

Algerian National Identity: Constants and Variables in the Book "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" by Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili

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Abstract:

This study seeks to unveil the contours of Algerian national identity through an analytical reading of Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili's seminal work, "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present". The author offers a meticulous chronological examination of the various events and epochs that have marked Algeria's trajectory, particularly throughout its colonial experiences, while highlighting the profound transformations that permeated different aspects of life under occupation. Al-Mili adopts an analytical and critical approach in addressing the colonial policies targeting Algeria, thereby exposing their multifaceted strategies for entrenching domination—whether through direct military control, as exemplified by Roman and French colonialism, or through indirect forms of guardianship, as witnessed during the Ottoman period. These colonial patterns left an indelible mark on Algeria's cultural, intellectual, and political fabric, consequently plunging the country into a vortex of subjugation and hegemony. This historical reality inevitably raises several fundamental questions, chief among them: How did the impact of different colonial eras reverberate through the components of national identity? Furthermore, what was the nature of the heritage—both religious and linguistic—that crystallized in Algeria, shaped on one hand by successive occupations and, on the other, by the Arabo-Islamic conquest?

Keywords: Mubarak al-Mili, History of Algeria, Colonialism, Colonial Hegemony, National Identity.

1. Introduction:

Every nation possesses its own distinct history, which serves not only as a mirror reflecting its past but also as the very foundation upon which the contours of its present and future are constructed; moreover, it constitutes a primary source for affirming its identity and articulating its civilizational and human entity. Algerian national identity stands among those identities distinguished by their deep-rootedness in the depths of history, emerging from a profound interaction among three principal components: Islam, Arabism, and Amazighness. This intricate interplay formed a central axis in the discourse of Algerian intellectuals, particularly during the colonial period when the reformist elite endeavored to reconstruct national consciousness upon solid historical foundations.

Within this context, the work "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" by Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili emerges as one of the most prominent scholarly endeavors seeking to chronicle Algeria's history from an Islamic national perspective. Our focus in this study is specifically directed toward analyzing the second volume of this work, which addresses the phases of Islam's entrance into Algeria, the establishment of Islamic principalities, and the subsequent transformations of identity during this pivotal period. Al-Mili masterfully constructs a precise depiction of Algeria's metamorphosis from a space predominantly characterized by Christianity into a land where Islam and Arabism took root rapidly and profoundly, particularly within the Maghrebi Berber environment. This significant historical transformation has captivated the attention of numerous researchers, especially concerning the mechanisms through which Islam and Arabism managed to embed themselves within the Amazigh consciousness, permeating the very core of Maghrebi reality to such an extent that they became inseparable constituents of the Algerian identity.

1.1 Research Problem:

Building upon the foregoing discussion, this study addresses the following research problem: How is Algerian national identity represented in Mubarak al-Mili's book, "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present"? Moreover, to what extent did major historical transformations—such as the Islamic conquest and various forms of colonialism—influence the formation of consciousness regarding Algerian national identity?

2.1 Research Objectives:

This study aims to elucidate Mubarak al-Mili's vision of Algerian national identity in light of Islamic history, while also analyzing the nature of the relationship between Islam, Arabism, and Amazighness in shaping the national character. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the role this book played in stimulating national consciousness under French occupation.

3.1 Adopted Methodology:

This research employs a descriptive-analytical approach, which involves: first, describing the historical context within which al-Mili addressed the question of identity; second, analyzing the content of the second volume of his book; and third, tracing the mechanisms through which national identity is presented as conveyed by al-Mili through the historical events he documented. Additionally, certain elements of the historical method are utilized to interpret the circumstances and facts that influenced the construction of Algerian identity.

Primary Sources Consulted: These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" by Mubarak al-Mili.
- Issues and Studies in Modern Algerian History by Djamel Guenane.
- The Algerian National Movement 1900/1930 by Abou al-Qasim Saadallah.

2. The General Context of the Authorship of the Book "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present"

To fully comprehend the significance of al-Mili's historiographical project, it is essential first to situate his work within the broader historical and political landscape that shaped its conception and

execution; for the circumstances surrounding its authorship were as complex as the history it sought to chronicle, and understanding these conditions provides the necessary foundation for appreciating the book's profound impact on Algerian national consciousness.

2.1 The Historical and Political Circumstances Accompanying the Authorship of the Book:

The composition of "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" by the distinguished scholar Mubarak al-Mili took place within an exceptionally sensitive historical and political context, namely the period of French occupation of Algeria, with its first volume appearing in 1928, followed by the second volume four years later,¹ all while colonial hegemony persisted alongside its relentless attempts to erase the identity of the Algerian people; it is particularly significant that the book's authorship coincided with the centenary of the French occupation, an anniversary accompanied by organized campaigns designed to undermine the fundamental constants of the Algerian nation—its religion, language, and history—which naturally prompted the intellectual elites, foremost among them the reformist scholars, to respond through various means, the most prominent of which was undoubtedly national historiography.²

From this standpoint, the book constituted nothing less than an act of cultural resistance, keeping pace with the literary and intellectual authorship movement during the colonial era; it aimed fundamentally at confronting the distortive practices to which Algerian history had been subjected while simultaneously demonstrating this nation's profound temporal depth through its authentic civilizational, ethnic, and religious composition. Moreover, it emerged amidst a flourishing intellectual and literary activity that Algeria witnessed beginning in the 1920s, supported enthusiastically by the reformist movement, which made historical authorship one of its fundamental axes for confronting the French cultural project and rehabilitating national identity; it is worth noting here that al-Mili documented this work during a critical period when Algerian identity stood at a crossroads: between assimilation into foreign colonial culture on one hand, and a return to authentic roots within the embrace of the reformist project on the other—a circumstance that amplified both the book's significance and its historical necessity.

2.2 Al-Mili's Intellectual and Renaissance Motives:

Mubarak al-Mili's motives for authoring this book stemmed from a clearly defined intellectual and renaissance vision, centered fundamentally on reviving and defending Algerian national identity against colonial attempts at erasure; he sought through this work to establish the deep historical existence of Algerians, extending back through centuries past and reflecting a diverse civilizational accumulation whose features were embodied in Arabism, Islam, and Amazighness under the comprehensive banner of national unity.

In perfect harmony with the objectives of the reformist movement, al-Mili worked assiduously to awaken consciousness of national belonging through historiography, regarding it as a means to solidify the pillars of identity within souls, particularly among the young elite who had become enamored with Western culture and had consequently drifted away from reading history as a discipline that refines morals and sharpens intellect; as Abd al-Rahman Chibane perceptively observes in his book "Introduction to Al-Shihab": "It appears to us that al-Mili's book came precisely to fill a void in the national historical culture of Algerians, especially among educated youth who had neglected reading history as a science that returns to their morals through refinement and trains their minds in critical thinking".³

His endeavors were not merely a reaction to colonialism, however; rather, they constituted an integrated intellectual project aimed comprehensively at "reviving Islam through the Quran and Sunnah, reviving the Arabic language and its literature, and reviving Islamic history and the legacy of its leaders".⁴ Al-Mili was also particularly keen to affirm the Algerian people's belonging to a comprehensive identity that amalgamates Amazighness and Arabism within the framework of Islam, emphasizing repeatedly that defending this identity was not an intellectual luxury but rather an existential necessity to ensure the nation's continuity and survival; in this way, his book embodied a conscious call to reclaim the self and to construct a national consciousness rooted firmly in history, capable of confronting the civilizational and cultural challenges imposed by colonialism.

2.3 A Reading of the Book's Structure and General Contents:⁵

The second volume of "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" is divided into two principal sections:

- The Second Book: Concerning the Arab Era.
- The Third Book: Concerning the Berber Era.

This bipartite division reflects the author's meticulous attention to tracing the major historical transformations that Algeria witnessed, from the Arab conquest to the formation of local Berber entities; the Second Book comprises six chapters, in which the author addresses the beginnings of Arab entry into Ifriqiya and the establishment of early Islamic emirates and states, namely:

- On the Arab Conquest of Ifriqiya and the Establishment of Their Emirate There
- The Rustamid State
- The Aghlabid State
- The Fatimid State
- The Ubaydid State
- The Migration of the Banu Hilal to North Africa.

The Third Book, meanwhile, is dedicated exclusively to the Berber era, wherein the author examines the development of Berber tribes and political systems in Algeria, distributed across eight chapters encompassing:

- The Algerian Berber Tribes
- The Hammadid State
- The Almoravid State
- The Almohad State
- The Conditions of the Arabs during the Hafsid, Zayyanid, and Marinid Eras
- The Hafsid State
- The Marinid State
- The Zayyanid State.

This volume spans no fewer than 513 pages, within which the author addresses the most significant historical phases that Algeria underwent, beginning with the Arab entrance into North Africa, proceeding through the establishment of Islamic emirates, and culminating in the formation of Berber states and systems; the work is distinguished by its sequential presentation of events, which facilitates tracing the historical context and its developments.

4.2 The Methodology Adopted in the Book:

The narrative-analytical historical methodology emerges with particular clarity throughout Mubarak al-Mili's "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present," wherein he masterfully combines the presentation of historical facts with politico-social interpretation. In his historical approach, al-Mili relies on narrating actual events in a clear chronological sequence, tracing the emergence of various Islamic states and emirates through to the Berber period; this chronological ordering facilitates for the reader the task of understanding the evolution of events in a sequential and interconnected manner according to their dates, while simultaneously enabling the connection of causes to effects without disorienting temporal leaps that might obscure the logic of historical development.

The effectiveness of the historical methodology is further reinforced by another analytical approach, namely the interpretive method; he does not merely list events but rather seeks actively to analyze underlying causes and comprehend eventual consequences, such as connecting the news of the Banu Hilal migration to its profound impact on political and social stability in the region. The dimensions of this approach become particularly evident when the author addresses the states that emerged in Algeria, such as the Rustamid, Aghlabid, Fatimid, and Almohad states, while mentioning the religious and political reasons that led to their appearance, thereby demonstrating that political formations do not emerge in a vacuum but rather respond to specific historical conditions and imperatives.

Al-Mili exercises his critical consciousness quite noticeably when comparing between different sources or indicating exaggeration in certain narratives, which announces the presence of a partial critical methodology appearing contextually throughout the work, thus highlighting the book's value, objectives, and aspirations. This leads us to assert that through the methodology he employed, Mubarak al-Mili sought primarily to highlight Algeria's Islamic identity and its ancient history, thereby reflecting the national, reformist, and renaissance dimension by transmitting the causes of weakness represented in political division, while simultaneously emphasizing the idea of unity and adherence to Islamic authenticity; all these efforts ultimately converge toward one indirect yet unmistakable objective: the consolidation of Islamic national identity.

3. Algerian National Identity Between Constants and Variables in al-Mili's Perspective

The embodiment of the Islamic factor on Maghrebi soil was not like other previous cases in the Arabian Peninsula or other countries where it was imposed through Islamic conquests following fierce wars between reigning monarchs and the conquering Arab forces; rather, the entrance of Islam into Maghrebi territory was not without certain skirmishes, such as those that occurred with al-Kahina, to whose emirate the Berbers were subject, and her outlook toward the Arab conquerors of Carthage was far from favorable, leading her to wage war against them under the assumption that they had come to plunder Algeria's wealth.⁶

We can summarize the history of Islam in the Maghreb generally, and Algeria specifically, according to what is presented in the book "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present," as follows:

- That which cultivated the concept of Arab identity and defined its constant essence, spreading throughout most regions entered by Islamic conquests, was Islam itself, whose features were determined through the ummi Qurashi Prophet; "for this Islam brought by Muhammad, peace be upon him, is the comprehensive religion encompassing both inward and outward virtues, guiding toward the two paths of happiness in this world and the hereafter, thus representing the seal of religions and the instrument of human perfection,"⁷ and it was transmitted through Islamic

conquests to the Maghreb by armies that worked to establish Arab footholds in Ifriqiya, among them: Uqba ibn Nafi and Musa ibn Nusayr.

- Islam stood as the great competitor in the land of the Berbers against three religions: paganism, Judaism, and Christianity, with Christianity itself comprising three divergent sects—Orthodox, the Roman and Arian factions of the Vandals, and the Donatists among the Berbers of Algeria.⁸
- The Berbers' choice of Islam stemmed "from a desire for honor, given the honor inherent within it,"⁹ though initially their relationship with adherence to Islam was not firmly established, being governed primarily by submission rather than genuine commitment, for entering into Islam was not forcibly imposed by the sword by the Arabs; indeed, the Arabs only imposed ransom upon the Jews and Christians residing in the Maghreb, including Christian Berbers, and did not expel them from their homeland for retaining their old faith.
- The Berbers' engagement with Islam was initially relative and unstable in terms of its presence and realization among them, as they "would convert to Islam when Arab armies came to them, but would apostatize when they withdrew—and it is narrated from Abu Zaydani that the Berbers apostatized twelve times".¹⁰
- The Berbers' steadfastness in the religion of Islam, their learning of the Arabic language, their deep study of it, and their creative expression through it came about thanks to Ismail ibn Abd Allah, who governed as a governor in the Maghreb under Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, and who sent with him ten of the Tabi'un who undertook the task of teaching the Berbers the Arabic tongue and instructing them in the teachings of their religion.¹¹
- The relationship between Berbers and Arabs was not consistently positive, as they would revolt against them from time to time; "initially, the Berbers thought that this religion was merely an instrument in the hands of the Arabs to subjugate nations to their authority and to impose obedience to Arabs upon others, so whenever they revolted against the Arabs, their uprisings were both political and religious in nature. However, during the caliphate of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, they came to understand it with true comprehension and realized that it was an instrument for human happiness universally, with no necessary correlation between Arab and Berber, so they submitted to it with a submission they bequeathed to their descendants forever, and thereafter when they revolted against the Arabs, their revolts were purely political."¹² Conversely, they preserved what they had acquired from the Arabs in terms of religion, language, and civilization, considering these among their acquired sanctities through which they announced transformation and entry into a life filled with challenges at all levels.
- The spread of religious sects in the Maghreb was largely due to the Kharijites, a faction that spread from the lands of the East and migrated to the Maghreb, where both the Sufriyya and Ibadiyya sects proliferated; the former was prevalent in the western regions while the latter dominated the eastern areas, with the most prominent tribes adopting and defending Kharijism being Zanata and Hawwara, among other tribes too numerous and wealthy to mention, while the Ibadiyya's homeland was the Sahara and the high plateaus, receding as one approached the Algerian coasts—it did not enter the territory of Kutama, and while it touched the peripherals of Sanhaja, it did not extend deeply among them.¹³

- Algerian and Maghrebi society generally was experiencing a state of loss, fragmentation, and overwhelming chaos across political, intellectual, and religious dimensions, with the Arabic language—by virtue of its strength—serving as the most effective means for the development of Maghrebi society, particularly Algerian society, toward improvement; this leads us to assert that "the weakness of language in any society is evidence of that society's own weakness, while its strength and development indicate the society's vitality and dynamism".¹⁴ The Arabic language accompanied the core of Islam and its laws, becoming the emblem of national identity in the Maghreb: "When the Arabs came to the Maghreb, the spread of their language accompanied their armies, so wherever a territory was militarily conquered, their language spread therein, and the Arabic language spread rapidly among the Berbers, enabling them to likewise rapidly overcome the civilizations of preceding nations".¹⁵
- The Arabic language, in companionship with Islam, found a place in the hearts of the Amazigh and occupied an elevated position in their society; regarding this, al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi states: "Through it, the Berbers came to know what they had not known before, and the wisdom of the Greeks sought to petition it for eloquence and to summon it across time, so it gave abundantly and returned generously; a spark flew to the Berbers from it such as the language of the Romans could not ignite, and it competed with the Berber tongue on the tongues of the Berbers, overcoming and surpassing it, unleashing its magic upon Berber souls until it rendered them Arab—all through choice, with no trace of compulsion therein".¹⁶

What we conclude from the foregoing discussion concerning the historicity of national identity's foundations, represented in its two components of religion and language, is that the Islamic religion, through its sublime virtues, succeeded in cultivating love of homeland within the Berber consciousness, without neglecting the human consideration that "love of homeland or national territory develops instinctively in humans, just as other elements constituting personality develop; the profound meaning behind this attachment lies in this land being the homeland of fathers and ancestors".¹⁷ This was precisely what had been shrouded in obscurity during the Roman and Byzantine occupation of Algeria, as they sowed seeds of chaos within the Algerian life sphere and dispersed the direction of thought and self, which by its very nature within its human framework seeks a safe haven for living freely and peacefully in this life.

Furthermore, we affirm that "religious unity plays an important role in reconciling hearts among members of a society where all individuals profess one religion, uniting them through belief in a single creed; it thus serves as a facilitating factor for the maturation of the nation and the completion of its national personality's development, while also stimulating the unification of its word and the consolidation of its ranks".¹⁸ The totality of these factors, which consistently connect reality with positive outcomes, was felt, lived, and appreciated by the Algerian Berber people when they contributed to adopting the Islamic religion as a unifying creed among the Algerian populace, engaging with it through belonging that became inseparable from their character, while opening the way for the Arabic language to settle within their communicative society and to accumulate the greatest possible linguistic repertoire that produced linguistic creativity in all its forms and intellectual innovation across various fields.

Thus, the Islamic religion transformed the communicative content within the Algerian Berber individual by eliminating the overwhelming chaos that the Algerian people were experiencing at that time, and by appealing to sound human judgment in coexistence, love of tranquility, and reassurance; consequently, Algeria progressed through all its developmental epochs, beginning with the Arab entrance into Ifriqiya and culminating in the totality of states established within its borders, following the pattern of sound and sober human thought through compliance with the teachings of the Islamic religion and deep study thereof. At that point, jurisprudential orientations, religious sects, and philosophical schools were determined—all of which constitute positive outcomes of the conscious and judicious thinking fostered by Arab Islamic culture.

These various intellectual endeavors, which enabled the Arabic language to assume leadership and elucidated the image of the steadfast Islamic religion in the souls of the Berbers, we shall attempt to elucidate according to what is presented in the book, selecting three phases for this purpose: the Rustamid phase, the Hammadid phase, and the Almohad phase.

3.1 The Rustamid State: Islam and Amazighness in Political Equilibrium

The Arabic language attained a prominent position in its communicative sphere within the Rustamid state, as well as in its social dimensions, and since language "plays an important role in numerous historical, social, cultural, political, and linguistic contexts, serving as a symbol of national identity while also playing a significant role in intellectual creativity, representing the primary emblem of unity and national policy, it has indeed played an important role in the state of Algeria"¹⁹ since ancient times, across all levels, particularly the intellectual, religious, and creative domains; "Arabic was the official language of the state, as the Rustamid epistles addressed to the Berber nation, urging obedience and adherence to religion, were written in the Arabic language".²⁰

Given that language in itself constitutes a criterion for civilization's advancement and sublimity, we affirm that "language is a fundamental component of national personality, and through it and by means of it, nations develop, their character crystallizes, and they emerge to impose their existence"²¹; the Rustamid state was indeed worthy of such advancement, having laid the foundation for the Arabic language's future trajectory toward elevating the sciences, literature, and jurisprudence of the Algerian state, which had already traversed considerable temporal distances in its doctrinal path Islam. "Arabic was the language of their sciences and literature as well, for most of their attention was devoted to religious sciences, which have no language other than Arabic... and the Berber nation emulated its government—and people follow the religion of their rulers—in caring for Arabic and its sciences and literature, nor did their revolution against the Arab government dissuade them from this; for whoever would count among the causes of that revolution ethnic, religious, or scholarly animosity between Berbers and Arabs would be greatly mistaken, since the idea of enmity toward Arabs and Arabism did not exist among Islamic nations at that time; rather, it is a product of our present age, employed by secularists as a cover to undermine these Islamic teachings".²²

Their achievements in various sciences and literature were remarkable, as the Rustamids devoted attention to transmitting books originating from the East, the fountainhead of the Islamic intellectual movement, though their concern for religious sciences was particularly intense, given that they were imams in knowledge just as they were imams in politics. They engaged in the study of exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, historical accounts, poetry, and mathematical sciences; among their most prominent figures was Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam, who was an exegete and authored works in

interpretation, and his son Abd al-Wahhab, who excelled in religious sciences; moreover, a library was established in Tihert called "al-Ma'suma," containing thousands of volumes.²³

Among the creative figures in the field of Arabic language, we find:²⁴

- Yahud ibn Quraysh al-Tiherti (4th century AH): He mastered Arabic, Hebrew, Berber, Aramaic, and Persian, being thoroughly knowledgeable in all of them, and devoted himself to linguistic research, attempting comparison between Hebrew, Arabic, and Berber; he is considered the founder of theoretical grammar, and his book on this subject, written in Arabic, was found in the Oxford library in England, representing the most valuable work ever composed on this topic.
- Abu Abd al-Rahman Bakr ibn Hammad al-Tiherti: He was distinguished by the abundance of his poetry, which narrators transmitted both east and west, with scattered fragments preserved in various books; he was a prodigy in literature, renowned for poetry, composing long and excellent poems on multiple themes, including love poetry, description, panegyric, satire, elegy, apology, asceticism, and moral exhortation.

Thus, the political experience of the Rustamid state was not merely a temporal phase in Algeria's history; rather, it constituted an early model for embodying national identity in its Islamic-Amazigh dimension through the consolidation of Arabic as an official and scientific language, and the consecration of belonging to Islam as a unifying reference point. This equilibrium between cultural and religious components would subsequently extend to other political experiments, most notably the Hammadid state, which clearly embodied the principle of unity within diversity.

3.2 The Hammadid State: Unity and Diversity

Hammadid Algeria witnessed remarkable scientific and cultural flourishing, as scholars, poets, writers, historians, physicians, mathematicians, and others emerged within it; religious sciences occupied the foremost position, followed by the sciences of the Arabic language, which was adopted as the official language of the state. The arrival of the Banu Hilal played an important role in strengthening the status of Arabic, for they came with a language very close to classical Arabic, spreading it among various strata of society, thereby facilitating for the elite the learning of Arabic and for the common people the learning of religion. Thanks to this spread, there was no longer any great need for instruction or authorship in the Berber language in Algeria, as had been the case during the Rustamid state.²⁵

The Hammadid state firmly established the principle of unity amidst population and linguistic diversity by promoting Arabic as a unifying language and embracing scholars and moderate religious thought, which deepened the sense of shared belonging. This trajectory continued in the Almohad experiment, which elevated the religious project to its Maghrebi dimension, making religion the foundation for a political unity transcending regional boundaries.

3.3 The Almohad (Mu'minid) State: The Religious Project and the Maghrebi Dimension

The emergence of national identity during the Almohad state had a profound impact, as its constant features became clearly delineated and settled upon the Islamic foundation through the application of its rulings despite the multiplicity of sects and intellectual-religious orientations; the Almohad state, like the Hammadid, relied upon the Arabic language as a fundamental factor in shaping national identity, placing it at the service of religion based on the consideration that "language

cannot be regarded merely as a tool, for it is something more than that; it is part of the nation's life and entity, part of its past and present, and an essential factor in securing its interests in the future".²⁶ This constitutes a history of which we, the generations of Algeria, are proud, wherein "the Maghreb emerged as a fortress of Eastern genius in the face of the West"²⁷, and wherein grew a spirit of cognitive, intellectual, and religious challenge—a spirit rivaling that of the Arabian Peninsula, extending even to the lands of Andalusia at that time. We can trace the most significant challenges faced by the Arabic language and the Islamic religion during the Mu'minid era, according to what is presented in Mubarak al-Mili's "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present," as follows:²⁸

- The Arabic language facilitated the learning of sciences that spread during that period, encompassing numerous fields: Islamic sciences and philosophy, including exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, logic, and mathematics, in addition to civil, domestic, and ethical politics.
- Natural sciences and philosophical theories were viewed with disfavor, particularly during the Almoravid era, when jurists held sway over their state, leading to a cautious approach out of concern for Islamic teachings; however, when the Almohads came to power, with their caliphs participating in various sciences, they skillfully distinguished between what contradicted religion and what did not.
- They promoted both the rational and transmitted foundations of religion, opening fields for research and deduction.
- A synthesis emerged between philosophy and Sharia, giving rise to Averroes the Grandson, one of Islam's greatest philosophers, who authored the book "Bidayat al-Mujtahid"; among his students was Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Sahnun al-Kumi al-Nadhrumi from the village of Nedroma.
- Prominent poets included Ibn Mujbar and the poet of Constantine, Abu Ali Hassan ibn Ali ibn Umar al-Faqqun.
- Various jurisprudential schools appeared: the Sufis, the Mu'tazila, the Ash'aris, and the scholastic theologians.
- The Maliki school was proclaimed by Ibn Mu'izz and adopted as the school of Sunni Islam in the Maghreb.
- Among the Sufi scholars were Abu Madyan Shu'ayb al-Andalusi, Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi al-Andalusi, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, and Abd al-Haqq ibn Sab'in in Bejaia.

Thus, the Almohad experience constituted a pivotal station in consolidating Algerian national identity through a unified religious project, a comprehensive language, and a broad Maghrebi horizon; however, this trajectory could not be completed without invoking the Amazigh dimension as an authentic component of Algeria's cultural and linguistic fabric—a dimension that today poses significant challenges and stakes concerning the place of Amazighness within the national communicative context.

3.4 Amazighness in the Communicative Context: Challenges and Stakes

The Berber language enjoyed a certain currency in daily discourse, and even in cognitive domains at the level of educational institutions, during the Islamic conquests of the Maghreb and the subsequent political skirmishes that occurred between Arabs and Berbers; its communicative flow remained ongoing, persisting thus during the Rustamid state until the advent of the Hammadid era,

when Berber receded from the scientific and literary field while Arabic competed with it in public assemblies, leading many Berbers to become Arabized, with Berber surviving only in the Aurès mountains, Titteri, Djurdjura, and similar regions where Berbers had not intermixed with Arabs. What impelled the Berbers toward this Arabization—despite the state being their own state and the government their own government—was their conviction regarding the nobility and richness of Arabic as the language of religion, so they came to take pride in mastering its pronunciation; thus is manifested the influence of religions in erasing ethnic distinctions.²⁹ Furthermore, Arabic transcended its communicative framework to encompass the political society of the state, particularly within the Sanhaja emirate, which documented most judicial and legal reports, as well as correspondence addressed to princes, in the Arabic language.

It is worth noting that the Berber language remained confined to domestic spheres and private gatherings, gradually withdrawing from official institutions and written expression, though this did not signify a complete eradication of Amazigh identity; rather, it represented a transformation in the mechanisms of its manifestation, wherein Amazighness continued to express itself through integration into the broader Islamic-Arab civilizational framework without completely severing its linguistic roots. The Amazigh elites of that era perceived no contradiction between their Berber origins and their adoption of Arabic as a language of science, culture, and governance, for they viewed Islam as a comprehensive identity transcending ethnic particularisms while simultaneously preserving cultural specificities within the private sphere. This dynamic contributed to the formation of a hybrid communicative context wherein linguistic duality functioned harmoniously: Arabic occupied the domains of power, knowledge, and religious expression, while Berber persisted in daily life, oral traditions, and popular culture, thereby creating a layered linguistic reality that would characterize Algerian society for centuries to come.

Thus, through extrapolating the successive political experiments in Algerian history—from the Rustamid state through the Hammadid and Almohad dynasties, reaching the presence of Amazighness in the communicative context—it becomes evident that Algerian national identity was neither an accidental construction nor contingent upon a transient historical moment; rather, it was the fruit of a prolonged civilizational interaction among Islam, Arabism, and Amazighness, an interaction embodied in the structure of the state and in its political, religious, and cultural discourse. This identity preserved its unity despite diversity, and its cohesion despite fluctuations, benefiting from religion and language as two fundamental tributaries for integration and harmony, without excluding any of its authentic components; this harmonious diversity was not merely an imposed reality but rather a civilizational choice and an early awareness of the importance of unity within the framework of difference, which constituted a solid foundation for building the national consciousness that later emerged forcefully in confronting projects of colonial erasure.

4. The Importance of the Book in Consolidating the Features of National Identity:

The book "The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present" constitutes "a new initiative in the field of historical awareness, as it left positive impacts on the psychology of Algerians, and even Easterners as well, for through it he sought to fortify and revive the roots and constituents of the Algerian personality,"³⁰ and he followed in this the path of Sheikh al-Kaak, who had drawn the initial outlines of Algerian national history in his book entitled "A Brief General History of Algeria from the Stone Age to the French Occupation," published by the Arab Library in Tunis in 1925.³¹

The main theme of this book falls within the framework of glorifying the Algerian past; the author defines history as "the mirror of the past, the elevator of the present, the testimony of the nation's life, the record of its noble deeds, the memorial of its genius, the bond of its unity, and the measure of its progress".³²

The writer focused on the question of identity, which was primarily manifested in confronting colonialism and resisting all its endeavors, standing as an impregnable barrier against it; for foreign occupation sought to eradicate the national identity of the people and kill virtue within their souls, working toward this through various means: by creating an environment that perpetuated ignorance, spreading values contrary to ethics, and striving to eliminate the prevailing social language that represented the element of interconnection and cohesion among the nation's members. Colonialism deliberately rejected authentic values, branding them as violence, barbarism, and ignorance, while seeking to impose its own social language as a replacement.³³

This book contains a comprehensive narrative of Algeria's history, extending from the ancient Phoenician-Berber era up to the contemporary period, with emphasis on the connection to the Islamic East and the Islamic Maghrebi character of Algeria, in response to the colonial ideology that sought to create justifications for the French presence by highlighting the Roman period and its Latin and Christian characteristics at the expense of the Berber-Arab and Ottoman periods, considering them merely bygone eras.³⁴

From the foregoing, we deduce that this book addressed the history of Islam, Arabism, and the Amazigh from the standpoint of considering them among the constants and features of identity, and that they were never party to the political wars witnessed by the Algerian reality; rather, they interacted among themselves to establish the features of Arab Islamic civilization in the Maghreb throughout all the historical and political stages that Algeria in particular and the Maghreb region in general underwent, as we find that the three elements of national identity (Islam, Arabism, and Amazighness) were strengthened and consolidated from one state to another established on Algerian soil.

This leads us to assert that this book carried historical contents that demonstrated the Islamic presence and its potential in establishing and elevating Islamic civilization, confirming that politics never had complete authority to control the terrain of religion, the Arabic language, and the Amazigh dialect; for all the wars that erupted in the Maghreb had their own laws and language, whether between Arabs and Berbers or among the Arabs themselves over power and position. Hence, the intellectual must review his calculations and retreat from denying the original terrain that possesses a deep history and an extension based on the challenges imposed by reality upon the Algerian individual in times past; accordingly, it can be said that the challenge the author sought to emphasize through his book lies in recovering the "lost sovereignty," that is, national identity with all its features, and striving to effect a rupture with the process of random reception of others' culture, which falls within the colonial endeavor aimed at imposing cultural hegemony that seeks to distort the authentic and impose the foreign.

5. Conclusion:

This study has sought to trace the features of Algerian national identity as formulated by Sheikh Mubarak ibn Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili in his work "The History of Algeria in the Past and the

Present," through extrapolating its texts and analyzing the historical, political, and cultural contexts that contributed to crystallizing this concept throughout the various stages the country underwent; it has become evident that the author presented a coherent national vision based on a fundamental trilogy: Islam, Arabism, and Amazighness, considering them the constant components that formed the essence of Algerian national identity.

Among the most prominent findings reached by the research:

- Affirmation of the Amazigh origin of the Algerian people, while indicating that classical Arabic became the language of cultural unity and national communication by virtue of its spread through the Islamic conquest.
- Demonstration that Islam was a unifying factor and a civilizational force, playing a pivotal role in dismantling the previous religious structure and establishing a firm creed that contributed to building the state and society.
- Consideration of the Arab-Berber wars as political in nature rather than doctrinal, and that despite differences, the civilizational interaction produced a distinctive linguistic and religious cultural unity.
- Rejection of colonial theses seeking to exclude Islamic and Arab periods from Algeria's history while highlighting Roman and Christian eras as an original reference for identity.
- Recognition of the role of Maghrebi writers and scholars in consolidating the Arabic language and its creative production, making it a carrier of civilization and a mirror of identity.
- Consideration of national history as possessing an existential dimension, forming the vessel carrying the nation's values and establishing the national being that French colonialism attempted to obliterate, particularly within the framework of its attempt to deny the existence of the Algerian state during its centenary celebration.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

Upon examining these findings, it becomes evident that al-Mili's work transcends mere historical documentation to establish a foundational vision for understanding Algerian identity; based on this, the following suggestions and recommendations can be formulated:

- The necessity of re-reading the historical intellectual works of the reformist pioneers, foremost among them Mubarak al-Mili, from the perspective of national identity and resistance to cultural hegemony.
- Integrating this identity-based vision into educational curricula to strengthen generations' awareness of their history and identity, and to consolidate shared values.
- Calling for a profound cultural dialogue concerning the constants of national identity, ensuring respect for pluralism and specificities without compromising the unity of reference points.
- Strengthening studies that link history and national identity to confront attempts at distortion or erasure that still find resonance in some ideological theses.
- The necessity of investing the national intellectual heritage in building a contemporary cultural and political discourse capable of facing the challenges of globalization and media openness.

Finally, the return to such foundational writings represents an essential step in recovering national consciousness and consolidating confidence in the self, and in reaffirming that Algeria, with its deep

history and authentic identity, possesses the capacity to transcend the trials of the present and the challenges of the future, through adhering to its constants while engaging with its variables, and through the awareness of its intellectual elite and the will of its people who have proven throughout history their ability to protect their identity and preserve their national being.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Murad Qabbal, "Writing the History of Algeria by Mubarak al-Mili: The Dean of Algerian Historians," *Historical Visions Journal for Mediterranean Research and Studies*, Khemis Miliana University, Vol. 1, Issue 2, October 2020.
- ² See, *ibid.*
- ³ Abd al-Rahman Chibane, *Introduction to Al-Shihab*, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1st ed., 2001, p. 120.
- ⁴ Abou al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Algerian National Movement 1930-1945*, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut-Lebanon, 4th ed., 1992.
- ⁵ Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present*, introduction and correction by Muhammad al-Mili, National Book Foundation, Beirut-Lebanon, (n.d.), (n.p.).
- ⁶ See, *ibid.*, p. 31.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁸ See, *ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- ¹¹ See, *ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
- ¹³ See, *ibid.*, p. 58.
- ¹⁴ Djamel Guenane, *Issues and Studies in Contemporary Algerian History*, Publications of the National Museum of the Mujahid, Algeria, (n.d.), 1994, p. 295.
- ¹⁵ Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present*, p. 59.
- ¹⁶ Mokhtaria Ben Kablia, "The Journey of the Arabic Language in Algeria from the Islamic Conquest to the French Occupation," updated 04/03/2010, accessed 18/03/2022. <https://www.nashiri.net/index.php/articles/literature-and-art/4370-2010-02-25-19-48-36-v15-4370>
- ¹⁷ Djamel Guenane, *Issues and Studies in Contemporary Algerian History*, p. 290.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- ¹⁹ Doaa Ashraf, "The History of the Arabic Language in Algeria," updated 15/July/2020, 11:56 PM, accessed 09/03/2022, 12:56 PM. <https://www.almrsl.com/post/927288>
- ²⁰ See, Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present*, p. 77.
- ²¹ Djamel Guenane, *Issues and Studies in Contemporary Algerian History*, p. 295.
- ²² Mubarak Muhammad Ibrahim al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present*, p. 78.
- ²³ See, *ibid.*, p. 76.
- ²⁴ See, *ibid.*, pp. 80, 81, 82.

- ²⁵ See, *ibid.*, p. 266.
- ²⁶ Djamel Guenane, *Issues and Studies in Contemporary Algerian History*, p. 295.
- ²⁷ Abou al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Algerian National Movement 1930-1945*, p. 86.
- ²⁸ Mubarak Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Mili, *The History of Algeria in the Past and the Present*, pp. 335, 337, 338.
- ²⁹ See, *ibid.*, p. 267.
- ³⁰ Murad Qabbal, "Writing the History of Algeria by Mubarak al-Mili".
- ³¹ See, *ibid.*
- ³² See, *ibid.*
- ³³ See, Doaa Ashraf, "The History of the Arabic Language in Algeria".
- ³⁴ See, Obeid Ahmed, "Algerian Historiography: Evaluation and Critique - The Case of Ottoman Algeria," *Insaniyat Journal of Anthropology and Sciences*, accessed 06/03/2022, 12:30 PM. <https://journals.openedition.org/insaniyat/4843>

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