

# THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND FRANCE IN THE SHADOW OF COLONIAL LEGACY: A NEW PAGE POSSIBLE?\*

Sömürge Mirasının Gölgesinde Cezayir ve Fransa Arasındaki İlişkiler:  
Yeni Bir Sayfa Mümkün mü?

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## Abstract

*This paper examines how the colonial legacy affected relations between Algeria and France. Since Algerian independence in 1962, the relations between France and its former colony have progressed on a highly delicate line for both countries. Traumas literally inherited from the colonial period continue to shape relations between the two countries. Algeria's dream of national independence was to become a sovereign state with free decision-making mechanisms by ending foreign control over the country's wealth and resources, away from French influence. However, this dream could not be fully realized in the shadow of 132 years of colonial legacy.*

**Keywords:** Algeria, Colonialism, Colonial Legacy, France, Independence.

## Öz

*Bu makale, sömürge mirasının Cezayir ve Fransa arasındaki ilişkileri nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Cezayir'in 1962'deki bağımsızlığından bu yana, Fransa ile eski sömürgeesi arasındaki ilişkiler her iki ülke için de oldukça hassas bir çizgide ilerlemiştir. Kelimenin tam anlamıyla sömürge döneminden miras kalan travmalar, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri şekillendirmeye devam ediyor. Cezayir'in ulusal bağımsızlık hayali, Fransız etkisinden uzak, ülkenin zenginliği ve kaynakları üzerinde yabancı kontrolüne sona vererek, özgür karar alma mekanizmalarına sahip egemen bir devlet olmaktı. Ancak bu hayal, 132 yıllık sömürge mirasının gölgesinde tam olarak gerçekleştirilememiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bağımsızlık, Cezayir, Fransa, Sömürgecilik, Sömürge Mirası.

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## INTRODUCTION

Having entered the Ottoman rule in the 16th century, Algeria has always been more independent from the provinces such as Egypt and Syria due to the Ottoman Empire's lack of a strong navy after the 17th century.<sup>1</sup> Until the end of the 19th century, the autonomy of local rulers was enormous, not only because of the autonomy granted to the provinces by the traditional Ottoman administration, but also because direct control of the Empire's vast territories from the center was not possible.<sup>2</sup> Algeria was also not easily accessible from the center, so it remained under the loose control of the Porte.<sup>3</sup> Looking at the political atmosphere of the 19th century, we can say that Algeria was de facto independent country, though ostensibly subject to the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the Algeria-France relations of that period are proof of this. At that time, France had a maritime trade base and consulate in Algeria. Algerian Deys<sup>4</sup>, which were affiliated to the Ottoman Empire, acted as an independent state, especially in commercial agreements.

France had been receiving its wheat needs from Algeria since 1792 and the shipments were made by French ships. After a while, Algeria's Jewish merchants (Bakri and Busnach) complained that France did not pay the money and interest for the wheat purchased for a long time. On April 29, 1827, Hussein Dey<sup>5</sup>, the Ottoman governer of Algiers, had a meeting with the French Consul Pierre Deval, but could not get a satisfactory answer. Thereupon, Hussein Dey hit the face of Pierre Deval with the fly whisk. This went down in history as the Fly Whisk Incident. France demanded an official apology from Hussein Dey for this, but he did

1 Carl Brockelmann, *İslam Ulusları ve Devletleri Tarihi*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1992, p. 328.

2 Ali Balci, "Algeria in Declining Ottoman Hierarchy: Why Algiers Remained Loyal to the Falling Patron", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2020, p. 6.

3 *Ibid.*

4 The Dey was the title of the rulers who were appointed as the Regency of Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis from 1671 during the Ottoman period.

5 The Regency of Algiers was governed by the rulers called "Beylerbeys (1517-1576)", "Pasha (1576-1659)", "Aghas (1659-1671)" and "Deyls (1671-1830)" during the Ottoman period. He was the last Dey of Algeria.

not. There were many reasons for France's occupation of Algeria, but the Fly Whisk Incident was cited as the apparent cause. Citing this incident as a reason, on June 16, 1827, France launched a comprehensive siege against Algeria that would last for three years. After a three-year siege, Algeria was occupied on July 5, 1830. Thus began the period of French colonialism that would last 132 years in Algeria.

In the colonial period, the country has begun to be Frenchized with its language, culture, and lifestyle. France exerted pressure to destroy the identity and culture of the Muslim people and to make the French language dominant instead of Arabic and Berber. This situation created a big problem in the formation of Algerian national identity after independence. Is the country's national identity Arab, Islamic, Berber or, Mediterranean as some politicians would have?<sup>6</sup> Algeria may be all of these, but more than 60 years have passed since the departure of the French colonialists who imposed its own language and culture, the country is still struggling to build its national identity. Looking at post-independence Algeria, there is a nation that speaks French virtually better than its native Arabic language, which cannot be Frenchized but also cannot find its own identity.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, on April 17, 2006, Former Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika confirmed this situation and said the following in his speech in Paris: "We no longer know whether we are Berber, Arab, European or French. France committed genocide on Algerian identity during the colonial era."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he asked France to apologize to Algeria for colonial rule. However, Nicolas Sarkozy, the then president of France, responded as follows: "You can't ask sons to say sorry for their fathers' mistakes."<sup>9</sup>

6 "Identity Crisis", *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/international/1998/07/09/identity-crisis>, (Date of Accession: 12.02.2021).

7 Mete Çubukçu, "Cezayir: Kuzey Afrika'daki Kirli Savaş", *Birikim*, 99, 1997, p. 16.

8 ELEM EYRICE, "Cezayir'in Fransız Sömürgeciliğine Karşı Yürüttüğü Bağımsızlık Mücadelesi", Ege Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İzmir 2008, (Unpublished MA Dissertation), p. 155.

9 "It's So Hard to Say Sorry", *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2006/11/16/its-so-hard-to-say-sorry>, (Date of Accession: 10.01.2021).

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In 1962, Algeria won a bloody war of independence against France by losing one and a half million people. France regarded Algeria as part of the homeland and did not think it could be separated from it, perhaps so it refused to give a name to what happened at that time. Until the 1990s, the Algerian War did not exist in the French political rhetoric; it was only the "Algerian events" that happened. According to Benjamin Stora, "for France calling it a war would be tantamount to accepting the possibility of a legal separation, the break-up of the One and Indivisible Republic."<sup>10</sup> However, in 1999, the National Assembly officially acknowledged that there was indeed a "war" in Algeria. Witnesses began to speak and archives were opened. Since then, considerable academic studies, films, documentaries, conferences, and exhibitions have been made on the Algerian War. Thus, France had to confront its colonial past, more precisely, the fact that it had avoided talking about for years.

Undoubtedly, the influence of the colonial legacy still continues in Algeria. Georges-Marc Benamou mentions that the relationship between the two countries is somewhere between love and hate.<sup>11</sup> At this point, it is necessary to ask the following question: How does the colonial legacy affect relations between Algeria and France? When the literature is examined, it is seen that the relations between the colonial powers and the former colonies that gained their independence are shaped around dependence and mutual hostility. Since Algerian independence in 1962, the relations between France and its former colony have progressed on a highly delicate line for both countries. Traumas literally inherited from the colonial period continue to shape relations between the two countries.<sup>12</sup> Although Algeria itself has experienced an overwhelming amount of this trauma, its effects on France should not be ignored. On the other

10 Benjamin Stora, "Algeria: The War Without a Name", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21(3), 1993, p. 210.

11 Georges-Marc Benamou, *Bir Fransız Yalani*, Babıali Kültür Yayıncılığı, İstanbul 2012, p. 29.

12 Alec G. Hargreaves, "France and Algeria, 1962-2002: Turning the Page?", *Modern&Contemporary France*, 11(4), 2002, p. 445.

hand, as seen in the case of Algeria, the legacy left by the colonists is held responsible for the problems faced by the new states, such as religious and ethnic discrimination, violence, weakness of democracy, and corruption.<sup>13</sup> However, attributing every problem faced by the country to the colonial heritage is a common view in the literature, but it creates an illusion.

This article aims to explain the continuing impact of the French colonial legacy on Algeria by addressing the relations between the two countries in political, economic, and cultural dimensions. While doing this, the events that are considered as turning points in the relations between the two countries in the period from 1962 until today were examined.

### POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND FRANCE

In the period after independence, Algeria has firmly stated that any interference by France in its internal affairs is unacceptable, despite maintaining relations with its former colonizer. Shortly after independence, Algeria went through a bloody civil war (1991-2002) and this dragged its relations with France to another dimension. France, which was initially unresponsive to the Algerian Civil War, began to show its influence in Algerian politics by clearly expressing the necessity of the intervention of the Algerian army in the elections through the French press after the prospective victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

The main reason why France changed its stance in this way is that the Muslims from the Maghreb region living in France is anxious to be influenced by the rising Islamic movement in Algeria. The coming to power of an Islamic party completely contradicted the interests of

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13 Martin J. Wiener, "The Idea of "Colonial Legacy" and the Historiography of Empire", *The Journal of Historical Society*, 13(1), 2013, p. 2.

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France. For this reason, France, which wanted to turn the process in its favor, transferred approximately 40 million dollars to Algeria through the European Union between 1990-1994.<sup>14</sup> With this assistance, France aimed to keep the Algerian government close to it.

While the relations between the two countries were expected to be strained at the end of the civil war, Abdelaziz Bouteflika gave importance to cooperation but did not position France as Algeria's only foreign policy alternative. The most important indicator of this is Algeria's close relationship with the European Union. In previous years, France acted as a borderline between Algeria and the EU, but France is no longer allowed to position itself in this way. In brief, during his time in power, Bouteflika neither completely turned his back on France nor established very close relations with France as in the past. He made a clear message to France by making an official visit first to the USA and then to France during the first term of his presidency.

Relations between Algiers and Paris went through their worst period after independence, with the enactment of the law in 2005, which asserted "the positive role of the French presence overseas" by the National Assembly in France. Paragraph 2 of article 4 of the controversial law is as follows:<sup>15</sup>

*"Les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l'histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l'armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit."*

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14 Jonah Schulfoer-Wohl, "Civil War in Algeria, 1992-Present", *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts since World War II*, Karl DeRouen-Uk Heo, eds., ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara 2007, p. 117.

15 République Française, "La loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005, portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés", Legi France, [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/download/pdf?id=y07S1hSr5STProtS5YLc2tc\\_Fh71x9KoG\\_z3damffY=,](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/download/pdf?id=y07S1hSr5STProtS5YLc2tc_Fh71x9KoG_z3damffY=,) (Date of Accession: 18.12.2020).

*School curricula specifically acknowledge the positive role of the French overseas, especially in North Africa, and the history and sacrifices of the French soldiers from these territories shall be given their rightful prominence."*

This law argued that French colonialism provided the colonies with large investments in education, health, and infrastructure that facilitated their development. The law caused serious controversy in both France and Algeria. French historians reacted quickly to the 2005 law and signed a petition demanding that the law be repealed. At the end of January 2006, then French President Jacques Chirac ordered the Constitutional Council to repeal article 4 of the law. However, it was a belated move and worsened France's image in the international community deteriorated. France's ignoring and denial of what happened in Algeria caused serious criticism in its own country's public opinion. These debates led to a revision of France's colonial history and school curriculum. France's colonial past has been in the school curriculum since the 1980s, but France, which officially accepted the Algerian War in 1999, could not be expected to reflect its colonial history as it is. Shortly after the discussion, the French government began updating the school curriculum to put more emphasis on colonial history. With the publication of a new school book in France in 2011 focusing on the Algerian War and the slave trade, a major step was taken towards France's confrontation with its colonial history.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there is even a compulsory module on "Memory of the Algerian War" in the program of the final year of high school at the moment.<sup>17</sup> This module is about the memories of the Algerian War that was constructed differently on both sides of the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup>

16 Itay Lotem, "A Decade After the Riots, France has Rewritten its Colonial History", *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/a-decade-after-the-riots-france-has-rewritten-its-colonial-history-50499>, (Date of Accession: 18.12.2020).

17 *Ibid.*

18 "Ressources pour le lycée général et technologique", *Ministère de L'éducation Nationale*, [https://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/lycee/12/3/01\\_RESS\\_LYC\\_HIST\\_TermS\\_th1\\_309123.pdf](https://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/lycee/12/3/01_RESS_LYC_HIST_TermS_th1_309123.pdf), (Date of Accession: 18.12.2020).

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However, none of these attempts were enough for Algeria. For a long time, Algeria has demanded a formal apology from France for crimes committed during colonization as a precondition for the sustainability of bilateral relations,<sup>19</sup> but this apology never came. During his official visit to Algeria in 2012, former French President François Hollande declared that his country's occupation was "unjust and brutal", but did not mention any apology.<sup>20</sup> In 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron described France's persecution in Algeria as "crimes against humanity" in a speech. In 2019, President Macron did more and acknowledged that France had a systemic chain of command that initiated the torture of the French army, paratroopers, and special forces during the Algerian War of Independence.<sup>21</sup> However, France has been avoiding a formal apology for years and this puts the relationship between Algeria and France in a vicious circle.

Relations between the two countries were tested again in 2013. Algeria opened its airspace to France, which wanted to support Mali's government in the clashes between the groups in northern Mali and Mali's army. This decision disturbed the opposition in Algeria, but the government chose to be closer to France. Moreover, Algeria supported France's Mali intervention in various fields, including intelligence. While it was thought that Algeria would not support France in any way, Algeria acted oppositely. However, it is worth noting that the driving force behind this decision is not only the impact of its colonial legacy but also Algeria's effort to become an influential actor in the region.

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19 Raphaël Lefèvre, "A New Chapter in Relations Between Algeria and France?", *The Journal of North African Studies*, 20(3), 2015, p. 316.

20 Abdennour Toumi, "Franco-Algerian Ties: A Conflict of Memory or Love-Hate Relationship?", *Daily Sabah*, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2020/02/17/franco-algerian-ties-a-conflict-of-memory-or-love-hate-relationship>, (Date of Accession: 22.12.2020).

21 *Ibid.*

In the past year, a serious social movement has emerged in Algeria called Hirak. The protests started on February 22, 2019 with the announcement of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's candidacy for the fifth presidential term, who has been serving as president for Algeria since 1999. The people showed a serious reaction, but in fact, the motivation behind the protests has been the rage of ongoing corruption, mismanagement, and social injustice in the current regime. Although this movement differed significantly from the Arab Spring in terms of both its structure and its consequences, it caused serious changes in the political leadership of the country.

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who previously held several official positions under the administration of Bouteflika, became the new president of Algeria in the elections held on December 12, 2019. Initially, France made only general public statements for demonstrations in the former colonial country and put no pressure on the regime in the direction of reforms. However, after broadcasting documentaries about the Hirak movement on French public television in May 2020, the Algerian Foreign Ministry immediately recalled the Paris Ambassador to country for consultation. The Algerian Ministry of Internal Affairs stated in a statement that the relevant documentaries are attacks against the Algerian people and its institutions under the name of freedom of expression. Two controversial documentaries about the Hirak movement were shown. The first of these was "Algeria, my love", aired by France 5, and the second film, "Algeria: the Promises of the Dawn" was broadcast on France's Parliamentary Channel.<sup>22</sup> Directed by French journalist of Algerian origin Mustapha Kessous, the documentary "Algeria, my love" narrated the Hirak movement

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22 "Films on Hirak Spark Algeria-France Crisis", *Middle East Online*, <https://middle-east-online.com/en/films-hirak-spark-algeria-france-crisis>, (Date of Accession: 17.02.2021).

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from the perspective of five Algerians in their 20s. The reason why the documentary got so much reaction is that it is mentioned about taboos in Algeria, especially sex.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of criticism of the documentary is directed towards the "reductive" portrayal and the "lack of knowledge" about Algeria.<sup>24</sup> Upon this, the Algerian ministry said in a statement that "malicious and lasting intentions on the part of certain circles, which do not wish to see peaceful relations between Algeria and France after 58 years of independence".<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Abdelmajid Tebboune, when he becomes the new president of Algeria, called for "mutual respect" in Franco-Algerian relations, saying his country "will not accept any interference or tutelage" from abroad.<sup>26</sup> Tebboune made such a statement because he wanted to point out that he saw French President Emmanuel Macron's call for "a transition of reasonable duration" at the beginning of the Hirak protest movement as an "interference" in the domestic affairs of Algeria.

In July 2020, France handed over to Algeria the skulls of 24 resistance fighters who were beheaded during the colonial occupation in Algeria and kept in a Paris museum for decades. Although it was a late step, the French side was aware of how important Algeria's friendship is to them and they could not risk losing it. The process of returning the skulls showed that France wanted to confront its past and gain Algeria's trust. Besides, steps taken between the two countries to address historical issues awaiting resolution have accelerated. It was expected that the memory file prepared by the initiative of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and French President Emmanuel Macron would lead to the solution of the

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23 "French Film on Algeria Sparks Diplomatic Spat, Angers Protesters", *The Jakarta Post*, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/05/29/french-film-on-algeria-sparks-diplomatic-spat-angers-protesters.html>, (Date of Accession: 12.01.2021).

24 *Ibid.*

25 "Films on Hirak...", *loc.cit.*

26 *Ibid.*

problems between the two countries. The 160-page report containing 22 recommendations on the memory of colonization and the Algerian war, supervised by Benjamin Stora, was presented to President Macron on 20 January 2021.<sup>27</sup> The report presented a series of recommendations:<sup>28</sup>

- Set up in France a “Memory and Truth” commission responsible for promoting joint initiatives between France and Algeria on memory issues;
- Commemorate the various symbolic dates of the conflict (Evian agreement on March 19, 1962, homage to the harkis on September 25, and repression of Algerian workers in France on October 17, 1961);
- Return to Algeria the sword of Emir Abdelkader, hero of the resistance to French colonization in the 19th century;
- Recognize the assassination of lawyer and political activist Ali Boumendjel during the Battle of Algiers in 1957;
- Set up a mixed commission of French and Algerian historians to shed light on the kidnappings and assassinations of Europeans in Oran in July 1962;
- Continue work on French nuclear tests in the Sahara and their consequences, as well as those of the laying of anti-personnel mines during the war;
- Facilitate the movement of harkis and their children between France and Algeria;

27 "France-Algérie: les 22 recommandations du rapport Stora", *Le Monde*, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/01/20/france-algerie-les-22-recommandations-du-rapport-stora\\_6066931\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/01/20/france-algerie-les-22-recommandations-du-rapport-stora_6066931_3212.html), (Date of Accession: 22.01.2021).

28 Benjamin Stora, "Les questions mémoriales portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d'Algérie", *Vie Publique*, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/278186-rapport-stora-memoire-sur-la-colonisation-et-la-guerre-dalgerie>, (Date of Accession: 21.01.2021).

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- Encourage the preservation of European cemeteries in Algeria, as well as Jewish cemeteries and the graves of Muslim Algerian soldiers who died for France during the Algerian war;
- Advance on the issue of archives, with the objective of transferring certain archives from France to Algeria, and on the other hand to allow researchers from both countries access to French and Algerian archives;
- Reactivate the Museum of the History of France and Algeria project, planned for Montpellier and abandoned in 2014;
- Bring lawyer Gisèle Halimi, a figure of opposition to the Algerian war, into the Pantheon;
- Create a Franco-Algerian commission on the future of the cannon "Baba Merzoug", also called "La Consulaire";
- Erect "places of memory" on four internment camps for Algerians in France.

The report addresses sensitive issues on behalf of the two countries but ignores the problem of apology Algerian authorities have long demanded from France for the colonial period.<sup>29</sup> The statement made by the Elysee Palace included the following: "hoped these initiatives would allow our country to take a lucid look at the wounds of the past, to build, over time, a reconciliation of memories and to be turned towards the youth in France and Algeria, in an education and transmission process."<sup>30</sup> Although there was no official reaction to the report in Algeria after the

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<sup>29</sup> Shweta Desai, "France to form Commission for Reconciling with Algeria", *Anadolu Agency*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/france-to-form-commission-for-reconciling-with-algeria/2117868>, (Date of Accession: 23.01.2021).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

statement, Algerians were unhappy about the lack of an official apology.<sup>31</sup> It seems that President Macron will take symbolic actions to reconcile the two countries.

To summarize the political relations, the relations have gone through ups and downs, but they never had a break. The role of the colonial legacy in political relations is undeniable and it seems that it will continue to be in the discourse of the Algerian political elite.

## ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND FRANCE

As the largest country in Africa in terms of area, Algeria has many natural resources such as gold and uranium as well as oil and natural gas and has the fourth-largest economy in Africa with its economy based on oil and natural gas. In the period following Algeria's independence, the most important economic relations were with France. Although relations between Algeria and France have progressed in a strained manner since the declaration of independence, the fact that the economic relations have progressed highly constitutes a contrast to the communication between the two countries. The economic cooperation of the two countries was seen as a necessity created by international economic conditions. With the end of the colony, the rapid economic gains promised by the ruling class of the new state generally failed to materialize, and economic development slowed after a short time. Due to pre-established trade links, the lack of experienced government officials, and the French military presence envisaged in the Evian Accords that ended the Algerian War, France continued to influence Algeria.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, France provided

31 "Algerians Unhappy About France's Lack of Apology for War Role", *Africa News*, <https://www.africanews.com/2021/01/21/will-french-president-apologize-for-france-s-role-in-algerian-war/>, (Date of Accession: 12.02.2021).

32 Helen Chapin Metz, *Algeria: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. 1994, p. 230.

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massive economic aid to Algeria after independence under the name of ‘cooperation’.<sup>33</sup> By providing such support, France planned to maintain its ties with Algeria and use the newly independent state as a “strategic doorway to the third world.”<sup>34</sup>

However, the intensity of economic links declined in the late 1960s after Algeria gradually replaced French personnel with its own citizens and the regime nationalized 51 percent of the main French petroleum company operating in its territory and 100 percent of French natural gas concessions in 1971.<sup>35</sup> This was an important step forward by an ex-colonial country towards becoming an independent country.

Economic and trade relations have grown rapidly since 1999.<sup>36</sup> The trade between the two countries tripled between 1999 and 2013, and Algeria became France’s leading trading partner in Africa. Moreover, Algeria became the third-largest market for French exports behind China and Russia, outside the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, France remained Algeria’s second-largest partner in 2019, with €4.98 billion in exports and a market share of 8.7%, behind China (19.8%).<sup>38</sup> France continues to be the leading investor outside the hydrocarbons sector and the top foreign employer in Algeria.

Undoubtedly, Algeria offers great economic opportunities to French businesses due to its natural resources. France and Algeria have signed an important bilateral contract that will allow the French automaker Renault

33 Lionel Babicz, “Japan–Korea, France–Algeria: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism”, *Japanese Studies*, 33(2), 2013, p. 208.

34 John Ruedy, “Historical Influences on Intra-Regional Relations in the Maghrib”, *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration*, Halim Barakat, ed., Croom Helm, London 1985, p. 89.

35 Michael J. Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring*, Oxford University Press, UK 2014, p. 295.

36 “Algeria”, *France Diplomacy*, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/algeria/>, (Date of Accession: 23.12.2020).

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

to set up a production plant in the Oran region and the “Renault Algeria” was inaugurated on 10 November 2014. It was a big project for French investment in Algeria, which is the second-largest automotive market in the African continent, but the expectations did not come true. Despite the tight relations between Paris and Algiers, this project, launched amid massive media and diplomatic fuss, failed just six years after its launch, and The Renault Algérie Production plant shutdown in 2020.<sup>39</sup> The project was not economic in the full sense of the word, but rather a “political” project for the regime of the former president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika.<sup>40</sup> There is a general view that France gained financial, political, and cultural privileges in Algeria during the era of Bouteflika. Political analyst Amin Al-Sadiq stated that French companies were respected during Bouteflika's tenure and gave priority to many economic projects.<sup>41</sup> Undoubtedly, the political and economic balances have changed with the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune as president in the 2019 elections, the new president will endeavor to ensure that economic relations with France are not interrupted. As can be seen, the impact of the colonial legacy on economic relations is generally on a positive line, especially compared to its negative influence in the cultural and political sphere.

### **FRENCH CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATION IN ALGERIA**

Language is the most important element of national identity, and the colonists, who are aware of this, made their own languages compulsory in administration and education during their domination in Africa and left

39 Mohamed Meslem, ““Renault Algeria” ...An Expected End to an Investment Project with Political Backgrounds!”, *Echorouk EN*, <https://www.echoroukonline.com/renault-algeria-an-expected-end-to-an-investment-project-with-political-backgrounds/>, (Date of Accession: 21.12.2020).

40 *Ibid.*

41 Ali Yahi, “Cezayirli Yetkililerin Fransızca Konuşması Halkı Öfkelenirdi”, *Independent Türkçe*, <https://www.indy التركية.com/node/114281/d%C3%BCnya/cezayirli-yetkililerin-frans%C4%B1zca-konu%C5%9Fmas%C4%B1-halk%C4%B1-%C3%B6fkelendirdi>, (Date of Accession: 29.12.2020).

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it as a legacy while leaving. It suffered a similar fate in Algeria to other colonial countries. The issue of language has long been a sensitive one in post-colonial Algeria as the predictable outcome of the colonial legacy. The official language of the state is Arabic, but few Algerians grow up speaking this language.<sup>42</sup> Even today, Algerian elites prefer French as the language of communication. According to unofficial statistics, more than 10 million Algerians use this language in the fields of economy, culture, arts, tourism, and service and their daily work.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, although Algeria is not a Francophone country, it is considered to be the second most French-speaking country.

The influence of French could not be eliminated because elites who came to power after independence went to French schools and expressed themselves in French. Indeed, Ahmed Ben Bella, the first president of Algeria, emphasized the importance of teaching Arabic in schools in order to destroy the colonial legacy of France, but while doing so, speaking in French created a contradiction. Malika Rebai Maamri asks a crucial question at this point: "Is it possible for Algerians to rebuild their own culture as long as they continue to express themselves in the language of their former masters?"<sup>44</sup> For Algerians, French became not only the language of the colonizer but also a language of resistance that could be used as the language of national liberation in their struggle against colonialism.<sup>45</sup> A striking example of this can be seen in the following words of the Algerian novelist Malek Haddad: "It is in French that I

42 "A Battle Over Language is Hampering Algeria's Development", *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2017/08/17/a-battle-over-language-is-hampering-algerias-development>, (Date of Accession: 12.02.2021).

43 Emin Zavi, "Cezayir'de İngilizce ve Fransızcanın Savaşı", *Independent Türkçe*, <https://www.indyturk.com/node/48476/d%C3%BCnyadan-sesler/cezayir%E2%80%99de-ingilizce-ve-frans%C4%B1zcan%C4%B1n-sava%C5%9FC%C4%B1>, (Date of Accession: 27.12.2020).

44 Malika Rebai Maamri, "The Syndrome of the French Language in Algeria", *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 3(3), 2009, p. 82.

45 Rabah Aissaoui-Claire Eldridge, *Algeria Revisited: History, Culture and Identity*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London 2017, p. 7.

first uttered the word independence.”<sup>46</sup> This reveals the dilemma that Algerians are in even today.

After independence in 1962, the adoption of Arabic as the national language represented a break with France and was necessary for a newly independent country to establish a national identity. Education reform has been high on the Algerian government’s agenda and the state sought to free its people from French assimilation by reviving Islamic cultural values and designating Arabic as the national language. However, the number of those who see Arabization policies as the cause of the chaos in Algerian education today is quite high. At the same time, students who study in Arabic are unlikely to have a good job unless they have proficiency in French.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, thousands of Algerians take French language exams each year to get scholarships from universities in France. About 23,000 Algerians are enrolled in French universities, making up 8% of France’s foreign students.<sup>48</sup>

A large number of students in Algeria are victims of language policies because after studying Arabic in primary and secondary school, all scientific specialties at the university are taught in French.<sup>49</sup> As if this duality in education was not enough, Algerian Minister of Higher Education Tayeb Bouzid made a controversial decision in 2019 to erase the traces of the colonial legacy. He said, “The French language gets us nowhere” and instructed university administrations in the country to use English instead of French.<sup>50</sup> This is a step towards replacing French as

46 Laeed Zaghlami, “Students as Victims of a National Language Malaise”, *University World News*, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2017121313330943>, (Date of Accession: 17.11.2020).

47 Cheryl S. Le Roux, “Language in Education in Algeria: A Historical Vignette of a ‘Most Severe’ Sociolinguistic Problem”, *Language&History*, 60(2), 2017, p. 118.

48 Lamine Ghanmi, “Algeria Seeks to Replace French with English at University, Sparks ‘Language War’”, *The Arab Weekly*, <https://thearabweekly.com/algeria-seeks-replace-french-english-university-sparks-language-war>, (Date of Accession: 17.11.2020).

49 Rim Hayat Chaif, “Algerian Students Are Victims of the Country’s Language Confusion”, *Al Fanar Media*, <https://bit.ly/2ZU9SUX>, (Date of Accesion: 27.11.2020).

50 Ghanmi, *loc.cit.*

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the dominant foreign language in Algeria with English but divided the experts into two. One party argues that since English is the language of international science, for Algeria's scientific activities to be more visible, the language of education should be English, like many other countries. The other party thinks that this transformation will drive the education system into a disaster. While there is currently no consensus on which of the six dialects of the Amazigh/Berber language, which was accepted as the official language in 2016, will be taught in schools, the emergence of a fourth language, after Darja (Algerian Arabic), French and Amazigh, makes things even more complicated.

Moreover, after the Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's announcement that the government was established, the use of French by the ministry staff in the press statements caused a wide-ranging campaign of criticism in the streets of the country. The situation in question brought to mind the period of former President Bouteflika, who spoke in French to the Algerian media and at official meetings. Thereupon, political analyst Amin Al-Sadiq made the following comment:<sup>51</sup>

*"The French language and culture experienced prosperity and development that they did not see even during the colonial period. This is one of the main reasons for the increase of congestion in Algerian society, which has exploded with the popular movement. Algerian authorities, especially new government members, continue to use the French language unfairly and exaggerated. This situation is far from patriotism and the demands of the popular movement and is an action unconstitutional. The situation may even further weaken the already fragile trust between the new administration and the people."*

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51 Yahi, *loc.cit.*

The Algerian national identity has been shaped directly by the colonial legacy of France and it seems that the French language will continue to exist in Algeria. Undoubtedly, Arabic as the official language provides Algeria with a sense of national identity, but the fact that French still has the status of mother tongue in society raises questions about the current Algerian identity.

## CONCLUSION

This article has tried to examine the effect of 132 years of colonial legacy on Algeria-France relations. First of all, it should be emphasized that France is slowly losing its power in Algeria, as it was in the former colonial countries. After independence, the relations between the two countries progress on a highly sensitive line. Although economic relations were strong, the influence of the colonial legacy on political and cultural relations causes tensions between the two countries from time to time. The overall distrust of the Algerian side towards France continues, and any move in terms of relations raises suspicion among Algerians. The obvious difference of opinion between the two countries on the solution of the problems arises at this point. While Algeria calls on France to acknowledge the crimes in question and pay compensation for the victims, France argues that it is necessary to close the old notebooks and look into the future. It seems France will not make an official apology in the near future for the crimes it committed in Algeria during the colonial period.<sup>52</sup> According to journalist Yassin Mohammadi, there can be talk about France's recognition of its crimes and paying compensation when the relationship between the two countries is equal and Algerian authorities activate the mechanisms of repression on Paris.<sup>53</sup>

52 "No Repentance nor Apologies' for Colonial Abuses in Algeria, Says Macron", *France 24*, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210120-no-repentance-nor-apologies-for-colonial-abuses-in-algeria-says-macron>, (Date of Accession: 21.01.2021).

53 Ali Yahi, "Fransa, Cezayirlilere Karşı İşlediği Suçları Ne Zaman Tanıယacak?", *Independent Türkçe*, <https://www.indyturk.com/node/91191/d%C3%BCnya/fransa-cezayirlilere-kar%C5%9F%C4%B1-i%C5%9Fledi%C4%9Fi-su%C3%A7lar%C4%B1-ne-zaman-tan%C4%B1yacak>, (Date of Accession: 29.12.2020).

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As a result, while much has changed in the time span since Algerian independence, there are still unhealed wounds inherited from its colonial past. These wounds will continue to shape relationships, directly or indirectly. Despite the occasional tension in the relations between France and Algeria, efforts to preserve the deep cultural and economic ties between the two countries seem to continue. However, it seems that France's role in Algerian politics will be limited due to the sensitivity of Algeria to interference in domestic affairs. Given the complexity of the relationship between the two countries, it does not seem possible to open a new page in the near future. It would be an optimistic point of view to turn a new page and continue on the road when there are still problems to be overcome inherited from the colonial past.

| Aybüke Rabia HALİL

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