unity ultimately dismantled all barriers that sought to separate the two peoples.

2. The Reformist Movement in the Arab East and Its Role in Algerian-Tunisian Communication

The Arab and Islamic world experienced a period of stagnation that hindered its ability to contribute to human civilization. This decline was largely due to widespread oppression, tyranny, blind imitation, and cultural alienation affecting all Muslim nations. In response, the Islamic East witnessed the emergence of major renewal and reform movements led by prominent scholars and thinkers. These movements aimed to rescue the Islamic world from backwardness and bring it up to par with European progress (Smina, 2003, p. 50).

The Wahhabi movement, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in 18th-century Najd, was one of the earliest calls for religious purification, advocating the removal of innovations and superstitions from Islam. While opinions varied on its origins and goals, it was seen at the time as a serious attempt to awaken the Muslim conscience and drive it toward revival and progress (Hanafi, 1977, p. 108).

2.1. Reformist Figures and Their Role in Algerian-Tunisian Communication

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was one of the most influential reformist figures in the latter half of the 19th century. He, alongside Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, called for the renewal and revival of Islamic thought through the **Pan-Islamic movement**. Their advocacy emphasized independent reasoning (ijtihad), intellectual liberation, and understanding the reasons behind Western advancements.

Their reformist efforts led to the establishment of the **Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa Association** and a journal of the same name, which significantly influenced the awakening of the Arab and Islamic world. The movement's ideas gained considerable acceptance in Algeria and Tunisia, as they encouraged a return to the Quran, rejection of harmful innovations, and the integration of modern sciences such as mathematics and chemistry into educational curricula (Ashour M. A.-A., 1999, p. 59).

Muhammad Abduh's visit to Tunisia in 1884 had a significant impact, as he was widely regarded as the leading intellectual figure of the Muslim world. His visit led to the establishment of the **Khaldunian School** by Bashir Safar, a graduate of the Sadiki School (Yahya, 1981, p. 238).

Similarly, his visit to Algeria in 1903 was met with a warm reception by scholars and religious leaders. Many Algerian intellectuals embraced his ideas of Islamic reform and revival, emphasizing Muslim solidarity as a means to achieve progress (N.C.S.R, p. 35). Among the reformist scholars influenced by him were **Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Majawi**, **Sheikh Abd al-Halim bin Samaya**, and **Sheikh Muhammad bin Abi Shneeb** (Saadallah A. A.-Q., 1992, p. 199). Additionally, al-Afghani and Abduh's efforts were carried forward by their students, **Emir Shakib Arslan** and **Muhammad Rashid Rida** (Ageron, p. 180).

2.2. The Role of Magazines and Newspapers in Algerian-Tunisian Communication

French colonial authorities attempted to sever Algeria's cultural ties with the Arab and Islamic world, recognizing its deep historical and strategic significance. The French administration imposed barriers to prevent the circulation of nationalist and reformist ideas that encouraged political awareness and resistance.

Despite these restrictions, many newspapers and magazines from the Arab world, particularly from Egypt, managed to reach Algeria, often through Tunisia. A French colonial official once acknowledged this by stating: "*There is a continuous and abundant flow of Eastern newspapers and magazines into Algeria through secret channels.*" (Saadallah A. A.-Q., 1992, p. 121)

One of the most influential publications was **Al-Manar**, which was smuggled into Algeria and played a crucial role in spreading reformist and revivalist ideas (Bousafsaf, 1981, p. 64). It helped lay the groundwork for the adoption of these reformist movements. Similarly, **Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa**, founded by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, contributed to the modern Islamic renaissance by raising awareness of colonial threats and their exploitative objectives (Ammamra, 1981, p. 99).

Other significant newspapers included **Al-Fath**, founded by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, and **Al-Mu'ayyad**, established in Cairo by Sheikh Ali Yusuf in 1867. These publications advocated for general awakening, internal reform, and resistance to colonialism and political tyranny (Bousafsaf, 1981, p. 64). The writings of **Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi** and **Shakib Arslan** also played a crucial role in exposing oppression and calling for reform (Ammamra, 2001, pp. 102-104).

During the 19th century, Tunisia saw a surge in newspaper printing, influenced by the thriving Egyptian press. Publications such as **Al-Murshid**, **Al-Sawab**, **Al-Wazir**, and **Al-Nadim** emerged under the influence of leading reformist newspapers like **Al-Mu'ayyad**, **Al-Liwa**, and **Al-Manar** (Ashour M. A.-F., 1970, p. 59). Among the most notable Tunisian newspapers was **Al-Hadhira**, founded in 1888 by Bashir Safar and Ali Bash Hamba.

3. Scientific Centers in Tunisia and Their Role in Strengthening Algerian-Tunisian Scientific Communication

Tunisia has historically been home to ancient cities with significant cultural and religious heritage, contributing to intellectual and scientific life over the centuries. These cities became centers of learning that attracted scholars and students from across the Maghreb, particularly from Algeria.

3.1. Famous Scientific Cities in Tunisia

- **Kairouan:** A leading scientific center in Tunisia until the late 12th century (Hussein, 1971, p. 08), Kairouan produced most of the jurists of Ifriqiya. Although it lost its cultural dominance to Tunis, it remained the holiest Tunisian city and a major religious center.
- **Tunis:** As the capital and cultural hub, Tunis attracted scholars, travelers, and traders.
- **Monastir:** A major intellectual center that drew scholars from across the region (Al-Tuwaili, p. 73).
- **Nefta and Tozeur:** Located along trade routes, these cities facilitated Tunisian-Algerian cultural exchange through religious institutions like the **Rahmani and Tijani zawiyas**.

3.2 .Key Scientific Institutions in Tunisia

3.2.1. Mosques:

The primary institutions for religious and scientific education. **Zaytuna Mosque** one of the oldest and most prestigious mosques in North Africa, serving as a prominent center of learning.

- **The Zaytuna Mosque**

Located in the heart of the old city of Tunis, the Zitouna Mosque has remained a prestigious religious and cultural institution throughout the ages, deeply connected to Tunisia's history. This mosque has produced numerous scholars, including the Al-Nifer, Al-Bayram, and Al-Ashour families, as well as specialists in jurisprudence, interpretation, history, literature (Hussein, 1971, p. 26), and religious rulings. Over time, it became a hub of knowledge and was classified as one of the oldest and most productive scientific colleges in the world.

Zitouna was not only a scientific stronghold in Tunisia but also in many other regions influenced by its teachings. It served as a center for intellectual advancement, illuminating knowledge like a beacon, and stood out among other ancient universities. It provided a

refuge for learning and higher studies (Al-Sanousi, 1994, pp. 12-13), extending its influence beyond Tunisia to the rest of the Islamic world, particularly the Maghreb.

- **The Great Mosque of Kairouan**

One of the most famous mosques in Tunisia, it attracted students from across North Africa, Andalusia, and even West Sudan, much like Al-Azhar in Cairo, the Zitouna Mosque in Tunis, and Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez. This mosque played multiple roles, serving as a major center of social life in the country, hosting significant meetings in times of peace and war. Other prominent mosques include Youssef Dey Mosque, Hammouda Pasha Mosque, Mohamed Bey Al-Mouradi Mosque, and the New Mosque.

3.2.2 .Schools in Tunisia

Tunisia saw widespread development of schools, especially during the Hafsid era, particularly in the capital near the Zitouna Mosque. Many ancient schools revived their activities due to the rulers' interest in scientific and educational advancement. Tunis became distinguished by its numerous schools, which played a vital role for centuries. These schools not only provided lessons and gatherings of students around their teachers but also served as residences for students arriving from distant areas, particularly those following the Maliki and Hanafi schools of thought. Among the most notable schools were:

- Al-Shamma'iyya School
- Al-Nakhla School
- Al-Bashiyya School
- Al-Sulaymaniyya School
- Al-Muradiyya School
- Al-Sadiqiyya School
- Al-Khalduniyya School

3.2.3 .Zawiyas

Due to the natural social and tribal ties between Algeria and Tunisia, many Algerian families sent their children to study in Tunisia, especially since opportunities for Arabic-Islamic education were limited in Algeria under French colonial rule. The numerous zawiyas in Tunisia played a significant role in welcoming these students, alongside Quranic schools and traditional learning centers that provided education, shelter, and food, particularly for rural and impoverished students.

While zawiyas initially played a major role in teaching language and religion, they lost some of their influence with the emergence of organized schools and Quranic institutions, which became the foundation for Arabic-Islamic education in Tunisia. These

institutions spread throughout the country, including border areas with Algeria, from Kef in the north to Jerid, Nefta, Redeyef, and Oum Larayes in the south. Schools later emerged as preparatory institutions for students before advancing to higher education at the Zitouna Mosque (Al-Maamouri, 1980, p. 124).

Before colonial intervention, Sufi orders and zawiyas were prominent centers of learning. However, the colonial administration later took control of these institutions, limiting their ability to innovate and reform. Despite this, they remained vital in preserving education. As historian Ahmed Tawfiq Al-Madani noted: *"Sufi orders and zawiyas held great influence and historical significance that even their detractors could not deny. They played a crucial role in preserving Islam and the Arabic language in these lands during times of ignorance and oppression."* (Al-Madani, 1981, pp. 350-351)

3.2.3.1. Al-Qadiriyya Zawiya

Most zawiyas in eastern Algeria were connected to the Nefta and Kef zawiyas, which welcomed Algerian students. The zawiya flourished under Sheikh Ibrahim bin Ahmed Al-Sharif Al-Nafti, whose influence extended as far as Ghadames, Ghat, and Ain Salah by 1897.

His son, Al-Hashimi bin Ibrahim, later founded a zawiya in Wadi Souf, in the Amiche region (Shetra, 2008, p. 417), along with other zawiyas in Gafsa and Gabes, with the Qadiriyya zawiya in Tozeur being particularly dedicated to education (Saadallah A. A.-Q., Cultural History of Algeria, 1998, p. 235).

3.2.3.2. Al-Rahmaniyya Zawiya

The Rahmaniyya order had a strong presence in both Algeria and Tunisia, especially in eastern Algeria (Ain Beida, Tolga, Tmassin) and western and southern Tunisia (Nefta, Kef, etc.). Mohamed bin Azouz Al-Burji was a key figure of the Rahmaniyya order, not just in the south but across the entire Jerid region. After the French occupation of Biskra, Mustafa bin Mohamed bin Azouz fled to Nefta in 1843, where he founded the Rahmaniyya zawiya.

This zawiya gained widespread fame and became the headquarters of the Rahmaniyya order in Algeria, overseeing branches in Tolga, Ouled Djellal, the Aurès region, Khanga Sidi Naji, the Hamil zawiya, and Wadi Souf. It became an essential educational center where students from both Algeria and Tunisia studied before continuing their education at the Zitouna Mosque. Among the Algerian students who studied at the Nefta zawiya and later at the Zitouna Mosque were:

- Al-Makki bin Azouz
- Al-Khader Hussein
- Mouloud Al-Zaribi
- Sidi Hamed Al-Abidi

3.2.3.3. Al-Shabiya Zawiya

The Shabiya zawiya originated in Tunisia and became well-known, with branches extending into Algeria, particularly in El Kala, Souk Ahras, Tebessa, the Aurès region, and Wadi Souf. Established in the 16th century by Mohamed bin Makhoulouf, the Shabiya zawiya became highly active in Kairouan and established numerous branches in both Tunisia and Algeria. It played a crucial role in preserving education during the French colonial period, particularly in Wadi Souf, despite colonial efforts to suppress it. (Saadallah A. A.-Q., Cultural History of Algeria, 1998, p. 257)

Religious lodges and spiritual retreats flourished across Tunisia, providing education and guidance while operating discreetly under colonial rule. They played a key role in sheltering Algerian migrants fleeing the colonial policy of cultural and educational suppression. These migrants found refuge in zawiyas such as the Qadiriyya, Rahmaniyya, and Shabiya, as well as others like the Alawiyya, Sanusiyya, Taybiyya, Aissawiyya, Khalwatiyya, and Tijaniyya, regardless of where these zawiyas originally emerged or who founded them—whether in Algeria or Tunisia

CONCLUSION

A study of Algerian-Tunisian history clearly demonstrates the deep cooperation between the two nations in resisting colonial attempts to erase their shared geopolitical and cultural identity. The civilizational exchange between Algeria and Tunisia provided the necessary resilience to confront colonial threats.

Geographic proximity, similar landscapes, and climatic conditions all contributed to this strong bond. Additionally, social and tribal ties between border communities played a significant role in shaping the history of both countries. Despite occasional political disagreements, their shared heritage and interconnected societies remained the foundation of their enduring relationship.

The French colonization of Algeria (1830) and Tunisia (1881) became a period that showcased the most remarkable examples of solidarity. Algerians found refuge in Tunisia, which became a sanctuary for resistance fighters, while Algerians also supported Tunisians after the French protectorate was imposed.

This mutual solidarity, deeply rooted in national consciousness, also contributed to the cultural and educational revival of both nations in the early 20th century. Algerians found support in Tunisian intellectual circles, using Tunisian newspapers as platforms to defend their cause. Likewise, Algerians played a role in Tunisia's cultural and academic renewal through their scholars, writers, and students. The intellectual movement in Nefta

stands as a testament to this scholarly collaboration, which later influenced both the Tunisian Revolution of 1952 and the Algerian War of Independence in 1954.

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