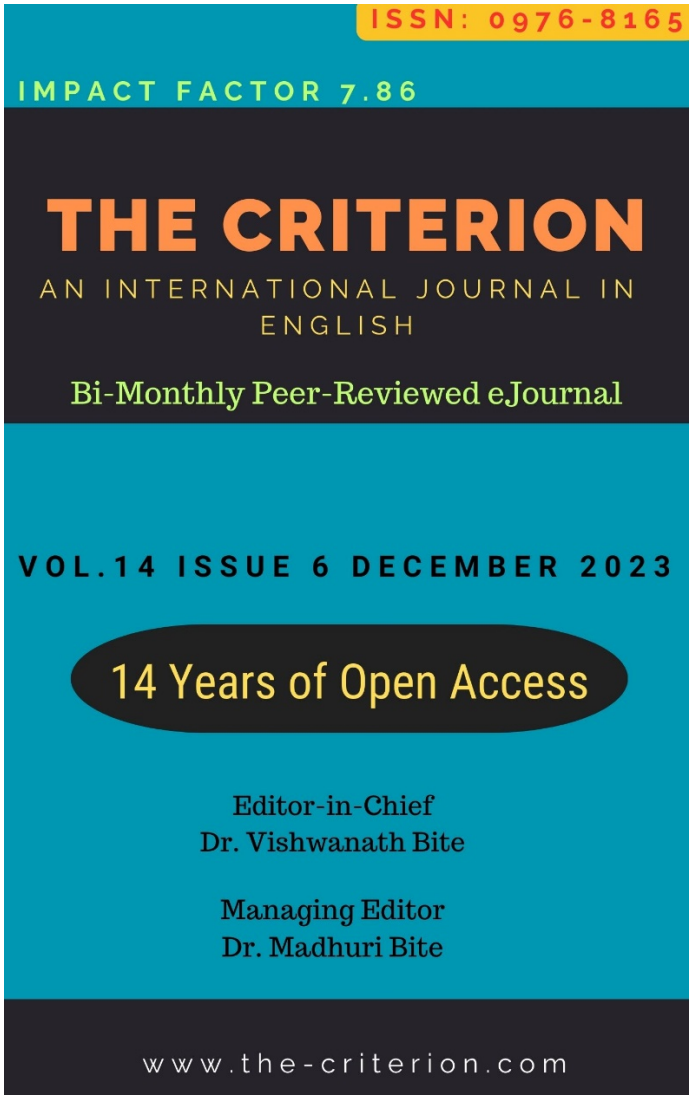

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Transnational Journeys and a Moroccan Romance in Foreign Languages: The Unacknowledged Story of a Moroccan Nationalist

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Article History: Submitted-26/11/2023, Revised-19/12/2023, Accepted-22/12/2023, Published-31/12/2023.

Abstract:

In the latter half of the 19th century, Sultan Moulay Hassan dispatched several expeditions of students to study in European colleges, especially in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. While many of these students have remained obscured by historical records, Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni has left an indelible mark on the tapestry of Moroccan history. Through meticulous examination of archival sources, this paper endeavors to construct the tale of his journey from a traditional Qur'anic school to an Italian military academy, his intercultural romance, his persecution by the Moroccan Makhzen and the French Protectorate, and his significant contribution to the emergence of nationalism and anti-colonial resistance in Morocco. Djebli's life story unfolds as a compelling narrative of a transformative era that shaped the course of Moroccan history and the making of Moroccan national identity in a time of cross-border mobility, the complexities of colonialism, the Makhzen's struggle for political survival, l, and the native subaltern efforts to acquire a voice and agency.

Keywords: Djebli El Aydouni, Cross-Border Mobility, Moroccan-Russian Romance, Makhzen, French Colonialism, Nationalism, Struggle for Independence, agency.

Moroccans have a rich and intricate history of engagements with Europe. Since the 17th century, numerous ambassadors, traders, travelers, professional entertainers, and students journeyed to Europe, exploring its cities and engaging with various facets of European societies, cultures, and civilizations. These cross-border experiences have significantly shaped their national and cultural identities, as well as influenced their political and religious worldviews.

This profound impact is vividly exemplified in the remarkable life story of Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni. In the late 19th century, he ventured to Italy to pursue his studies at the military academy of Turin, providing a compelling narrative that reflects the broader dynamics of Moroccan-European interactions during that era.

1. From Qur'anic School in Rabat to Military Academy in Turin: A Path of Unexpected Transitions

Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni was born in Rabat on 26 June, 1866. He attended a Qur'anic school together with his older brother. In his autobiography, he admits they "were not among the brightest students in our class."[1] One day, during their leisure time, the students decided to play a game of war, dividing themselves into two opposing sides and initiating a battle. Ahmed Djebli hurled a stone from his sling, accidentally hitting and injuring a classmate in the head. His parents complained to the Pasha of Rabat but later forgave Ahmed Djebli and retracted their complaint. Despite this, his father decided to withdraw him from school and placed him under the apprenticeship of a cobbler.

However, as he puts it, "Providence had a much better plan for me and my future." He was chosen among the third expedition of fifteen students to study in Italy. Ahmed Djebli belonged to the lower class and was not part of the merchant bourgeoisie or the Makhzen elite.[2] These privileged classes typically did not recognize the advantages of sending their sons to study Western sciences or pursue military education in foreign countries. Instead, the emphasis within these classes was on religious education, which offered lucrative career paths in jurisprudence (cadi) and ulama (religious scholars). These positions held

significant power and authority within the institutions of the Makhzen and served as the backbone of the Moroccan government. The religious scholars played a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the governance structure of the country.

Another factor that discouraged Moroccans from sending their sons to study modern knowledge in Christian lands is the fear of compromising their religious integrity. This fear is expressed by the nineteenth-century Moroccan historian Khalid Nassiri, who warns against "adopting the manners of foreigners, or following their ways in their expressions, conversations, speeches, or greetings, among other things… in the learning process, they ended up losing their religion. Within two or three years, the children of Muslims would become foreigners."[3]

Undeterred by the prospect of crossing borders and encountering foreign cultures and people, Djebli and the other students chosen from Rabat, Salé, Laraach, and Tetouan arrived in Tangier. Djebli does not provide details about his stay in the city. However, according to Al Houssein Zaari's travel autobiography, we learn that students usually spent a couple of weeks or months, sometimes even years, acquainting themselves with the language of the country where they were going to pursue their studies. During their sojourn in Tangier, students were also measured, and uniforms were cut to their sizes.[4]

On November 24, 1887, at the age of 21, Djebli boarded the Italian cruiser *Garibaldi* bound for Genoa. Upon disembarking in Genoa on the third day, they were received at the port by Mr. Agostino de Grossi, the director of the institute where their educational pursuits were arranged. The new Moroccan students spent the night at a hotel and traveled by train the following morning to Turin.

As the contingent of Moroccan students arrived in Italy, dressed in their traditional Moroccan attire, and walked from the train station to the International College, located at Via Saluzzo No. 55, they undoubtedly piqued the curiosity of the local Italian inhabitants.[5] At the arrival of the Moroccan students "Celebrations were held in various classes in honor of our arrival. These abundant joyful events were mixed with the excitement of watching Moroccan children."[6]

This international aspect is also emphasized by Djebli who stated enthusiastically, "We found ourselves surrounded by students from Bulgaria, Armenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Japan, Egypt, and especially Ethiopia. At the same time, several princes were present: Prince Ahmed Fouad, the current King of Egypt, and the Prince of Montenegro, the brother of the current Queen of Italy."[7] So unexpectedly, the former cobbler apprentice, who had been withdrawn from school in Morocco due to misbehavior, now found himself attending a prestigious institution alongside members of the aristocracy and even royalty. He eagerly embraced the opportunities presented to him, stating in his autobiography,

> I was entrusted to exceptional professors for my education, and I made the most of my time. After completing my fifth year of studies, I returned to the Infantry Officers' School in Modena (October 1891). I had a fondness for mathematics, and fate had favored me in that particular subject. Therefore, I attempted the entrance examination for the Military Academy of Artillery and Engineering in Turin. To my utmost joy, I passed with an average score of 17.75 out of 20.[8]

Elsewhere, the former cobbler apprentice declares, "Seeing Prince Ahmed Fouad, who had graduated as an artillery officer from the same academy, filled me with hope and encouraged me to pursue the same career." After five years of study in Turin, Djebli joined the School of Infantry Officers in Modena in 1891. Having completed three years of study at this academy, from October 1892 to July 15, 1895, he was put in uniform in the Italian army in the 29th regiment of fortress artillery and was stationed at Fort Bramafou in Bardonneche, close to the French borders. He subsequently served in the 17th Campaign Artillery Regiment in Novara, near the 10th Coastal Artillery Brigade at the Saint Bénigne Battery in Genoa.[9] Djebli was thrilled to don the uniform of the Italian army.

As Orientals traversed geographical boundaries, their interactions with different cultural landscapes and exposure to foreign values, traditions, and

societal norms contributed to the formation of new identities. Negotiating new cultural elements fostered the emergence of hybrid identities that transcend traditional borders and paved the way for the construction of nuanced, multifaceted, and fluid identities. We remember in this conjunction the statement by Arianna Maiorani and Bruna Mancini that identities "are not fixed, that flow and change due to the impact of transnationalism and cross-border mobility."[10]

2. Back Home: An Engineer in the Cherifian Army

Djebli returned to Morocco in 1896, at the age of 30, after spending nine years in Italy. His life in Morocco took on an extraordinary trajectory. He joined the service of the Makhzen of Moulay Abdulaziz, serving as a military engineer (*mohandis*) and participated in the Makhzen's military campaigns against the uprisings in Chaouia and Tadla in 1897, where he sustained multiple wounds. During these campaigns, he undertook topographical missions under the command of Moulay Abdelhafid, Sultan Moulay Abdulaziz's brother and leader of the Cherifian troops.

In 1900, due to his expertise in artillery, Moulay Abdelaziz appointed Djebli to lead the delegation sent to Germany for the purchase of cannons from the Krupp weapon factory in the city of Essen. Djebli was accompanied by three members, all from his hometown of Rabat and former classmates at the military academy of Modena where he had studied. These members were Mohamed Tadlaoui, an infantry officer from Rabat; Mohamed Ben Omar al Abbari, the chief of Cherifian police in Tangier; and Mohamed Ben Elouazzae, another infantry officer in Rabat.[11]

In 1901, Djebli was dispatched to Algeria together with Mohamed Al Gabbas, Minister of War, a graduate from the Royal Engineers in Chatham in Britain (1876-1879), on a mission to demarcate the Moroccan-Algerian borders. During this journey, Djebli was seriously injured. He decided to resign from the Makhzen. Moulay Abdelaziz granted him a small pension along with a decree addressed to the Pasha of Rabat, authorizing him to establish a school in Rabat to

teach mathematics and foreign languages. However, despite the royal decree, the Pasha deliberately obstructed Djebli's efforts by placing numerous obstacles in his path, preventing him from realizing his vision.

Although the archives do not provide explicit information about the career path Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni pursued after the failure of the language school project, it is evident that he found success in other endeavors. Despite the setback, he managed to thrive and eventually became one of the affluent residents of Rabat and ascended to wealth and prominence within the community.

3. Moroccan-Russian Romance

During his mapping mission in Algeria, Djebli was seriously wounded and taken for treatment at Mustapha Hospital in Algiers. It was here that destiny brought him into an encounter with the Russian maiden who would later become his beloved bride. Elena Alekseevna Bezrukova had arrived in Algiers to visit her brother, who was undergoing treatment for his lungs. During her regular visits to the hospital, the Russian girl and the Moroccan patient got acquainted with each other, and before long, a profound passion developed between them. The Moroccan patient proposed to her, and she unhesitatingly gave her consent.

It is possible that Elena was acquainted with Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), a girl from a Germano-Russian aristocratic family who sought refuge from the constraints of her culture and made a life in Algeria during the late 19th century. Isabelle converted to Islam and embraced Islamic mysticism, and her journey led her to fall in love with an ordinary Algerian native whom she eventually married.[12]

Elena's story diverged from Isabelle's, as she found herself drawn not to an ordinary man or Islamic mysticism, but to an extraordinary Moroccan. The man she fell in love with was tall, handsome, highly educated, a high-ranking officer and engineer in the Sultan's army, a polyglot with vast linguistic skills, and possessed considerable wealth. He was a true "man of the world." His

experiences, knowledge, and understanding of various cultures and languages made him a worldly and cosmopolitan individual.

The practice of Moroccans marrying foreign women was not uncommon. Since the early nineteenth century, Moroccan merchants, acrobats, and circus entertainers traveled to Europe and America, where many of them formed marital bonds with women from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. In 1886, for instance, Hadj Larbi Guesus, a merchant trading in Britain, married Alice Agnes McAyoy of Blackpool. They had a daughter named Lulu and a son named Randolph Sidi Mohamed.[13] Acrobat Mohammed Bencacem married Clara Casey, an actress from Manchester. Embracing Islam, Clara Casey had their marriage solemnized in 1905 in Liverpool, following Muslim rites at the first established mosque in England.[14] In 1887, Hadj Tahar, a Moroccan circus entertainer in America, wed the Irish Julia Doyle. They later parted ways, and in 1918, he entered into matrimony with Julia Bekesy, a Hungarian actress.[15] Additionally, it is worth mentioning the Sharif of Wazzan, Abdeslam, who fell in love with an English girl named Emily Keen during her visit to Tangier in 1873. Their love story culminated in marriage.[16]

Elena and Ahmed's exceptional love story was undoubtedly the first Moorish Russian romance. Their extraordinary connection and the circumstances that brought them together made their romance an unforgettable chapter in the annals of white women's marriage with brown men. After obtaining Elena's consent and having his wounds healed, Ahmed Djebli returned to Morocco and resigned from the Cherifian army. Soon after, he journeyed to Russia to seek Elena's hand in marriage from her father, Mr. Alexis Nicolaevitch Bezroukov. Undoubtedly, her father must have been profoundly impressed by the European-educated Moroccan, a courageous officer who had served in the Sultan's army, and a man who exhibited remarkable intelligence and proficiency in multiple languages. He must also have been impressed with the Moroccan suitor's gift to his daughter — an upright piano of the esteemed brand of Adolf Lehmann, purchased from Berlin.[17]

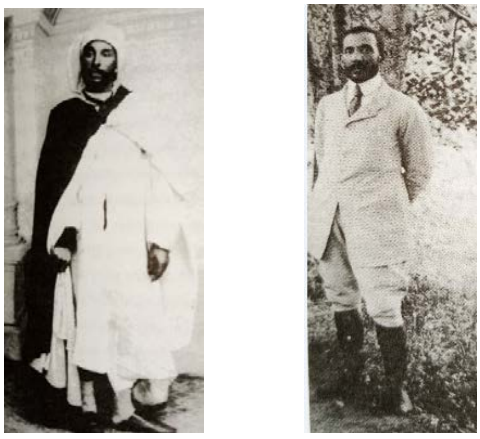

Figure 1: [18] Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni in Moroccan and European Attire

Elena and Ahmed's marriage was extraordinary not only because it was the first union between a Moroccan and a Russian girl, but also because it was conducted in a Catholic ceremony. Their union was solemnized on February 23, 1903, in Genoa, Italy.[19] The marriage certificate was issued by the Archdiocese of Genoa. Significantly, the marriage occurred in Genoa, a city filled with memories for Djebli. It was the first port he arrived at when embarking on his journey to Europe to study at the Turin Academy as well as the city where he was stationed with the Italian army after his graduation and wearing the army uniform.[20] For Elena, it was a romantic place, more glamorous and enchanting than her cold and dark native town of Voronezh.

Figure 2: Elena in Genoa, 1903

In his autobiographical account, "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni: Etudiant en Italie 1887-1899," Ahmed speaks emotionally about his marriage to the Russian aristocratic lady, "I had married a noble Russian woman, educated and a graduate of the 1st Conservatory Prize in Moscow. She was the daughter of the noble Alexis Nikalaiwich Bezroukoff, who had been the Mayor of the city of Voronezh four times."[21] Djebli proudly highlights the musical achievements of his foreign bride, being the recipient of the first prize of the Moscow Conservatory.

After an enchanting honeymoon in Genoa, the couple traveled to the bridegroom's homeland. Upon arriving in Tangier, they solemnized a second marriage, now following Islamic law with the bride's name converted to Khadija.

Interestingly, Djebli's autobiography omits the disclosure of his Russian bride's first name, as well as specific details about their Tangier marriage. Fortunately, a landownership deed published in the *Bulletin Officiel* on December 16, 1924, clarifies that "Ahmed ben Sid el Hadj Mohammed el Djebli el Aidouni, married according to Muslim law to Mrs. Bezeroukoff, Héléne, in March 1903 in Tangier." The deed further indicates their residence in Rabat in 43, Rue de la République,[22] which later became Rue Djebli. Another source gives a more Slavic name to his spouse, claiming that Djebli "was married to a Russian citizen named Elena Alekseevna Bezrukova (married as El Aydouni Djebli el Alami in Islam, known as Khadija)."[23]

Having celebrated their union once again, the couple set off for Rabat, where they began their new life together, cherishing their intercultural love story with joy and devotion. Elena's implied conversion to Islam seems to be motivated primarily by practical considerations, as it granted her greater acceptance and credibility among the Arab community. She continued to dress in the European fashion.

Figure 3: Elena and Ahmed Djebli

As mentioned in his memoirs, Djebli abstains from providing details about his Russian bride; however, he does emphasize the joy and happiness she brought into his life. He states,

> She made me the happy father of three children, one of whom is a lawyer, while the other two are attending high school. In addition to the wealth and happiness that had smiled upon me and accompanied me throughout my marriage, I also enjoy great moral satisfaction that my children never fail to give me through the fulfillment of their duties, as if imposed upon them by a supreme power, by God Himself. [24]

Djebli built a sumptuous mansion and, like his father-in-law, he became a landowner with vast arable lands in Ain Al Aouda. The couple lived happily, spending their days on delightful excursions and holidays at their picturesque country farm in Ain Al Aouda. Elena relished the opportunity to escape the long, cold winter months of Voronezh and bask in the sunny and vibrant ambiance of Rabat, overlooking the blue expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. She bore him three children: Mohamed, who became the first Moroccan lawyer,[25] Maryem, who achieved renown as Morocco's first female pianist, [26] and Ahmed, who pursued a career as a medical doctor.

Figure 4: Maryem, First Moroccan Female Pianist[27]

4. Djebli and the First Russian Church in Rabat

Sources mention that during the early twentieth century, the Russian emigrants residing in Rabat held their sermons in shanty barracks because they lacked sufficient funds to acquire a piece of land for the construction of a church. The Protectorate relocated the capital from Fez to Rabat, leading to a significant increase in land prices. However, in a remarkable act of generosity, Djebli, the Moroccan husband of a Russian woman, donated land to the Russian community. The story runs as follows,

> Jebli, a noble resident and Charif of Rabat… suffered from a serious illness. When medical supplies ran out and the illness did not recede, on the advice of his Russian wife, the Moroccan man called upon Father Barsanuphe and asked him to pray for him. After a prayer service performed by an Orthodox priest, Jebli recovered. As a token of gratitude, he donated land to the Russian community for the construction of the church. On December 12, 1929, the deed of sale was issued with a symbolic amount of one franc. It specified that the

> land could only be used for the construction of a Russian Orthodox Church.[28]

Djebli's deep love for his wife, his unwavering loyalty to the Russian diaspora community in Rabat, and his profound gratitude to her for saving him from a perilous disease moved him to generously donate a piece of land for the construction of a church. While his wife might have embraced the religion of her Moroccan spouse and adopted the Muslim name of Khadija, Djebli helped her compatriots to build for themselves a place of worship where they could freely practice their faith in the lands of Islam. Djebli's act of donating land for the construction of an orthodox church to the Russian community in Rabat demonstrates his religious tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity and the values of coexistence beyond the boundaries of ethnicity and religion. Indeed, his gesture signifies a cosmopolitan humanism that transcends rigid categorizations.

Figure 5: Russian Orthodox Church in Rabat, 1930s[29]

When later he found himself incarcerated by the French Protectorate for protesting against the Berber Dahir, the memories of his marital bliss provided him solace and relief in his dark cell. Despite the oppressive environment, the thought of his cherished Russian wife and the happiness they shared brought him moments of respite and comfort. Amid his struggle and confinement, the memory of their love served as a source of emotional sustenance.

5. Djebli Behind Bars: Scandalous Abuses of the Protectorate

On April 28, 1931, Djebli was arrested and imprisoned for writing and distributing anti-Berber Dahir leaflets.[30] His house was raided and searched, and all his papers, letters, and documents were confiscated. His arrest was quickly reported by the pro-French colonial press. Under the alarming title, "Arrest of Agitators," *Le Temps Colonial* wrote, "The Sultan has ordered the arrest of a Muslim named Ahmed Djebli, who claims Russian protection for distributing anti-Muslim leaflets in public places and mosques, inciting the natives to rebel. Ahmed Djebli has been incarcerated in Rabat."[31] The announcement was reiterated by *Paris-Mid* and other colonial newspapers.

The French socialist press, on the other hand, launched a severe attack on the Makhzen and the Protectorate. It affirmed that both Djebli and his Russian wife had French protection and attacked the colonial press' reference to their Russian protection as mere fabricated propaganda to deny Djebli French justice and deliver him to the cruel jurisprudence of the Makhzen court. In an Islamic country, his accusation of distributing anti-Islamic leaflets was an extremely grave crime.

While in the Pasha's prison in Rabat, Djebli's Russian wife spared no effort to secure a French lawyer to defend her husband, but it was in vain. From his prison cell, Djebli sent registered letters to Jean Longuet and his son Robert, renowned Parisian lawyers, socialist militants, and descendants of Karl Marx. His letters never reached their destination as they were confiscated by the Protectorate. In the absence of legal representation, he was quickly indicted and sentenced to two years in prison and exile.

When the news of Djebli's reached Jean Longuet, he traveled to Rabat and had a meeting with General Charles Noguès, Director of Indigenous Affairs. "It is General Noguès, Director of Indigenous Affairs, who is the instigator of the prosecution against Djebji, and it is he who ordered his incarceration with a military-like brutality," wrote *Le Midi Socialiste*. The newspaper further stated that during Djebli's lawyer's interview with General Noguès, "the latter had the

audacity to admit to him that it was he who had ordered the Pasha to condemn Djebli to the maximum punishment, which was two years in prison and exile, adding 'That's how we subdue the natives.'"[32]

In an article entitled "A Scandalous Prosecution of an Innocent," *Le Midi Socialiste* talks of the monstrosities of the Djebli affair. That Chérif Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni was a French protégé, which made him subject to French and not Moroccan laws. As for the charge of rejecting the Berber Dahir, Djebli's position was clearly outspoken in both his speech and writings. [33]

The press fervently proclaimed his innocence, condemning the egregious injustice he endured within both the French and Moroccan legal systems, highlighting the deplorable conditions of his imprisonment, his solitary confinement in a foul cell, and the denial of essential medical care.

Eventually, through a consistent press campaign and the efforts of his lawyers, the Moroccan courts annulled his initial sentence, acknowledging that being a French protégé, Djebli was not subjected to the Cherifian tribunal jurisprudence. He was retried in a French court, which charged him with conspiracy with a foreign country for writing against the Dahir to the Queen of Holland. The accusation runs as follows: "The crime of machination and giving secret information to foreign powers with the intent to incite them to commit hostilities against France."[34] *Le Midi Socialiste* responds mockingly, stating, "When one considers that Marshal Lyautey received Queen Wilhelmina of Holland with great pomp at a time when she was accused in Morocco of preparing for war against France!"[35]

For Michael Pym, the arrest and trial of Djebli served as an illustration of the arbitrary cruelty and hypocrisy of the French Protectorate. He quotes a statement from General Nogues, who remarked, "Djebli, you know, is perhaps not guilty. Or if he is, he is only very slightly implicated. But, let him give us the names of the real culprits and we'll let him off after a few months. We have to make an example after the recent events in Fez."[36]

Djebli was tried, and after nine months in prison, he was acquitted.[37]

6. The Djebli's Retribution: The Fall of the French General and Rise of Moroccan Nationalism

The affair of "the little Rifian" helped bring to the foreground the injustice and abuse of power of the French Protectorate, leading to the fall of General Charles Noguès.[38] The French socialist press, especially *Le Populaire*, launched a concerted campaign against him for his persecution of Djebli, calling him sinister, cruel, and odious. On 30 December 1931, *Le Populaire* wrote enthusiastically,

> The sinister General Noguès, with scandalous administrative practices, has been definitively recalled to France. The Quai d'Orsay was finally fed up with him from his numerous blunders, which have added to actual crimes. Mr. Noguès, who demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the Muslim world, fully revealed his narrow-mindedness and subservience to the forces of money. Readers … remember how this "glorious" military man crushed the Moroccan uprising against the unjust Dahir on the Berber justice. Students and dignitaries were beaten, thrown into prison, and exiled. The old Cherif Djebli… was imprisoned without evidence, brutalized, and condemned without trial by order of General Noguès... These scandals undoubtedly influenced the Quai d'Orsay's decision to dismiss such a clumsily malevolent individual.[39]

The other consequence—a blessing in disguise—is that during his various travels to Rabat to defend Djebli, Robert Longuet became aware of the abuse of power of the Protectorate and had the opportunity of meeting with Moroccan nationalists, especially Mohamed Hassan Ouazzani. Ouazzani writes in his book *Combats d'un Nationaliste Marocain* that during his visits to Rabat to defend Djebli, Robert Longuet became aware of the extent of the cruel and unjust treatment inflicted upon Moroccans by the French Protectorate under the grip of colonialism. As a reaction, he came up with the idea of founding a magazine to enlighten the French public about the injustices perpetuated by the authorities of the Protectorate's policies. Ouazzani adds that the strength and passion with

which Robert Longuet conducted this defense of Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni caught the attention of some Moroccan students in Paris, especially after successfully overturning the Pasha's judgment and the resignation of General Noguès.[40]

Following the victory of Robert Longuet in the affair of Djebli, two Moroccan students in France, Omar Abdeljalil and Ahmed Balafrej, visited him seeking help and assistance for hundreds of victims of similar arbitrary persecution. They suggested that he establish himself as a lawyer in Morocco to facilitate this task.

Robert Longuet believed that a law firm would be paralyzed by the Protectorate and was thinking instead of a larger project that would have a broader scope and implication for the cause of Morocco, rather than individual cases. He suggested the creation of a magazine to enlighten public opinion about the misconduct of the colonial Protectorate. Meetings were held in Paris between Robert Longuet and three prominent Moroccan nationalists—Omar Abdeljalil, Ahmed Balafrej, and Mohammed Hassan El-Ouazzani—to concretize the project of publishing the Maghreb magazine. In the inaugural issue of July 1932, Robert Longuet connects the birth of the magazine with Djebli's affair:

> The *Maghreb* was born through, if I may say so, a judicial affair -- a significant political trial. In 1931, I was entrusted with the defense of a Moroccan friend, Cherif A. Djebli, who had been arbitrarily sentenced 'by order' to two years in prison. Through my perseverance and with the help of my father, I managed to secure his release and obtain a dismissal of the charges. Furthermore, I caused the resignation of the person responsible for this denial of justice, General Noguès, the director of Indigenous Affairs, by filing a complaint against him for stealing correspondence addressed to a lawyer.[41]

The launch of the *Maghreb* magazine was met with instant success and its popularity only grew with attacks from the reactionary press.[42] Robert Longuet recalls a memorable visit to Winston Churchill, accompanied by his father, where Churchill refers to him as "the Moroccan," declaring that he was a reader of *Maghreb Review*. The magazine also garnered recognition from notable figures such as Sir Wickham Steed, a respected English journalist and former editor of *The Times*, who requested a complete collection of the publication. Even renowned British novelist H. G. Wells counted himself among the readers of Maghreb magazine, underscoring its extensive reach and influence.

At the level of Morocco, Robert Longuet remarks that "it was around *Maghreb*, initially, and later around the excellent newspapers edited in Morocco by Mohamed Ouazzani, that the Moroccan Nationalist Movement formed, crystallized, and developed. The Plan of Reforms owes much to this press. The initial idea of studying and presenting concrete and constructive proposals was launched by Mohamed Ouazzani and myself during my stay with him at 15 Derb Bouhaj in Fez."[43] Ouazzani explains that as a group of nationalists in Fez,

> we are considering ways to provide our movement abroad with a voice to first make known and then counter the campaign of deceit being conducted against us by French newspapers, both in Morocco and in France… we have established contacts with Robert Jean Longuet... He shows his complete willingness to collaborate with us. What encourages us in this collaboration is the fact that he is familiar with the realities and intricacies of French politics in Morocco; he is committed to the Moroccan cause; … he is willing to make his office the headquarters of the journal, of which he will be the editor-in-chief… It must reflect a combatant Morocco.[44]

In fact, as the newspaper L'Ami du Peuple reports, the Maghreb magazine inspired not only youth in Morocco but also throughout North Africa to rebel

against French colonial policy. In Fez, writes *L'Ami du Peuple*, a new revolutionary spirit had already emerged among the 'turbaned youth,' who were voluntary correspondents of the *Maghreb*." Fuelled by the *Maghreb Review*'s influence, young Tunisians took it upon themselves to keep the flame of revolution alive. Posters were displayed calling for the end of the French Protectorate and protests and agitations were organized in various locations in North Africa by Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian "turbaned youth." As a result, "demonstrations follow violence, threats follow insults, blows lead to riots, as a real riot has just erupted in the Arab quarter of Halfaouine." During this incident, two French soldiers were seriously injured by the rioters.

In Tunisia, posters were displayed, explicitly calling faithful Muslims to wage war against the Protectorate. "That's the work of the *Maghreb* and other revolutionary publications." Its revolutionary preaching, writes *L'Ami du Peuple*, had traveled from "Fez-the-Holy, and stained the walls of Tunis-la-Blanche."[45] Thus, Djebli contributed significantly to the rise of Moroccan nationalism and the demise of French colonialism in Morocco and, to some extent, in the Maghreb as a whole.

Interestingly enough, while trying to silence Djebli, the colonizer unleashed nationalist and anti-colonial voices. The *Maghreb Review* played a significant role in the fashioning of nationalist thought and anti-colonial resistance. The exercise of arbitrary colonial persecution against native populations in an attempt to dominate and subjugate them ultimately sowed the seeds of its own downfall.

Conclusion

Djebli's life story is, indeed, a captivating tale of transformation and defiance. His encounter with Europe sparked a profound change within him, fashioning for him a new identity rooted in translational cosmopolitanism. Despite starting as a cobbler apprentice after being withdrawn from school due to misbehavior, Djebli defied expectations. He studied in prestigious military

schools in Italy, served in both the Italian and Moroccan armies, became a wealthy landowner, and married a Russian bride. The knowledge he acquired in Italy, his mastery of European languages, and his economic independence made him politically subversive in the eyes of the Makhezn and the Protectorate, rendering him a formidable figure who posed a threat to established authorities.

Djebli was keenly aware that his education at one of the most prestigious European institutions, his multilingual proficiency, intellectual pursuits, and economic independence posed a threat to both the Makhzen and the Protectorate. These achievements became a source of envy for his Moroccan and French detractors, fuelling their resentment and attempts to undermine his reputation. He says,

> I was considered fallen, and it was the period of injurious libels that were supported by natives who court the Protectorate for a job or promotion and who were jealous of my origin and independent life. They were also endorsed by Europeans who envied my happiness, my situation, and who felt my intellectual and moral superiority within themselves. They can therefore afford the luxury, on this occasion of my imprisonment, to call me "the little Rifian", "the little Rifian" who has the ability to fluently speak five European languages, read and write fluently in seven.[46]

Throughout his journey of crossing borders, Djebli embraced hybridity and maintained a unique perspective as a nationalist who spoke and wrote from outside the confines of nationalism, a transnational commitment to human ideals.

Despite being an unacknowledged nationalist, Djebli played a crucial role in uniting the French left and Moroccan nationalists, shaping the future of the nation's struggle for independence. His life represents the subaltern voice and agency during the complex process of decolonization and nation-building. Djebli's contributions, often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives, had

an enormous impact on Morocco's path to independence and an indelible mark on Moroccan history. It serves as a reminder of the complex nature of social change and the significance of subaltern voices in shaping the course of nations.

Notes:

[1] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni: Etudiant en Italie 1887-1899," in Mustafa Boushara, *Al Istitan wa al Himaya bil Maghrib: 1863-1894* (Rabat: Al Matbaa al Malakiya, 1984), p. 1389. Translation mine. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this article are mine.

[2] If Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni was from a privileged background, his father would not have chosen to apprentice him to a cobbler. Typically, families of means would involve their children in business ventures or other pursuits befitting their social status.

[3] Abu al Abbas al Nasiri, *Kitab al-Istiqsa* (Al-Dar al-Bayda: Dar al-Kitab, 1954-1956), vol. 9, p. 106.

[4] Ahmed Maaninou, "Mudakirat Talib Maghribi Ursila fi Baatha Maghribiya ila Italia Mundu Thamanin Sana," *Dawat al Haq*: year 12, vol. 12 (November 1968), pp. 143-148.

[5] "Our passage from the station to the school," Zaari recalls, "attracted full attention, especially since we were still dressed in the traditional Moroccan attire (the caftan enclosed within the melifa robe) that we had donned in Tangier." Ahmed Maaninou, "Mudakirat Talib Maghribi Ursila fi Baatha Maghribiya ila Italia," pp. 143-148.

[6] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni," p. 1389.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid, pp. 1389-1390.

[9] Ibid, p. 1390.

[10] Arianna Maiorani and Bruna Mancini, *Space and Place as Human Coordinates: Rethinking Dimensions across Disciplines* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), p. xv.

[11] Djebli explains that Mohamed Tadlaoui has become a simple farmer in the Sraghna region, and Mohammed Ben Elouazzâe immigrated to San Pablo, in Brazil, in 1902. "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni," p. 1390.

[12] On the life of Isabelle Eberhardt, see Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp, eds., *Great Women Travel Writers: From 1750 to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 170-178 and Ursula Kingsmill Hart, *Two Ladies of Colonial Algeria: The Lives and Times of Aurélie Picard and Isabelle Eberhardt* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1987).

[13] See Khalid Bekkaoui, *Fassi Merchants Come to Manchester: Border Crossings and Construction of Diaspora Consciousness* (Fez: Moroccan Cultural Studies Centre, 2016), p. 64.

[14] On this marriage, see Layachi El Habbouch, "Moroccan Acrobats in Britain: Oriental Curiosity and Ethnic Exhibition," *Comparative Drama*, 45: 4 (2011), pp. 381-415 and Bekkaoui, *Fassi Merchants Come to Manchester*, pp. 67-70.

[15] See *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 9 September, 1928. For an insightful discussion of interracial romance between Moroccans and foreign women in America, see Lhouince Simour, "The Sexually Enthralling Other: Oriental Weddings in Performance and American Erotics of the Brown Threat," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 17: 3 (2012), pp. 389-408.

[16] See Bekkaoui, *Fassi Merchants Come to Manchester*.

[17] Pauline de Mazières, *Histoires de Russes au Maroc: Fragment III. Madame Djabli* (Tanger: Edition Khbar Bladna, 2011), p. 15.

[18] Figures 1, 2, and 3 are sourced from Pauline de Mazières, *Histoires de Russes au Maroc: Fragment III. Madame Djabli*. I must express my thanks to the author for publishing such valuable photos and to the family of Djebli El Aydouni for providing them.

[19] Ibid, pp. 15-16.

[20] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni," p. 1390.

[21] Ibid., p. 1391.

[22] His address of "43, Rue de la République" occurs in many land ownership deeds.

[23] "Christianisme au Maroc," https://travelbycar.ru/fr/marokko/pravoslavnyj-hram-marokko.

[24] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni," p. 1391.

[25] His name was Mohamed Alexis-Lola. It was reported that he was assassinated by the French army in 1943. See Mazières, *Histoires de Russes au Maroc*, p. 27.

[26] Maryem completed her musical studies in France at the Conservatory of Paris. A newspaper comments on her performance: "Miss Djebli El Aydouni, who is not of our race, has shown how well she has perfectly understood and assimilated the genius of classical European music. Her playing is delicate, fine, and fast... no doubt in the near future, the doors of a bright future will open before her," *Maroc-matin*, 28 January 1948.

[27] Source: *Ce Soir*, 15 August, 1950.

[28] See Pauline de Mazières, *Histoires de Russes au Maroc*, pp. 30-31.

[29] Source : https://expositions-virtuelles.citedelarchitecture.fr/maslow/02-06-DOC18.html

[30] Gilles Lafuente, *La Politique Berbère de la France et le Nationalisme Marocain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p. 248.

[31] *Le Temps Colonial*, 2 May 1931. The same is announced in the *Paris-midi* newspaper on 5 January 1931, and 1 May 1931.

[32] *Le Midi Socialiste*, 31 July, 1931.

[33] *Le Midi Socialiste*, 25 July, 1931.

[34] *Le Populaire*, 1 February 1932.

[35] *Le Midi Socialiste*, 25 July, 1931.

[36] Michael Pym, "The Franco-Muslim Position with Special Reference to the North African Dependencies," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. XX (October, 1933) Part IV, p. 625.

[37]See Michael Pym, "The Franco-Muslim Position with Special Reference to the North African Dependencies" and Lafuente, *La Politique Berbère de la France et le Nationalisme Marocain*.

[38] Mohamed Ḥassan Ouazzani, *Combats d'un Nationaliste Marocain* (Fez: Fondation Mohamed Hassan Ouazzani, 1989), vol. 1, p. 97.

[39] *Le Populaire*, 30 December, 1931.

[40] Ouazzani, *Combats d'un Nationaliste Marocain*, vol. 1, p. 97.

[41] Quoted in Ouazzani, *Combats d'un nationaliste marocain* , vol. 1, p. 319.

[42] In an article entitled, "'The Longuet's' Und Sohn and the Campaign Against France," *L'Ami du Peuple* newspaper writes that "At a time when France sheds the blood of its soldiers to establish Peace and Civilization in the Cherifian Empire, some wretched scoundrels from the sinister International Red gang are stabbing her in the back." It accuses the Longuets of coming to Fez "to bring the good revolutionary word to the Holy City." The *Maghreb* is called subversive, whose mission is to preach rebellious propaganda to the naïve and ignorant natives, urging Paul-Boncour, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, to ban the *Maghreb*, describing it as "the poison carrier of these new serpents in the palm trees, whose poison seeps into the furthest of sites of dissidence." *L'Ami du peuple*, 4 May, 1933. See more attacks in *L'Action française*, 7 August, 1932, *L'Ami du peuple*, 17 April, 1933, and *L'Écho de Paris*, 15 January, 1934. It must be mentioned that the Makhzen, too, protested against the *Maghreb*, urging the Resident General for its ban. See Lafuente, *La Politique Berbère de la France et le Nationalisme Marocain*, pp. 254-255.

[43] Quoted in Ouazzani, *Combats d'un nationaliste marocain*, vol. 1, p. 320.

[44] Ibid., p. 97.

[45] *L'Ami du peuple*, 4 May, 1933.

[46] "Mémoires de Moulay Ahmed Djebli El Aydouni," p. 1391.

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