

The Impact of Conscription on Tunisians during World War II on the Spread of National Awareness (1939-1945)

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Abstract:

World War II had a direct impact on Tunisians for several reasons, including its important strategic location and the fact that it was under French protection, one of the parties to the conflict. The latter exploited its material and human resources by conscripting them into the French army and sending them to various fronts. The conscription of Tunisians contributed to their mixing with various conscripts from French colonies, exchanging national ideas. National movement activists took advantage of the current situation to promote their anti-conscription propaganda against Tunisians in a war that did not concern them. The conscripts imbued with national ideas spread propaganda that played a role in raising national liberation awareness among the soldiers, leading to instances of desertion and rebellion against the French policy of discrimination between French and Tunisian soldiers in ranks, salaries, and places of service..

Keywords: World War II, conscription, national struggle, Tunisian Constitutional Party, Habib Bourguiba.

Introduction:

Europe witnessed, during the first half of the twentieth century, a conflict that turned it into a battleground, extending to the surrounding geographical area of the western Mediterranean and echoing to the southern region. It had a direct impact on the Maghreb region in general and Tunisia in particular, whose geographical area became a battlefield due to its important strategic location, making it susceptible to external transformations and the ambitions of the Italian fascist regime, supported by the German ally, to impose control over it. Tunisia experienced, during the period from 1939 to 1945, the dominance of both the Axis and the Allies. Beginning with the establishment of the pro-German Vichy government taking control after the fall of Paris in June 1940, and then the Free French government that extended its influence over Tunisia after the Anglo-American landing in North Africa on November 8, 1942. During both phases, successive French governments sought to spread their propaganda, utilizing various means to attract Tunisian youth to enlist in the French army.

The aim of the research is to inform those interested in studying Tunisian history about the impact of compulsory conscription of Tunisian youth into the French army, especially during World War II, on national consciousness. We will focus on narrating and analyzing historical events so that the reader can understand the intended goal. Based on this, we pose the following question:

- What is the extent of the impact of compulsory conscription of Tunisians during the French protectorate on the spread of national liberation awareness during World War II?

1. The evolution of the conscription process for Tunisians during the French protectorate (1882-1945):

A- The roots of compulsory conscription in Tunisia (1882-1920):

Military service by Tunisians is not linked to the outbreak of World War II and the colonial phenomenon, but dates back to the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. In 1858, the Bey commissioned a committee to draft a military service law, which was announced on February 7, 1860. The law was a desire of the Bey for the independence of the Tunisian eyalet from the Ottoman Empire.

¹With the imposition of the protectorate on Tunisia, General Forgemol, the commander of the protectorate forces, proposed to continue the previous military service law while reducing the service period by four years.²

This was a commitment to the Treaty of Bardo, which stipulated respect for the laws. The law represented a suitable ground for conscripting Tunisians living in rural areas and provided a ready license for conscription, merely keeping the 1860 law as a reference while gradually changing it to serve its interests without altering the content. Thus, successive high orders aimed at expanding conscription began with the order of June 6, 1883 (census of the population between 18 and 32 years), the order of June 8, 1886 (which set the service period to two years), the order of November 1, 1891, the order of March 3, 1893, the order of October 14, 1894, the order of September 11, 1895, and the order of September 26, 1899, which set the military service period to three years while the soldier remained under military authority for seven years.³

With the dawn of the twentieth century, the recruitment process evolved through the issuance of several laws that increased the regulation of recruitment through orders, including:

Order of June 13, 1911, which defined the conditions of military service for Tunisian subjects of Algerian origin.

Order of April 10, 1914, which allowed for the extension of service in the French legions from 3 to 5 years.⁴

The order of June 19, 1914, also included Tripolitarians coming from Libya in the recruitment process after an agreement with the Italians.⁵

It can be concluded that these decrees and laws issued by the protectorate authorities represented an effective step to organize the recruitment of Tunisians in service of their interests. Concurrently, with the outbreak of World War I, numerous military orders were issued that formed an effective means to organize the recruitment of Tunisians. Through Order 09/08/1914 and Order 12/09/1914, the method for submitting compensation requests and the days for civil conscription were defined, and Tunisian soldiers whose service had ended were forced to remain in service until the end of the war.⁶

¹ Ben Belghith Al-Shibani, the Tunisian army during the reign of Muhammad Al-Siddiq Bey (1859-1882), 1st edition, Dar Naha, Sfax, 2002, p. 81.

² Fathi Al-Aidi, the colonial army and the local community in Tunisia (1911-1943), 1st edition, Publications of the Higher Institute for the History of the National Movement, Tunis, 2011, pp. 224-225.

³ Ben Belghith Al-Shibani, insights into military history in Tunisia (1837-1917), 1st edition, Dar Naha for Printing, Sfax, 2004, p. 160.

⁴ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 229. Same, p. 231.

⁵ Al-Ajili Al-Talili, insights into the life of Muhammad Al-Sharif Al-Tijani and the conditions of locals in Tunisia during the first third of the twentieth century, Maghreb Historical Journal, No. 55, 1989, p. 146.

⁶ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 321.

The number of recruited Tunisians began to rise starting in 1912, reaching 3,600 recruits in that same year, coinciding with two significant events: the Italian control over Libya and the imposition of the protectorate over Morocco, which formed convincing reasons to increase the recruitment process in all French colonies in an effort to confront the dangers in southern Tunisia and to form military battalions and auxiliary units to enforce the protectorate over Morocco.¹

World War I also contributed to the increase in the number of recruits, with the number of recruits in 1914 reaching 4,212. This was due to the issuance of the decree on August 14, 1914, which allowed Tunisian youth to join the army for the duration of the war, provided they had no criminal record. The decree granted amnesty to Tunisian soldiers who had deserted, on the condition that they return to their military units.² In April 1915, the number of Tunisian recruits reached 26,797, with some sent to Morocco and the rest distributed among military units such as the Bey's Guard, the 4th and 8th regiments, while the remainder was sent to the French fronts.

It can be concluded that the contribution of the Tunisian eyalet to the war effort during World War I was significant, despite its modesty compared to other North African countries (12% of volunteers), where the Algerian contribution was 254,000 soldiers and Morocco 69,000 recruits, according to the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was explained by the desire of Tunisians to emigrate as laborers instead of enlisting in the French army. As for comparing the number of recruits to the population, it can be said that the contribution of Tunisians to the war was high (3.9%) compared to Algeria (3.5%) and Morocco (1%), and France considered it a form of loyalty to it.³

B- Recruitment during the interwar period (1920-1939)

The recruitment process continued during the interwar period, with a large number of Tunisian soldiers sent to Morocco between 1921 and 1925 to suppress the Rif rebellion, and other elements directed to the Levant (Syria) between 1919 and 1925, contributing to quelling some movements such as the Druze uprising (July 1925). The number of Tunisian recruits in 1925 reached 4,200 and eventually rose to 7,000 soldiers.⁴

The recruitment process developed during the 1930s, witnessing an increase in the pace of mobilization, as illustrated in the following table:

Table No. (05): The evolution of the recruitment process between (1930-1939)⁵

Year	Number of recruits
1930	6000
1931	6000
1932	4353
1933	4864
1934	5481
1935	4864

¹ Al-Zahra 17/08/1914.

² Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 232.

³ Same, p. 248.

⁴ same, p. 231.

⁵ ISHMN, SHAT, Coil (s23), Carton (C2N243), D2, Document 309, Recruitment distribution prepared in North Africa, 07/03/1939.

1936	5639
1937	4551
1938	4128
1939	5746

Reference: Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 232.

What can be inferred from the table is that the number of Tunisian recruits during the 1930s experienced fluctuations and ranged between (6000 recruits and 4128 recruits), who were mobilized to direct them to various fronts with conflicts in the French colonies such as popular uprisings and the wars that France was waging abroad. Additionally, the recruitment of Tunisians in the period following World War I led the French army to forgo recruiting large numbers of Tunisians and directed its efforts to push them to work in farms and factories. The number of soldiers in April 1939 in Tunisia reached (80,200 soldiers), including (24,600 French soldiers) and (55,600 local Tunisian soldiers). France's goal in increasing the number of Tunisian recruits was to confront the Italian threat coming from the south (Libya). Recruitment and military presence in Tunisia were linked to the distribution of the Italian community, and to form a unified defensive system across North Africa, which of course would only be achieved by supporting the recruitment of local youth to defend the French colonies from the Italian ambitions coming from Libya.¹

Due to the policy adopted by the protectorate authorities in the field of recruitment, the Free Constitutional Party worked to spread its propaganda, which contributed to the decline of the image of the French army. Of course, the army's intelligence became aware of this after some copies of the constitutional newspapers that were distributed in some circles in October 1923 leaked. During the Rif War in Morocco (1925), most constitutionalists opposed the recruitment of Tunisians to fight their brothers and contributed to propaganda that played a role in limiting the refusal of some recruits to participate in suppressing the revolution of Abdelkrim El Khattabi and the flight of some of them. This was expressed by Rja Al-Taher Al-Haddad to Mohieddine Qali, a member of the executive committee of the Free Constitutional Party, on May 7, 1925, in which he confirmed that it was the duty of Tunisians to refuse to serve in the ranks of the French army in Morocco.²

The request submitted by Tahar Haddad clarifies the position of the Free Constitutional Party. The party worked to exploit the Rif War to criticize the discriminatory French policy within the French army, which had an impact on Tunisian conscripts. Tunisian propaganda increased in the 1930s, especially after the exile of political leaders in the south (Bordj Loufouf - Ramada), where Chadhli Khairallah played a role through his propaganda tours in the military region (southern Tunisia) in January 1935, which resulted in manifestations of rebellion such as the mutiny of the nationalist brigade in Medenine (March 1935) and their reluctance to join their units.³

The constitutional activity raised fears within the French administration. Officer Lafon stated: "... Constitutional propaganda has spread within the military region in southern Tunisia secretly... It aims to undermine the foundations of our authority." From the officer's statement, the extent of the

¹ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 408.

² Daif Allah Muhammad, Tunisian soil from submission to rejection, the example of Nafzawa (1881-1956), Maghreb Historical Journal, No. 79-80, 1995, 537.

³ Same, p 539.

propaganda practiced by the Constitutional Party in the southern region and its significant impact on the population and conscripts in the French army is evident, posing a danger to the French presence in the area.¹

In parallel with the constitutional activity in southern Tunisia, rural areas in the northwest witnessed the formation of cells for the Constitutional Party. In 1936, three branches were established in Tabarka, Ain Draham, and Fernana.² Some activists in the new Constitutional Party, such as Issa Al-Sakhri, managed to hold a meeting in the area on 27 March 1938, in Souk Al-Arba, encouraging the population to engage in civil disobedience and refrain from joining the French army. Both Youssef Al-Rouisi and Suleiman Ben Suleiman held a meeting in Fernana on April 3, 1938.³

In general, we conclude that the constitutionalists' propaganda against conscription served as a means to incite many Tunisians against the process of conscription and volunteering in the French army, leading many of them to refrain from joining the army and others to flee, which affected the conscription process and contributed to France changing its policy towards Tunisian conscripts by introducing incentive bonuses and brutally confronting the events of April 1938, as well as arresting the Tunisian leaders promoting the inciting propaganda for conscription.

As for the stance of the Tunisian people, it appeared to be varied regarding the conscription process due to their lack of awareness and the absence of comprehensive political framing, especially during the 1920s. Two positions emerged: the first expressed loyalty to France and its army during World War I, where the newspaper *Al-Zahra* stated: "The subscription for aid to the wounded in money and offerings continues to flow; the people, regardless of their social status, from the wealthy to the middle class and even the poor farmers, have contributed to the aid, and had it not been for this year's appeal, the aid funds would have reached significant amounts. The generality of Tunisians, regardless of their classes, feel the strong bond that ties their fate to that of France, and therefore they sincerely wish for them a resounding victory and a final triumph."⁴

However, the second position expressed opposition to military presence and rejected the participation of Tunisians in its wars through various means, including the migration of tribes from the far south to Tripoli and joining the resistance movement, in addition to the growing phenomenon of Tunisians fleeing conscription and their refusal to join the French army.

The first position represented the affluent families (the merchants) who aligned their stance with the leaders and the sheikhs of the religious orders, due to the social and economic ties they had with them. The second position was influenced by the propaganda of the Islamic university and the idea of jihad against the foreign powers controlling the country, similar to the stance of the poor families opposing the French protectorate in the country. As awareness increased among the locals, they began to view joining the army under the bey or the French protectorate forces as something that did not serve their interests, but rather as an intrusion aimed at protecting colonial projects and imposing dominance.⁵

¹ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 410.

² Al-Hilali Abdul Hamid, *History of the Jendouba region (1981-1956) the relationship of the national movement with the countryside*, PhD thesis in history, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Tunisia, 2000/2001, pp. 211-212.

³ *Al-Zahra* 07/04/1938.

⁴ *Al-Zahra* 18/09/1914.

⁵ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 384.

Moreover, Tunisia was subjected to a wave of fascist and Nazi propaganda, especially during the 1930s with the onset of World War II, utilizing various means such as the Bari radio station and establishing numerous propaganda centers in Bizerte, Béja, Tobruk, Sousse, and Monastir. The fascist propaganda focused on its relationship with Arab Muslims and its efforts to assist them in eliminating French control, while praising the Italian army and its strength, and highlighting the weakness of the French army and its discriminatory practices against Tunisian conscripts. To ensure the success of its propaganda, it emphasized the use of verses from the Holy Quran.¹

Regardless of the circumstances, the goal of Italian and German propaganda targeting the youth in Tunisia was to incite against the enlistment of Tunisians in the French army, manifesting in various forms including incitement to rebellion and disobedience, and changing the image of France from that of a strong state in the eyes of the locals to a weak state that could be defeated, thereby complicating the recruitment process for the French army.²

What can be concluded is that the recruitment policy implemented by the French protectorate authorities during the interwar period was highly effective despite the opposing propaganda from the leaders of the Tunisian national movement (the constitutionalists) and the axis, and the number of recruits presented in the table proves this. The economic and social conditions, along with the laws imposed on Tunisian youth, contributed to reducing the impact of the aforementioned factors on the recruitment process, and the Tunisian recruits participated in many battles fought by the French protectorate forces.

C- Tunisian recruits during World War II (1939-1945)

Tunisia during this phase faced Italian threats in the south, despite the signing of the (San Remo) agreement on 14/09/1939 with the French government to ensure Italian neutrality. France intensified its military presence in Tunisia and divided the country into two fronts: the northern front led by General Bessière and the southern front led by General Poupinel, increasing the number of military divisions along the dangerous Mareth line on the Libyan border. This threat from the south and the conditions of World War II contributed to an increase in the number of Tunisian recruits.³

Tunisia provided 5 military battalions during World War II, with the fourth battalion (of the tirailleurs) contributing during the military campaign in Tunisia. Tunisian soldiers fought in many battles against Rommel's army, including the battle of Belvedere, and General Juin praised the role of Tunisian soldiers in the battle, stating: "We cannot overestimate the effort of the fourth battalion of Tunisian tirailleurs at any cost during the battle of Belvedere." General de Gaulle said: "France cannot forget the effort made by Tunisians during the long war .". The difficult living conditions of Tunisian youth contributed to their enlistment alongside France, fleeing from poverty and deprivation, and seeking to improve their living conditions amid the war and scarcity of job opportunities.⁴

¹ Khaled Ahmed, *Secrets Documents of the 2nd Bureau Tunisia Maghreb under the pre-war context (1937-1940)*, Ed STD, Tunis, 1983, pp. 557-558.

² The Tripoli Radio Station, established on 29/12/1938, embodied this through radio programs directed in Arabic and colloquial language, criticizing conscription and forcing Tunisian youth to volunteer in the legions directed towards the European fronts, and incited jihad and defense of Islam. The station indicated in other programs directed at Tunisians that this war does not concern them and they should join the Axis forces to achieve freedom and independence. See: Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, p. 418.

³ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, pp. 150-151.

⁴ Same, p. 248.

Hamid Touati mentioned in his book (*Immigration Maghrébine et activités politiques en France de la 1ère G.M a la veille de fronts populaire*): "I do not believe that the participation of Tunisians in the war on the side of the Allies can be explained by sacrifices for democracy and freedom, as Tunisians are unaware of the meanings of these slogans, despite the propaganda plans and counter-propaganda that were imposed on the country. What proves this is the lack of enthusiasm among the youth for conscription unless social conditions necessitated it; most Tunisians sought to join the ranks of workers to avoid risks. This led the French authorities to increase compensation and grants from 1000 francs in 1914 to 2000 francs in the year.1944 " ¹

The number of Tunisian recruits evolved from the beginning of World War II to its end as follows:

Table No. (06): Development of the Number of Tunisian Recruits During World War II (1939-1945)

Year	Number of recruits
1939	5746
1940	About 15 thousand
1941	//
1942	//
1943	//
1944	2000
1945	//

Reference: Fathi Al-Aidi, previous reference, p. 231.

We observe from the table a significant increase in the number of recruits between the years (1940-1943) to the extent that the provided statistics were not in specific numbers, which indicates the large number of recruits, and the reason is that the war was at its peak both in North Africa and Europe. North Africa witnessed fierce battles between the Allies and the Axis, the most important of which was the battle to regain control of Tunisia after it fell under Axis influence. After that, the battles moved to Europe, where the Allies utilized recruits from the French colonies in general and Tunisians in particular to liberate Europe from Axis forces, and the motivations that led Tunisian youth to join the French army varied.²

Some Tunisians considered the army as the institution through which they would realize their dreams of rising to the highest positions.³ Regardless of the circumstances, the escape from the economic and social reality established by France due to the protectorate system and the tyranny of the leaders, along with the colonial policy that was based on land plundering and granting it to settlers, is considered the main motivation behind the enlistment and volunteering of Tunisians in the French army.

¹ Hamed – Taouti M'Barka, *Maghreb Immigration and Political Activities in France from World War I to the Eve of the Popular Front*, pub F.S.H.S, Tunis, 1999, p. 27.

² One of the motivations for Tunisian youth to volunteer in the French army during World War II was the economic aspect; as agricultural yields were weak, the number of unemployed increased, leading to a rise in the number of young Tunisian volunteers in the French army. This, along with Tunisia's connection to the colonial reality and the negative repercussions on the lives of Tunisians, who found no other way but to enlist in the army to improve their conditions. See: Fathi Al-Aidi, previous reference, pp. 231-232.

³ Al-Hilali Abd al-Hamid, the previous reference, pp. 236-237.

From the above, we conclude that the young Tunisian found in the French army a refuge to ensure his livelihood, which led him to enter a form of voluntary slavery due to the closure of all paths before him. This was a positive matter for France in general, as evidenced by the letters sent by Tunisian recruits to their families, which allowed researchers to identify their positions towards the military institution, raised their daily problems, and demonstrated their loyalty to the protectorate system.¹

In a letter from one of the Tunisians from the fourth battalion (of the tirailleurs), he says: "... When I arrived at the hospital, I was received by the staff as a family would welcome their son. They dressed me in soft, clean clothes, washed my body, and gently bandaged my wounds. I had never seen anything like it in my life. These charitable women are like angels; they were the reason I became well acquainted with the French spirit and recognized its virtues and kindness. My stay here has increased my love for the great French homeland... and I will fight for this homeland like I would for my own until the last drop of my blood to drive out the vile Germans...".

What can be inferred from this message is that the recruit's admiration for France due to the treatment he received in the hospital and his singing of the love for the French homeland did not prevent him from separating it from his original homeland. However, the treatment the recruit received improved his view of France and its institutions. It can be said that the way of dealing falls within the realm of French counter-propaganda, which relied on attracting the largest number of Tunisian youth for recruitment, by establishing a different image of France's treatment of Tunisian recruits compared to what German propaganda shows.²

With the landing of Allied forces in Algeria and Morocco on November 8, 1942, the Vichy government felt the danger that had become present in the remaining colony in North Africa (Tunisia). Military units landed in the Al-Aouina airport on November 9, 1942, and the Fifth Armored Division was formed in the southeastern region, in cooperation with the French soldiers belonging to the Vichy government. It is worth noting that Tunisians had previously heard about the retreat of the French army in the face of the German advance, as Paris fell on June 10, 1940, and how three-quarters of Tunisian territory came under German control, with many Tunisians sympathizing with Germany, believing that the salvation of Tunisia from colonialism would come with Hitler's victory.

Therefore, the German forces were welcomed in all the areas they entered, and they found a people eager to assist them, applying the saying "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Krou's testimony states the following: "... the German forces entered Gafsa and presented us with images that were perhaps expressive, as they were repeated in many Tunisian cities and villages. I was among those who welcomed the German paratroopers upon their arrival at the city entrance, and I welcomed them on November 13, 1942. The teenagers eagerly rushed to lead those soldiers towards the French civil observation...."

What can be inferred from the testimony of Abu al-Qasim Muhammad is that, despite the propaganda directed by France to change the opinions of Tunisians towards it, the strong aversion of Tunisians to France was significant due to its previous colonial policies, which is reflected in the way

¹ Fathi al-Aidi, the previous reference, pp. 236-237.

² Despite the war effort made by the Tunisians, France did not respond with concessions in favor of the Tunisians, despite its acknowledgment of the role of its colonies in its wars. This was evident from the French public opinion that clung to the colonies, considering them a factor in the victory of the Allies. The Minister of Colonies (Rony Blavand) expressed this by saying: "France is aware that it has no value without the empire." See: the same source, p. 251.

they received the Germans.¹ Many Tunisians volunteered to work with the Germans as informants and spies by tracking the movements of the French and the Jews supporting the Allies, and many Tunisians expressed their desire to volunteer in the Tunisian legions according to official French reports.²

In the minutes of a session dated May 26, 1943, it was confirmed that a large number of reserve soldiers wore German military uniforms after fleeing from the call of Sheikh (Qudaa) under the leadership of Bajja.³ Additionally, the local militia of Fort-Saint in the southern military region fled en masse with their weapons, with some of them working with the Italians by guiding them during their attack on the regional center on December 28, 1942. Others volunteered with the Germans, including 15 recruits who served as guards in Jebel Bessalem to monitor the advance of the English. Other French reports indicated a strong desire among the residents of the military territory (specifically in Nefraza and Douz) to support the Germans, as indicated by a report from Gay, the head of the Kebili Douz battalion, dated April 10, 1943, which mentioned the involvement of many locals in the German military units.⁴

The previous French policy in Tunisia served as an incentive for their support of the Axis forces, and they bet on their ability to liberate Tunisia. The Germans formed several military units that included Tunisians, such as the Liberating Unit (L'unité Libératrice) based in Bouficha, where the largest training camps were established. The Germans formed German-Arab military teams with several branches, including the German-Arab training branch that included 800 Arab soldiers.⁵

During the same period, the African Battalion (Africaine phalange) was formed, which included volunteer elements from the French and Moroccans, directing its actions against the French military and the Anglo-Saxon forces stationed in Tunisia. Out of a total of 405 soldiers in the battalion, 277 were Tunisian volunteers. The battalion participated in many battles against the Allies, and in order to attract a larger number of Tunisian volunteers, a Tunisian battalion was branched off (March 1943) along with another Algerian battalion, primarily consisting of war prisoners.

In a letter addressed by Sheikh Shakib Arslan to Habib Bourguiba on February 21, 1943, while he was in Rome, and after recalling the oppression faced by Tunisian activists from the Constitutional Party since 1938 and the imprisonment of thousands of its men, the letter stated: (... It is no secret that the enemy has amassed 500,000 soldiers in Tunisia, as acknowledged by Churchill himself, and I believe this number does not include the British army coming from Tripoli, which is no less than 130,000 soldiers. Furthermore, the French are continuing to recruit tens of thousands from the people of Algeria and Morocco. The force facing the Axis armies is immense... and the longer the defense of Tunisia lasts and the enemy's inability to expel the Axis forces becomes apparent, thousands of fighters will join its ranks, not only from Tunisia but also from Algeria. Newspapers have reported the entry of 50,000 Algerians into Tunisia, organized into the Axis armies... Given that General

¹ Al-Zahra 23/09/1940.

² A.N.T, M.N, C3,D9, Police report from Hammamet to the chief commissioner of the 2nd region dated 25/05/1943.

³ A.N.T, M.N, C3, D9, Gendarmerie report dated 26/05/1943.

⁴ Al-As'ad al-Ghriani, Axis and Allies propaganda policy towards Tunisia (November 1938 to 1940), thesis for obtaining a diploma in advanced studies, Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Manouba, Tunisia, academic year 2004-2005, pp. 141-142.

⁵ Chérif Faycal, Tunisia in World War II (impacts and attitudes April 1938 – May 1943), doctoral thesis, University of Paris (Sorbonne), 2001, pp. 354-357.

Giraud and Mr. Pérouton are friends of Tunisia and friends of Islam... they are diligent in recruiting tens of thousands of Muslims to defend France...¹

Through the message, we can see the extent of the contribution of recruits from North Africa in the ongoing war in North Africa, and Sheikh Shakib Arslan's disclosure of the number of volunteers from North Africa indicates the degree of influence that Axis propaganda had on Muslim youth. Regardless of the circumstances, the sympathy of Tunisians for Axis forces (Italians² - Germans), especially the Germans, explains the failure of national political action to reach a stage that could provide an alternative to the current situation in Tunisia. Hitler remained, in their view, the savior from French domination, which leads us to the lack of conviction among the Tunisian popular classes regarding the effectiveness of party political action, and military power became, in the popular perspective, the determinant of the victor and the vanquished. Some supporters of the Germans saw their enlistment in the German army not as loyalty to them but as a reaction against the practices of the French colonial authorities.³

In conclusion, it can be said that the recruitment process in Tunisia witnessed a divergence of positions within Tunisian society between those who supported France and those who backed the Axis forces (Italy - Germany), especially the Germans. Some Tunisian groups considered the Axis powers a danger to the country and supported France in its war against the Germans by enlisting as volunteers in its army, while others enlisted out of a desire to improve their economic and social conditions. As for the deprived popular classes during the time of French control, they viewed the German presence as a way out of their miserable situation and an opportunity for revenge against their exploiters, especially the group of leaders and sheikhs who aligned with the French colonial administration.

2.The contribution of Tunisian recruitment to the spread of national awareness:

Tunisians have formed two opposing positions on recruitment: supporters and opponents. The supportive side mainly included Tunisians who had benefited from French policy in previous stages and had no choice but to affirm their support for France in its war, regardless of the consequences. Additionally, the working classes, who lived in difficult living conditions, considered the recruitment process a way to escape from the miserable economic and social situations. On the other hand, the opposing side consisted of some political and intellectual classes who viewed the war as something that did not concern them and did not want Tunisians to become fuel for it. The rejection responses were manifested through fleeing from service or surrendering to the Germans and Italians at the front lines.⁴

¹ For more details, see: (See Appendix No. 01)

A.N.T, M.N, C65,D1, letter from Chakib Arslan to Mr. Habib Bourguiba, dated 23/02/1943.

² Despite the positive attitudes of the locals and their sympathy for the Germans, this does not hide their hostility towards the Italians, which was evident through incidents such as those that occurred between the Marazig and the Italian soldiers in early 1943 due to the looting carried out by the Italians and their intimidation of the locals by brandishing weapons in their faces, as well as the historical animosity between Tunisians and Italians, especially in the context of labor. The situation was further exacerbated by Italy's refusal to grant Tunisia independence on the grounds that the time was not right for it. For more, see: Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, pp. 388-389.

³ Adnan Mansar, on the issue of Tunisian sympathy for the Axis during World War II, *Rawaafid Magazine*, No. 3, 1997, pp. 93-94.

⁴ Al-Asaad Al-Ghrayani, the previous reference, pp. 7-8.

What demonstrates the divergent positions of Tunisians regarding French policy is the conflicting opinions about the visit made by French President Édouard Daladier to Tunisia in January 1939. Some praised it while others were indifferent, as some saw it merely as a visit that brought nothing new to Tunisia, but rather aimed at protecting the influence of the French Empire from the fascist threat. Habib Thamer confirms in his book (*This is Tunisia*) that the Tunisian people seized the opportunity of the visit to show their dissatisfaction with France's actions against their country through demonstrations in (Bizerte, Bardo, Tunis, Sfax) and everywhere he went. The protectorate authorities responded by arresting hundreds of nationalists and imposing harsh sentences on them.¹

The position of the national movement was generally opposed to conscription, especially after the events that took place in Tunisia on April 8, 1938, and the subsequent arrests of leaders and activists of the national movement. Habib Bourguiba mentioned in his book (*Long Live Tunisia*): "At four o'clock in the morning on April 10, 1938, the French police stormed the homes of the leaders and some activists, gathered them in Bab Souika Square, and then threw them into the civil prison in Tunis, from where they were transferred to the military prison, including Habib Bourguiba, Mongi Slim, and Hedi's brother, and leader Habib Bourguiba..".²

Following the arrests of the leaders, the constitutional activists reorganized the struggle movement and resumed their activities by issuing leaflets and distributing them to the population, forming groups assigned the task of cutting telephone and electricity wires and preparing explosives against many activists. The situation continued in this manner until the Germans took control of Tunisia.³

By examining the conditions of the activists and leaders of the Tunisian national movement, we conclude that the reality of the relationship between them and the French protectorate administration did not show any understanding, which would reflect on the position of the leaders of the new constitutional party regarding the conscription of Tunisians into the French army, which they considered a mobilization of Tunisia's human resources to serve its colonial interests, especially since the positions of the protectorate administration were not lenient towards the leaders and activists of Tunisia.⁴

The constitutional party's propaganda worked to distort the image of the French army, and this period saw a mix between the politicians overseeing the propaganda and the Tunisian conscripts who had been discharged. An example of the response of some Tunisian conscripts is the French police's apprehension of conscript Mohamed Ben Khalifa Ben Mubarak, who was found in possession of a collection of leaflets calling for rebellion, revealing their connection to the new constitutional party.

The French army also experienced a state of mutiny similar to what happened in Kairouan on September 26, 1939, where a number of soldiers (150 soldiers) managed to escape and enter the city, attacking the city prison (near Bab al-Jalladin) and releasing all the prisoners. The events in Dkhil

¹ Habib Thamer, *This is Tunisia*, introduction by Rashid Idris, review and verification by Hamadi Al-Sahli, 1st ed., Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, 1988, p. 98.

² Ali Al-Zaydi, *the Zaytunis and their role in the Tunisian national movement (1904-1945)*, 1st ed., Dar Naha, Sfax, 2007, p. 491.

³ Among the activists were Bashir Zarq Al-Ayoun, Muhammad bin Amara, and Omar bin Hamida, and the activist Hussein Al-Treiki contributed to supplying them. The Resistance Committee was discovered in January 1940 after surveillance measures by the French intelligence, and the official in charge of Islamic affairs commented: "The police's interests in these last days of January were not limited to identifying the perpetrators of the acts of sabotage committed in Tunisia and its suburbs and arresting them, and those who caused the explosion at the Kasbah wall, but also to the authors of the statements directed to Berlin..." For more, see: Ali Al-Zaydi, the previous reference, p. 491.

⁴ Driss Rachid, *Reflection of a Struggle*, ISHMN, Tunis, 1996, p. 74.

(November 1940) involved the refusal of the locals to attend the Senegalese soldiers, supported by some Tunisian conscripts. The authorities attributed the reasons for the rebellion to the infiltration of constitutional propaganda among the conscripts, as it was noted that discharged soldiers with temporary permits mixed with some national elements who were conducting anti-French army propaganda, and the participation of Tunisians in the war on its side, which is explained by the anti-French army activities that Tunisia witnessed, coinciding with the return of many conscripts from the fronts and their interaction with the national elites calling for a boycott of military service.¹

General Barré mentions that the propaganda carried out by the constitutionalists contributed to the increase in the phenomenon of mutiny and desertion among conscripts, especially during World War II. However, most Tunisian conscripts who were on active fronts lacked opportunities to desert. Numerous letters circulated among the families of conscripts indicated the extent of Tunisians' aversion to conscription. In a letter sent by soldier Ammar Azouz to his uncle (Nabeul), he wrote: "... I was saddened to hear about your son Hassan's conscription... and since you are the head of a large family and a man of advanced age... (I advise you) to file a complaint with the civil inspector, and to make this complaint credible, let your hair grow long and wear dirty clothes, and make sure your appearance is pitiable when you meet him...".

Through the message, it is clear that the loyalty of Tunisians to the army was superficial, which refutes what the French administration promoted as a way to achieve dreams through advancement, gaining jobs, and improving the living conditions of Tunisians. A letter from one of the conscripts, Tiraour (Ahmed Ben Qaddour), from the Sidi Abd al-Qadir area in Kef to one of the saints, Sidi Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, accompanied by a postal order worth 76 francs, requests his intervention to free him from military service, and there are many examples that show the extent of the failure of the protectorate administration in establishing the loyalty of the conscripts.²

The Tunisian political elite relied on inciting Tunisians not to enlist during the mobilization, for example, the supervision of Sidi Sakhri, head of the Wednesday Market branch, over a meeting in Wadi Meliz on March 27, 1938, where he focused on studying a method to incite the population to civil disobedience and to refrain from enlisting in the French army.³ This confirms the constitutionalists' rejection of supporting the war effort, especially after France's defeat against the Germans and the changing image of the French army, which no longer represented a source of strength. Tunisian nationalists also sought to employ the conscripts to create confusion within the ranks of the French army and inside the barracks, in order to pressure the protectorate authorities to release political prisoners, as evidenced by one of the pamphlets distributed to Tunisian conscripts: "... we Tunisian soldiers ... do not care at all about the authority to which we are subjected, whether civil or military ... the arrest of political leaders will only increase our hatred for France ... we cannot rely on Tunisian soldiers unless our national demands are met"⁴

¹ Fathi Al-Aidi, the previous reference, pp. 346-347

² The Tunisian Dispatch 0704/1938

³ ISHMN, SHAT, series Tunisian Protectorate, B(R105), C(1717), D2, Report of the Chief of Security Interest to the Tunis Resident, 13/09/1939.

⁴ In the absence of nationalists during World War II, some were in prisons and others had emigrated, most of them to engage in activities abroad. The constitutionalists focused their efforts on reviving the people in various cities and emphasized secret work to avoid clashes with the protectorate authorities. The constitutional cells played a role in raising awareness among recruits through pamphlets or recruits who were enlisted in the army through their role in spreading national awareness among the conscripts. See: Rachid Idriss, *Memoirs (On the Path to the Republic)*, Vol. 1, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 2001, p. 68.

Through an in-depth study of the content of the publication, it becomes clear to us the extent of the impact of constitutional propaganda on Tunisian conscripts. It played a significant role in creating a group of conscripts imbued with national spirit and political awareness. Additionally, the interaction of Tunisian soldiers with conscripts from French colonies on various battlefronts in Europe during World War II contributed to the emergence of a political consciousness regarding the necessity of fighting for the liberation of their countries, due to the discrimination they experienced compared to French soldiers.¹

The protectorate authorities responded at the beginning of World War II with a series of measures, including the enactment of a set of laws that prohibited conscripts and their families from accessing or distributing constitutional or foreign propaganda pamphlets. They also banned the national press from writing articles opposing the French military presence and prohibited constitutionalists from holding propaganda meetings due to their impact on conscripts and incitement to rebellion and mutiny.²

However, these measures taken by the protectorate authorities were ineffective, as the communication between constitutional elements and temporarily discharged conscripts did not cease, and their propaganda campaigns continued among the conscripts. An example of this is the meetings that were held with Tunisian conscripts at the (Al-Akhlef) café on Al-Halfawiyin Street to raise their awareness and encourage them to spread constitutional propaganda among the conscripts to create a national consciousness that would make the Tunisians participating in France's wars more aware.³

It can be said that the contribution of Tunisians to World War II played a significant role in creating a group of nationalists opposing the French protectorate authorities. During this period, the propaganda of the new constitutional party and the communication of conscripts with soldiers from French colonies were of great importance in raising their awareness of their national role and clarifying the French motives behind their conscription. This thus formed the nucleus for the emergence of awareness among Tunisian conscripts, which would play a role in future national struggles, as evidenced by acts of desertion and rebellion within the Tunisian units assigned to serve the French army.

Conclusion:

From what we have previously mentioned about the participation of Tunisian youth in World War II and the impact of their contribution in raising national awareness, we conclude the following:

- The participation of Tunisians in World War II as recruits contributed to the formation of a national consciousness among them by observing the discrimination between them and the French soldiers.
- Through the activities of the Tunisian Constitutional Party's activists among the recruits, propaganda was formed that contributed to the emergence of national groups among the recruits.

¹ Among the laws enacted by the protectorate authorities was the decree of August 3, 1939, which imposed penalties against those who violated the publication of propaganda pamphlets (imprisonment - fines - exile and deportation). A decree issued on 05/09/1939 prohibited listening to broadcasts from foreign stations that harm national defense issues and imposed fines (100 and 1000 francs) against violators. The decree of 15/09/1939 prohibited any foreign radio activity in public places. See for each of:- Official Bulletin 07/09/1939.

-Same 28/05/1940.

² Driss Rachid , op-cit , p 484.

³ Driss Rachid , op-cit , p 485.

- The activists who were recruits in the French army had an effective contribution in communicating with the Tunisian and Moroccan soldiers, leading to discussions that produced national ideas emphasizing France's destructive role in the Maghreb countries, especially after the national movements in the Maghreb became more united than divided after World War II.

- The propositions of the Tunisian national movement were confirmed after their legitimate demands were rejected by the Allied forces and the French occupation authorities.

In general, World War II had a direct impact on Tunisians who were recruited in the French army, as the communication that brought together Tunisians and recruits from various French colonies facilitated the exchange of ideas that would play a significant role in shaping a new spirit of national struggle, especially after the communication that enabled Tunisians to know what was happening in the world.

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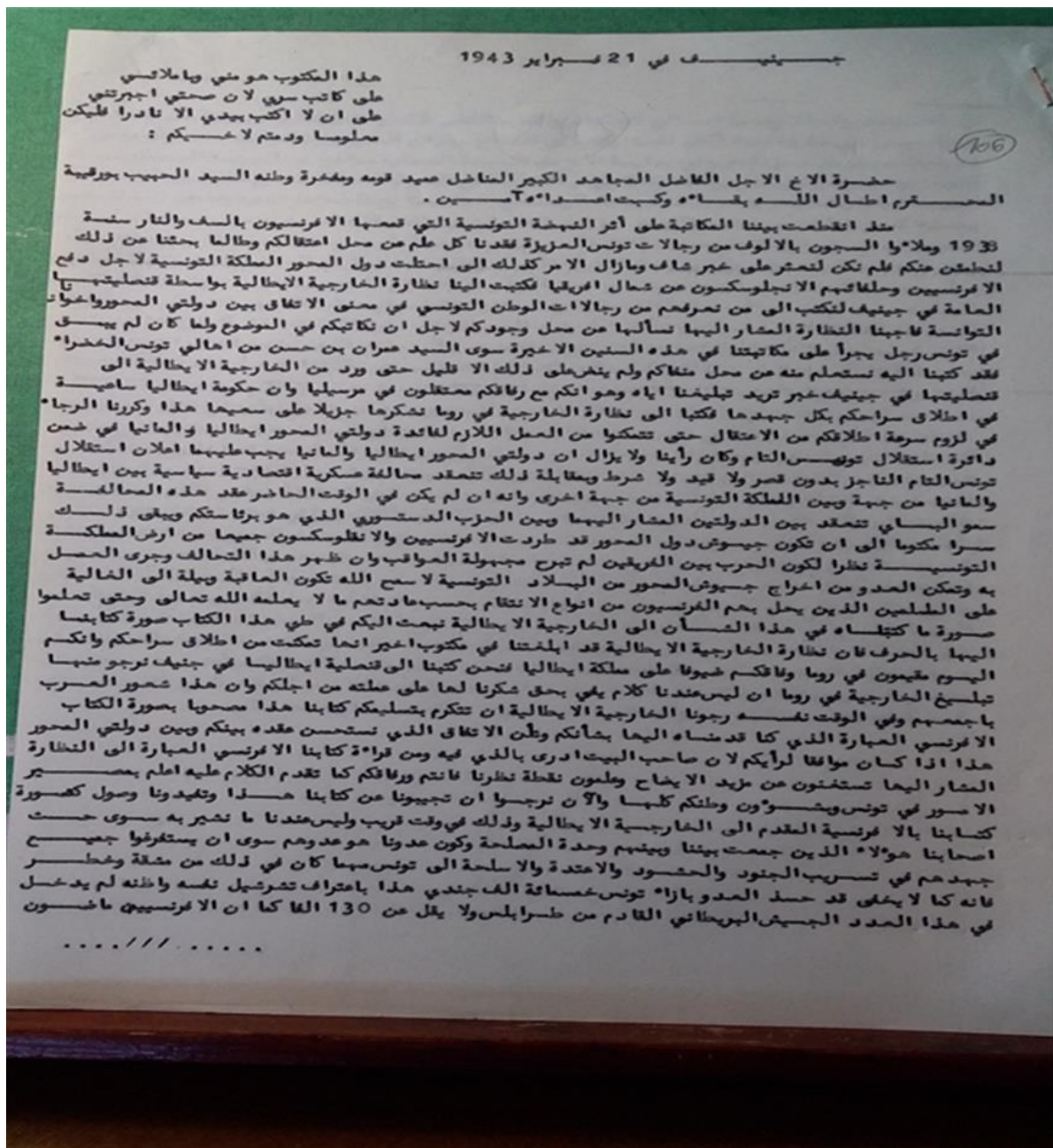
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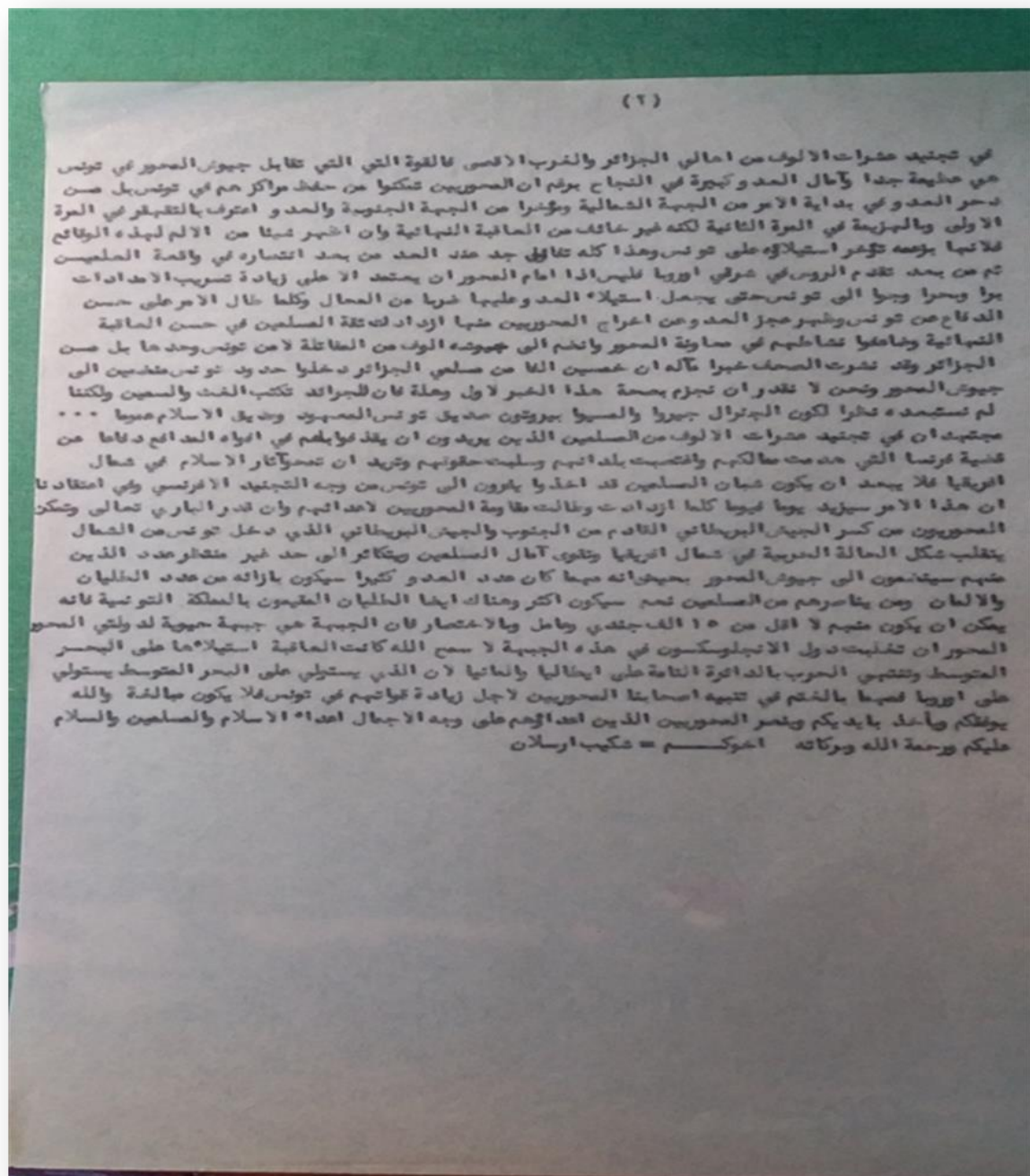
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Appendix No. 01: A letter from Sheikh Shakib Arslan to the freedom fighter Habib Bourguiba.



- A.N.T, M.N, C65,D1 ,lettre de Chakib Arslan a m. Habib Bourguiba, de 23/02/1943.