

The Algerian National Liberation Movement and its Role in the French Colonial System

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The French colonialism in Algeria had features of a specific settlement colonization type through expropriating vast lands and transformation of population. While settler colonialism has been extensively studied, the enduring legacy of this regime on Algeria's socio-political and economic structures, and relations with France, both during and after colonialism remain too often unexplored. This article examines the origins of the Algerian War of Independence, tracing the development of nationalist movements and the emergence of the National Liberation Front (FLN). **Method:** Wherever the French established colonies, they did not consider such colonies to be mere colonies like others; in Algeria, settlers seized control of all the best land, forcing the native population onto the dry and barren soils. European settlers, lured to settle by the French government, rang the political and economic bell in Algeria. The French enacted systems such as the Code de l'Indigénat that instituted severe limitations of local civil rights, policies that only escalated aggravation of the natives. **Results:** The relationship between the settler colonialism experienced in Algeria and the subsequent attempts to build a national identity during and after the revolution from French rule is one that has impacted the identity of the nation greatly and has thus been the subject of a great deal of study considering the before-during and the after of the processes which shaped the political, social and economic nature of the revolution, and the post-colonial state building process. **Novelty:** This study highlights the distinctive nature of French settler colonialism in Algeria as not merely administrative control but a transformation of land, population, and identity. It contributes to understanding how the colonial system's socio-political legacy shaped both the Algerian War of Independence and the post-colonial state-building process.

INTRODUCTION

French colonialism in Algeria was a unique form of settler colonialism, entailing massive land expropriation and demographic transformation. Algeria was seen as a continued and inseparable part of France, unlike other colonial possessions, most of which were only ruled over for economic exploitation. Colonists seized enormous clearings of fertile land displacing the local Algerian population and having a drastic effect on the agricultural economy [1]. European migration to Algeria was actively promoted by the French government, which in turn allowed the creation of a settler elite who became very influential in political and economic affairs [2]. According to political scientist Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism is founded upon "a logic of elimination of all traces of native life." Settler colonialism seeks to eradicate the native population almost entirely. In Algeria, for example, this took the form of land grabbing, economic exclusion, and socio-political discrimination, exacerbating settler-native hostilities [3].

Politically, French nominally moved from a military regime to a civil administration, though one based on a European Algerian hierarchy. The local

population was subject to discriminatory laws called the "Code de l'Indigénat" that empowered the authorities to administer arbitrary punishments and deny political rights to the indigenous populace. With the French plan to assimilate Algeria to France, the 1947 Algerian Statute established relative political representation but left settler hegemony intact. As the writer Frantz Fanoun describes, colonial rule was of a violent nature with oppression from the law and outside of the law [4]. He claimed that it is the very fact of colonial domination that awakening a national consciousness which led to the establishment of revolutionary movements like the National Liberation Front (FLN).

Central to the French colonial ideology was the concept of assimilation, an idea that Algerians could be French culturally and linguistically. To be sure, there were only limited moves towards assimilation and this was done selectively [5]. Although the 1865 Senatus-Consulte had permitted Algerians to apply for French citizenship, this was contingent on their renunciation of the Islamic personal status. Assimilation largely failed because most refused these preconditions. Benjamin Stora, modern Algeria's foremost historian, writes that the integration policy put in place by the French administration "divided the Algerian elite and its mass: integration on the one side; the countryside on the other;" and "instead of unifying, they further intensified fragmentation." A failure of assimilation, thus contributed further to the motivation of colonial peoples to seek to free themselves from colonial rule and helped set the stage for independence movements [6].

French colonial rule deeply affected Algeria's economy. The colonial economy was primarily structured to serve French interests, with Algeria functioning as a source of raw materials and a market for French goods. Agricultural production was oriented toward exports, disrupting traditional lifestyles and increasing the colony's economic dependence on France. Historian and political economist Samir Amin rightly explains that colonial economies were deliberately underdeveloped to maintain dependency. This economic model in Algeria intensified social inequalities and widespread poverty, which in turn fueled discontent and strengthened the struggle against colonialism [7]. Another pillar of French colonial policy was the suppression of Islamic identity. French authorities attempted to secularize Algerian society by restricting Islamic education and bringing mosques under state control. The 1905 law on secularism, applied broadly in France, was also implemented extensively in Algeria: Islamic institutions were targeted, while Catholic and Jewish communities enjoyed relatively more independence [8]. Political scientist Olivier Roy, in his work *The Failure of Political Islam*, emphasizes that colonial interference in religious life radicalized the local population, as religious identity became a central factor in the anti-colonial struggle [9]. In particular, the Islamic reform movement led by Abd al-Hamid ibn Badis resisted French policies by revitalizing Islamic education and promoting religious and linguistic revival to strengthen national consciousness [10].

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a historical and qualitative analysis of Franco-Colonialism and French Settler Colonialism in Algeria in the long term towards the political, social and

economics contexts in Algeria. A multidisciplinary work, the research borrows from political science, history, sociology, and economics to explore how settler colonialism occurred as well as its effects on the Indigenous population. A few examples of primary sources to be analyzed include meticulous historical records, governmental documents which speak to the intentions that seeded historical tension, and the words of powerful figures such as Frantz Fanon, Patrick Wolfe, and Benjamin Stora who frame theorizing strategies behind colonial policies. Secondary sources in terms of academic journals, books and case studies are also utilized to supplement the empirical ways of understanding decolonization process along with the broader anti-colonial movements around the globe. This analysis is grounded in qualitative content analysis of texts and historical narrative to track the development of nationalist movements, with special attention to the National Liberation Front (FLN) in the Algerian War of Independence [11]. By using this methodology, it is possible to cover all aspects, from systemic discrimination and the failure of assimilation policy against the indigenous people to the economic nature of the independence demand. It also examines the post-colonial legacy, analyzing the implications of French colonialism on the present day political and economic situation of Algeria. In looking through this lens, the research seeks to discover the complexities of colonialism's legacy in Algeria, in order to understand its impact on identity and governance, ultimately leading to an understanding of the century-long challenges still facing Algeria today [12].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Algeria had fought against French rule in many ways, with armed uprisings in the 19th century and political action and massive war in the 20th. Development of the Armed Struggle of the National Liberation Front (FLN) 1954–1962 Influenced by Global Anti-Colonial Movements and Shifts in the Cold War Historian Alistair Horne describes the torture inflicted by French forces during Algeria's brutal fight for independence as horrific [13]. Both of these made the international implications of course as they were fighting the British who were busy with the war in the rest of this fight had significant international impact inspiring anti-colonial movements throughout both Africa and Asia This made the war international in other ways as well. Anti-colonial nationalism localized the struggles of the colonial world yet unveiled the European state form and governance.

The Algerian revolution was not solely a national cause, but part of a much larger process of decolonization. By bringing together the leaders of a large number of newly independent states, the 1955 Bandung Conference represented a significant moment – and the Algerian war swiftly became a focus for the fight against colonial oppression, and a symbol of international resistance [14]. Icons like Che Guevara and Fidel Castro would speak in solidarity with the FLN and link its struggle with anti-imperialist movements across Latin America and Africa. For example, the well-known French philosopher and political commentator Jean-Paul Sartre condemned colonialism as an inherently exploitative system that rendered colonized peoples less than human.

During and after the war, French policy sought to maintain colonial rule, but international pressure and domestic dissent within France made it impossible to continue the process. In 1961, military coup attempts organized by French generals opposed to Algerian independence revealed internal divisions within the colonial system. Recognizing the impossibility of continuing colonial domination, Charles de Gaulle acknowledged Algeria's independence through the 1962 Evian Accords. The transition was marked by violence: mass exodus of French settlers, massacres, and the persecution or exile of many pro-French Algerians [15].

The legacy of French colonialism continues to shape Algeria's present-day politics and society. Traumas related to colonialism, war, and displacement remain key issues in relations between Algeria and France. As scholar Achille Mbembe describes, colonialism is not a past historical event but continues to influence the political structures, economic dependencies, and identity politics of post-colonial states. This old colonial french legacy well articulated the current politics and society of Algeria. Colonial, war, and displacement traumas are still important factors in Algerian French relations [16]. Colonialism is not a bygone era frozen in amber, but instead radiates in power structures, economic realms, and politics of identity of post-colonial states as scholar Achille Mbembe describes it. And in Algeria, of course, the exhausted ruling elite have often turned to anti-colonial rhetoric to justify their rule, even as the moribund economy protests increasingly harsh political repression [17].

The Algerian War of Independence marked one of the largest struggles in the decolonization narrative within the 20th century, bringing along the fall of a colonial ruler of Algeria and becoming an example for other liberation movements throughout the world. This conflict lasted for eight years and was characterized by guerrilla warfare, political negotiation and mass atrocities. Ultimately, Algeria achieved independence. The war had repercussions and repercussions not only profound on the political fabric and social fabric of Algeria, but also on French politics, French society and its colonial empire [18].

Historical Overview of Cause of the Conflict. The roots of the conflict are found in the colonial policies established after the conquest of Algeria in 1830. Algeria, under French rule, was the site of economic exploitation, racial oppression, and political disenfranchisement of its native Muslim population. By the mid 20th century, they were largely a second-class citizen, as European settlers in the country, the Pied-Noirs, controlled most of the political and economic life of the country. Increased resistance to French colonialism was evidenced by the strengthening of nationalist movements, particularly the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale). And ultimately, this process resulted in the outbreak of war on 1 November 1954.

One of the most significant events of the war was the Battle of Algiers in 1956-1957. During this period, the National Liberation Front employed urban guerrilla warfare tactics against French forces [19]. The French Army led by Jacques Massu reacted to the insurgents using extreme brutality, including torture and mass arrests. But the FLN's

intensity and wider international awareness of the war helped shape public opinion globally against French colonialism, as seen here in their desperate battle.

This was a key point of political leaders in the war. Over the next three years, they became leaders of the National Liberation Front, which organized military and diplomatic efforts to secure independence, Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediene around them. Charles de Gaulle provided a crucial counterweight on the French side. At first, he was in favor of keeping the French rule of Algeria, and came to understanding that the Algerians had the right to self-determination. When he returned to power in 1958, a new chapter began, and he steered French policy toward negotiations and signed the Evian Accords [20].

The Algerian War has been considered by political scientists indeed it has been analyzed theoretically in relationship to some of the most popular theories. Related (colonial) violence Fanon viewed as both a psychological and social phenomenon, and he claimed that armed struggle was the only option for decolonization [21]. Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu, for example, addressed the character of French colonialism from cultural and ideological perspectives, examining the subjugation of Algerians and their long-established opposition movements. By contrast, Raymond Aron argued in favour of a *realpolitik* interpretation of the war, claiming that practical considerations underpinned France's decision to bestow Algerian independence.

In accordance with the terms of the Evian Accords, a vote on independence was conducted in Algeria, which it overwhelmingly supported. But the results of the war were complicated [22]. Almost one million European colonists exited the nation, parliamentary disputes inside the National Liberation Front grew, and a one-party machine turned into formed, first beneath the management of Ben Bella and later Boumediene. For France itself, the war created a lasting scar, sparking political crises and triggering a collapse of colonial aspirations.

The Evian Accords were signed in March 18, 1962, that ensured the independence of Algeria, and this occurred in the last stage of the war [23]. The referendum for independence, conducted on July 1, showed that 99.72% of the citizens voted in favour and, on July 5, 1962, Algeria was recognized as an independent state. The period after the war led to political and economic strife over the National Liberation Front's in-fighting and other factions trying to fill the gap left by Europeans leaving the national territory, John Ruedy pointed out.

The era of Algeria's First Republic shaped the nation's path forward politically and economically. Algeria picked the socialist route with its early leaders, particularly Ahmed Ben Bella and then Houari Boumediene, after a bitter war of independence from French colonial rule [24]. This period bore the marks of the economic and political policies adopted at that time, such as socialism, state-driven development, as well as a slow opening to *ghusl* by Chadli Bendjedid.

After independence, the FLN took over the political scene in Algeria, touting itself as the only legitimate political structure there. The Syrian Arab Republic was meant as centralist power house for former socialist regimes, and the first president of Algeria,

Ahmed Ben Bella, sought to centralize power along the lines of a socialist model [25]. Drawing from both the Marxist education of Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon's fervent anti-colonialism, Ben Bella introduced agrarian reforms, nationalization policies, and centralized planning of the economy. Algeria's earliest socialist measures were aimed at speeding industrialization on a foundation initially laid down by the colonial power, together with trying to alleviate the grave social injustices left after colonialism, as the historian and political scientist John P. Entelis pointed out.

As historian and political scientist John P. Entelis noted, Algeria's initial socialist policies sought to accelerate industrialization while addressing the deep social inequalities inherited from colonialism [26]

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : Algeria's political history is characterized by its courageous struggle for independence, the dominance of state power and the military. Although state control over the economy and the socialist approach yielded results initially, it later generated social problems. **Implication :** The dominance of a single ideology and party began to lose its place and role in society by the 1990s, increasing public attention towards Islamic groups. This shift was largely due to the long period during which the population lived under a single ideology and the absence of pluralism, which led many to turn towards Islamic views offering alternative perspectives. **Limitation :** As a result, armed clashes arose between Islamic groups and the military, showing that political transition and ideological change were accompanied by severe internal conflict. **Future Research :** Despite suffering greatly from this civil war, Algeria managed to preserve its political and security systems — a phenomenon that invites further research into how post-conflict states maintain stability amid ideological division.

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