



Who has done better and where?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Histoire & stratégie

The French landing in Algeria in 1830 was due to a political decision with an indisputable strategic motive: to cleanse the western Mediterranean of barbarian pirates.

Once Algiers was conquered, was it necessary to colonize the rest of the province? This debate was answered in the affirmative at the time, because of the facts on the ground: the state of political, administrative and health decay that was disinheriting this province and irresistibly attracting the seizure of power by whoever wanted it, in this case France. Good or bad, it does not matter. The purpose of this article is not to make a comparative philosophical and moral study, Jules Ferry and Clemenceau have publicly opposed each other on this subject, but to make a concrete assessment of 132 years of French presence and to describe the legacy left. It is a photograph, because hospitals, agriculture, roads, railways, ports, airports, oil and gas are undeniable realities.

It is not useless to make this assessment by answering, in passing, the main accusations against this colonization, apart from the philosophical concerns about the inferior and superior races. I will therefore examine the civic disparities (referred to as inequalities) between Europeans, Jews and Muslims, the inequality in the education of these different groups, the inequality in the quality of schooling, the inequality in the quality of the education of the Jews and the inequality in the education of the Muslims. I will therefore examine the civic disparities (treated as inequalities) between Europeans, Jews and Muslims, the inequality in the schooling of these different categories, public health, agriculture (allegedly reserved for settlers), infrastructure facilities, mining resources: especially oil and gas.

Civic status

It is necessary to repeat and reiterate that all the subjects of Algeria under French sovereignty (1830-1962) were French, and as such, subject to the general laws of the Republic. At the legal level, the Court of Cassation has handed down a large number of rulings along these lines. In addition, conscription, the purest expression of nationality, was applied and provoked several riots (Aurès 1916). This reminder of everyone's French nationality was necessary in order to make a clear distinction between the other problem, which has been denounced as an inequality: civic status. Indeed, Muslims refused to subordinate their status religious to the civic status of the French indigénat, which religious status concerned marriage, repudiation, filiation, inheritance, courts, schools, which led to difficulties in the area of political rights. Indeed, could French Muslims be granted the combined advantages of the civic status of the Republic and those of Koranic religious law? They would have been 200 per cent French. Civic inequality if you like, but the real word is disparity, due to respect for the religion of the largest population. The secular republic rightly did not want to engage in religious genocide, but the administrative, social and political consequences were commensurate with this respect for the Muslim religion. The Jews, far fewer in number, accepting "naturalization", an improper word since they were French, enjoyed a normal civic status, overhead of their religion that they kept.

This civic disparity, of religious origin, has unfortunately resulted in inequality in schooling. Muslims were mainly educated in Koranic schools and the French language was represented as the "language of the devil". The change of attitude came slowly and for an unexpected reason: the war of 14-18! The riflemen and spahis demobilized in the 1920s saw "on the job" the advantage of speaking French and even better of writing it, leading to a workers' emigration to metropolitan France and all of them relayed the idea that it was necessary to speak French to get out of exclusion (Koranic).

It should be noted that with a delay of nearly a hundred years, due to the brake of religion, the bet was already difficult, but the difficulty was increasing disproportionately by the demographic explosion that was coming, and at the same time was the tangible proof of an exemplary public health policy.

Public health

France has had a real public health policy in Algeria.

From the very beginning of the conquest, it was discovered that there were many diseases to overcome: Dysentery, malaria, smallpox which led to death or blindness, typhus, typhoid, trachoma (still blindness), syphilis, plague, cholera...

France committed the means: first of all those of military medicine, doctors, surgeons, pharmacists, administrative officers, and nurses. From 1832 onwards, ambulant care was provided to the population and then, as the conquest progressed, indigenous infirmaries and anti-venereal dispensaries, run by the military, were opened in 1840.

To this must be added the massive vaccination campaigns, particularly against smallpox, a real scourge at the time, from the landing in 1830 (six months later!!!...).

After 1870, the Republic carries out the resumption by the civil sector of hospital infrastructures and public health missions. The effect was felt even in the "bled" where the demographic expansion, due to the fall in infant mortality, exceeded the regular

expansion of the health network.

Also in the field of health, the scientific work was exemplary. Algeria and the whole world are indebted to the doctors of the African Army for major discoveries:

- Maillot became the apostle of the popularisation of quinine, an essential weapon against malaria;
- Laveran discovered in Constantine in 1880 the agent of malaria, allowing preventive action. This earned him the Nobel Prize in 1907, the only military doctor to ever receive this award;
- Huinaut organized in 1891, at the Maillot hospital in Algiers, the first military laboratory of bacteriology;
- ...

The hospital expansion was considerable. The Third Republic considerably developed the network of military hospitals. In 1953, 24,000 beds were distributed in a 2,000-bed hospital, two hospitals with more than 1,000 beds, 11 multi-purpose hospitals, 14 specialized hospitals and 9 private establishments. All this represented a financial burden far greater in proportion to that devoted to the metropolis.

I borrow this sentence from Professor Claude Richet: "This Algerian medicine must arouse in every French person, provided it is normal, exactly the opposite of the inferiority complex".

Agriculture

It wasn't enough to treat the population, they had to be fed. And yet agriculture used primitive techniques until the conquest of the primitive techniques. Here again, the representation of modernization through colonization has been caricatured: the rich colonists and the poor "fellahs", the owners and the workers....

It is true that at the beginning of the conquest, not only authoritarian expropriations but also private transactions provided a large part of the land for colonization. But it cannot be forgotten that thousands of hectares were reclaimed from the Mitidja swamps and the Bône plain. It was an epic of which the settlers can be proud, a just pride because, beyond their toil, it was followed by a considerable success.

But inequality? In 1950, out of a total of 13 million hectares, indigenous properties represented 75% of the cultivated surface area. The disproportion, which was unequal, was real, since Europeans accounted for only 2% of the rural population and 10% of the total population, but it was clearly limited if we consider only the criterion of arable land. In fact, the disproportion was accentuated by the population explosion among Muslims, which was a public health benefit and a social evil due to religion, as it reduced the theoretically available land per inhabitant. In addition, the rapid mechanization of agriculture was reducing the need for manpower and creating a worrying social situation.

Despite these major difficulties, agriculture in French Algeria has achieved remarkable successes. Particularly in soil restoration through the draining of marshlands, drilling, dyking, pumping stations, reservoir dams (14 major projects completed). Livestock breeding and cereal and fodder crops provided a livelihood for a very large part of the population as well as for the countryside. The tables below illustrate this in **1950**.

To this must be added the vine (450,000 ha), citrus growing (the clementine was born in Algeria). In spite of the obstacle of the galloping demography among the Muslims, the French work compared to what existed in 1830 (and to agriculture today) offers many reasons for satisfaction, even pride.

Communications

Concern for water control and soil productivity has gone hand in hand with the desire to develop means of communication.

Terrestrial communications

During the conquest, French troops, like the Roman legions, built roads and bridges. In the 20th century, road works were continued by civil companies and military engineers. In 1958, there were 54,000 km of roads, including 34 national roads (see map). The great penetrating Algiers-Ghardaia, Philippeville-Touggourt, Bône-Negrine, Oran-Colomb-Béchar. The transversal roads, including the one linking Morocco, Tlemcen, Oran, Algiers, Constantine.

For the railways, 4,420 km made it possible to connect the large cities of the territory.

Maritime communications

A thousand kilometres of seafront, which in 1830, with their well-sheltered harbours, served as dens for the barbarians. In 1958, 23 ports were developed, 10 of which were accessible to cargo ships and 5 served by regular liners. Algiers was, at that time, France's third largest port, and there were also Oran, Bône, Philippeville, Bougie, and Mers-el-Kébir... whose development and strategic position made it a coveted military base.

Air communications

In competition with maritime communications (the "Caravelles" put Algiers at 2 hours from Paris), they also extended towards the interior of the territory. From 1949 onwards, long-distance mail linked Paris to Black Africa and Madagascar, calling at Algiers-Maison Blanche.

Many other developments and equipment of the territory developed Algeria: telecommunications, phosphate mines generating a substantial chemical industry, that of metals (lead, zinc, iron) developing metallurgy.

But the most beautiful jewel, the most recent gift to Algeria, which became independent, was the oil and gas revenue. Until 1950, no one ventured to bet on the potential of the vast Maghreb desert, except for a small group of French academics who came to Algeria in the early 1940s to defend a law thesis. Faced with the first results (several years later) the Algerian general government launched an official recognition campaign in an area of 400,000 km². The black gold was then discovered which was to overturn the country's economic data.

The first important discovery took place at the Hassi-Messaoud deposit in June 1956. In

1959, oil production was equal to 1.2 million tons. In 1972, when French engineers left the Sahara, 250 wells were drilled in 16 years in the Hassi-Messaoud area alone.

Other oil bases were discovered and developed in the eastern Sahara, as well as natural gas deposits, for example at Hassi R'mel.

This industrial jewel led to the construction of a gas liquefaction plant at Arren (near Oran), the establishment of large refineries in Algiers and Hassi-Messaoud, as well as the establishment of a major network of oil and gas pipelines to Arzew, Algiers, Bougie, and also a Saharan road network (2. An additional 500 km).

The spectacular development of the Sahara, based on hydrocarbon resources, was entirely carried out by French prospectors and engineers. This has provided these former French departments with most of the current national wealth (95% of its revenue), which is great, even if its management is very unequal.

Conclusion

The assessment must be based on what existed in 1830 and take into account the length of the French presence, which was sufficiently long that concrete results can be expected, firstly in terms of human resources and also in terms of equipment (agriculture, infrastructure, wealth).

On the human level, integration was unsuccessful, but public health was exemplary:

- integration has not been possible because the population has remained heterogeneous, organised in juxtaposed communities, living in peace, but not assimilating each other. It was not for lack of trying, and the Third ^{Republic} behaved honestly with regard to its values, wishing to establish an egalitarian and fraternal system. But the apathy of the Arab and Berber populations of Algeria, the Muslim religion placing the Koran above the laws and their refusal for a hundred years of schooling have handicapped the integration process. France has therefore practically managed what is now called an ambiguous neologism "communitarianism", which at the time espoused social and professional inequalities and carried the seeds of the final fracture. This handicap has not prevented France from caring for the indigenous populations, despite their reluctance, and from providing this province with an exemplary public health policy, the best illustration of which is the demographic explosion, which allows me to ask the question: "Who has done better and where? »
- Likewise, the results in agriculture and industrial equipment have been up to what one would expect from a country like France, with its wealth, its culture, its entrepreneurial, technical and scientific capacities.

This legacy was temporarily masked by the tragic end of the French presence in 1962: the instant mass exodus from the European Community, the Harkis massacre.

Unless we deny the truth, it appears that France has left Algeria an important legacy, enhanced by the riches of the subsoil of the Sahara, enabling its successors to continue the development of a modern nation. The French can be proud of what their country and their army have done in Algeria.

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