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The question of identity and nationality in the association of Algerian Muslim scholars: Its position on the issue of naturalization as a case study

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Keywords: Association Algerian Muslim Scholars, National identity, French Colonial Administration, Naturalization.

Abstract

This paper examines the components of national identity as articulated by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, which sought to consolidate these elements within Algerian society in order to preserve its Arab-Islamic identity, history, and cultural heritage. This endeavor aimed to protect Algerian society from French attempts to strip it of its religious and historical values. In this context, the Association confronted the French colonial administration head-on, opposing its various policies and projects, most notably the issues of naturalization and assimilation.



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Abstract---This paper examines the components of national identity as articulated by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, which sought to consolidate these elements within Algerian society in order to preserve its Arab-Islamic identity, history, and cultural heritage. This endeavor aimed to protect Algerian society from French attempts to strip it of its religious and historical values. In this context, the Association confronted the French colonial administration head-on, opposing its various policies and projects, most notably the issues of naturalization and assimilation.

Keywords---Association Algerian Muslim Scholars, National Identity, French Colonial Administration, Naturalization.

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of nationalism has long been closely associated with the question of religion among the various currents of the Algerian national movement, including the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. Likewise, the Association linked identity and nationalism to religious affiliation, as it called for the preservation and defense of the Islamic identity of Algerian society. It also sought to instill a sense of nationalism in the collective consciousness of the Algerian people through the education and upbringing of younger generations, nurturing their intellectual formation with the principles of spiritual and national identity by reviving the history of the Algerian nation and its civilizational past, under the slogan: *Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland.*

Within the framework of its concern for issues of identity and nationalism, the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars endeavored to combat the policy of naturalization, the integration of Algerians, and

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their assimilation into France, as well as to oppose those who advocated such policies. The Association maintained that any individual who chose a nationality other than the Islamic one had repudiated sacred laws, and it declared apostasy against Algerian Muslims who sought to obtain French citizenship. From this perspective, the following research questions arise : ***What are the components of national identity according to the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars ? And how did it confront the colonial policy aimed at entrenching a culture of naturalization and assimilation ?***

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ALGERIAN MUSLIM SCHOLARS :

The year 1924 is considered the actual starting point of the Association, embodied in the *Scientific Brotherhood Association* (*Jam'iyat al-Ikḥā' al-'Ilmī*), after having initially been no more than an idea that occupied the mind of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibn Bādis, which he intended to present to al-Ibrāhīmī. However, the circumstances the country was experiencing at the time prevented its realization. Nevertheless, efforts continued until the idea was eventually brought to fruition under more favorable conditions, through the lessons delivered by Ibn Bādis and his journalistic writings (Marḥūm, 1981, pp. 6-7).

This is further affirmed by one of the leading figures of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, who highlighted the factors behind the emergence and development of the reformist movement in Algeria: *"The educational revolution brought about by Shaykh Ibn Badis through his dynamic lessons; the sound upbringing upon which he trained his students; the authentic teachings he instilled in their pure and youthful souls; and the long-term preparation with which he nourished their aspiring spirits. It was not long before the first cohort of Ibn Bādis's students had fully acquired the necessary tools—sound ideas, enlightened minds, ambitious souls, sincere determination, polished tongues, and capable pens. These were the first battalions of his students... the vanguards of a bright new era."* (Marḥūm, 1981, p. 16).

The idea was eventually realized with the establishment of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars on Tuesday, 17 Dhū al-Ḥijja 1349 AH, corresponding to 5 May 1931, at the *Taraqqi Club* in Algiers (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 7). The capital was chosen as the Association's headquarters, given its status as the seat of the administrative authority and the presence of the *Taraqqi Club*, which constituted the Association's first institutional nucleus and the initial foundation of its emergence. Sa'd Allāh, however, argues that the selection of the capital as its headquarters aimed to confer a representative character encompassing scholars from across Algeria and to dispel any suspicion of monopolizing the reformist movement (Sa'd Allāh, 1992, p. 84).

The scholars of the Association regarded themselves as being closer to religious reform and missionary activity than to official religious functions. Shaykh Ibn Bādis explicitly expressed this stance, stating : *"O you officials, fear God in matters concerning Islam and the Qur'an. There are those who claim affiliation with Islam and the Qur'an, yet among them are some who are more harmful, more dangerous, more reprehensible in conduct, and more detrimental in impact than others. These are the officials—though I do not generalize—whose positions have enslaved them, causing them to forget their true selves and sell their consciences to please those from whom they seek honor. They have gone to the furthest extremes of flattery and servility."* (Belmeḥdi, 2011, pp. 103-104).

Despite the reformist religious character that distinguished the Association's activities and founding principles, this does not negate its interest in political matters, albeit indirectly and to a lesser extent than its religious reform activities, in order to avoid the reactions of the French colonial administration. This political concern is evident in many of the Association's activities and demands, which bore a distinctly political dimension.

Consequently, the Association adopted religious and cultural activity as a cover for its political positions. These stances exposed it to numerous accusations from the French administration. In

response to the Governor-General's accusation that the Association harbored political ambitions, Shaykh Ibn Bādis remarked : *"What is this fault with which Muslim scholars are reproached if they engage in politics? Have the great or small parliamentary assemblies ever been devoid of men of other religions ? Was the French Academy ever devoid of the influence of the minister-priest Richelieu ? No—there is neither fault nor blame. A person is judged according to the choice he makes and is praised or condemned according to his conduct in that choice."* (Bel'īfa, 2008, p. 11)

Thus, it becomes evident that the Association was not detached from the political sphere ; indeed, it constituted, in effect, the first organized manifestation of political Islam in Algeria.

The Association's Political Objectives : In the political sphere, the Association sought to achieve the following :

1. **Reviving Algerian National Identity :** This involved reinforcing its historical, civilizational, cultural, and national components, with the aim of preserving the independence of the Algerian entity from the French one.
2. **Opposing Naturalization and Assimilation :** The Association opposed the French policy of assimilation and its attempts to naturalize Algerians. It endeavored to stand against these French projects aimed at integrating Algerians into the French body politic, and it declared apostasy against any Algerian Muslim who sought to obtain French citizenship. In this regard, al-Tayyib al-'Uqbī stated : *"Naturalization, in its commonly known meaning in North Africa, is prohibited, and undertaking it is in no way permissible."* Shaykh Ibn Bādis likewise asserted: *"Naturalization is, in reality, the choice of a non-Islamic nationality by Muslims, which entails a repudiation of the sacred laws that regulate the affairs of Muslim life and provide them with worldly and human legislation."* (Rashīd, 2016, pp. 258–259).
3. **The Association's Refusal to Support France during World War II :** The Association expressed its refusal to send a telegram of support, endorsement, and solidarity with France during the war. The matter was put to a vote before the Association's Administrative Council, which resulted in a decision rejecting such support. Shaykh Ibn Bādis insisted on upholding this decision and expressed his readiness to accept any punishment that France might impose on the Association as a consequence (ibid., p. 157).
4. **Instilling National Consciousness among the Algerian People:** This was pursued through the education and upbringing of younger generations and the intellectual nourishment of their minds with the principles of national spirit and identity, by reviving the history of the Algerian nation and its civilizational past.
5. **Preparing the Algerian Nation for Independence :** This constituted one of the Association's unannounced principles, as it worked toward Algeria's independence within its Arab and Islamic framework (Bel'īfa, 2008, p. 111).

Furthermore, the second leading figure of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, Shaykh Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, demonstrated clear interest in political matters through the request he submitted to Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Jamālī—then Iraq's representative and Vice-President of the United Nations General Assembly—calling for the inclusion of the Algerian question on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly during its 1951 session (Mujāhid, 2007, p. 111).

These efforts clearly reveal the political character of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, including its reaction to the celebrations marking the centenary of the French occupation of Algeria, as well as its activities among the Algerian masses as a form of national, revolutionary, and psychological preparation. The Association played a decisive role in shaping generations who would later assume the responsibility and burden of liberating Algeria. Indeed, an examination of the initiators of the Algerian Revolution shows that the majority were students of the Association and graduates of its Arab-Islamic institutes, profoundly influenced by its Arab-Islamic nationalist orientation. This influence was ultimately embodied in the demands and principles enshrined in the charters of the Algerian Liberation Revolution.

I. COMPONENTS OF IDENTITY ACCORDING TO THE ASSOCIATION OF ALGERIAN MUSLIM SCHOLARS

The Association adopted a slogan that clearly expressed its orientations and principles, namely : “*Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland.*” This slogan served as a fundamental reference for the Association and its members, as Islam constituted its central axis and enduring foundation. The Association sought to restore Islam to its correct path by combating innovations and superstitions. The Arabic language, for its part, was regarded as a symbol of national identity, in contrast to the foreign language of the colonizer. Nationalism and Algeria’s civilizational affiliations further reflected the authenticity of Algerian society. Together, these three elements formed the core components and reference points of Algerian society (Bouabbash, 2012, p. 232).

1. Islam

1.1 Preserving Arab-Islamic Identity

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars placed particular emphasis on religious matters, as the preservation and protection of religion constituted one of the fundamental purposes for which it was established and represented the central pillar of its reformist struggle, as well as its religious and educational activities. In order to fulfill this noble mission effectively, the Association had to confront two principal adversaries :

1. **Sufi brotherhoods**, due to the fatwas, misconceptions, and outdated beliefs they propagated.
2. **The French colonial administration**, which worked systematically to combat religion and sever any link between Algerian society and its Islamic faith.

For the Association, religion represented a formidable force of great significance, one that could not be underestimated. It served to regulate individual behavior as a religious moral framework governing daily practices. Religion was viewed as a means of refining social ethics and eliminating moral corruption and the spread of crime within society (Bouabbash, 2011, pp. 251-252).

To disseminate these Islamic values and lofty moral ideals, the Association relied heavily on its newspapers, publishing articles that emphasized guidance, compassion among people, and the struggle against deception and superstitions that had distorted religion. It also stressed the importance of knowledge, wisdom, and moral exhortation. Alongside its engagement with Islamic thought, education, and moral guidance, the Association paid attention to international political affairs, seeking to unveil the realities concealed by global politics and clarify them for its readership (Al-Madani, n.d, p. 188).

Moreover, Islamic instruction—particularly sermons and religious lessons delivered in mosques and in the Association’s schools—played a significant role in motivating the masses to resist colonialism. These lessons infused Algerian society with a strong sense of religious and national zeal and enthusiasm (Zouzou, 2013, p. 18). The primary objective of these teachings was to counter hostile propaganda and the campaign of distortion launched by the French administration against Islam. This included restoring Islam to its original purity within Algerian society and combating false beliefs such as sorcery, charlatanism, and forms of polytheistic superstition.

The Association also sought to establish educational and cultural clubs among Algerian migrant communities, with the aim of preventing their immersion in lives of moral laxity and decadence. This was achieved by guiding their thinking and shaping it in accordance with the teachings of Islam (Julien, 1976, pp. 135-36). In addition, the Association devoted considerable effort to writing the history of Algeria as a means of confronting the French campaign aimed at erasing and distorting the image and historical legacy of Algerian Islamic society. Among the most prominent figures of the Association who contributed to this endeavor were Mubārak al-Mīlī and Aḥmad Tawfiq al-Madani.

- **Mubārak al-Mīlī** : He sought to rewrite Algerian history on a national basis. He authored *History of Algeria in Ancient and Modern Times*, publishing its first volume in 1928, followed by

the second volume in 1932. After independence, his son Muḥammad al-Mīlī completed the third volume.

- **Aḥmad Tawfiq al-Madanī** : He authored *Carthage through Four Ages : From the Stone Age to the Islamic Conquest* in 1927, as well as *Algeria* in 1931. The cover of the latter bore the slogan of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars : “*Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland.*” (Mas‘ūdī, 2018, pp. 177-178).

1.2 The Separation of Religion and the State

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars called for the separation of religion from the state and for respect for its particularities. It demanded that the French authorities distance themselves from Islam and refrain from interfering in Islamic affairs, especially in matters related to fatwas, Islamic judiciary, and the administration of mosques. The Association believed that separating religion from the French state would serve the interests of Islam and would be more compatible with its principles (Bel’īfa, 2008, pp. 362,366,368).

Al-Ibrāhīmī explained this position by stating : “*These successive governments have, since their inception, followed one of the worst and most reprehensible methods of colonialism. They take Islam as a tool to serve politics ; for this reason, they cling tightly to its mosques and institutions. At the same time, they turn politics into a tool for demolishing Islam: they fight the Arabic language and Arabic education in order to erase Arab nationality, and they block the paths of knowledge before learners through various means so that the people may remain ignorant.*”

The Association held that Islamic affairs—whether acts of worship or religious transactions—should be confined exclusively to Muslims, particularly scholars and educated individuals, as they possess sufficient religious knowledge and competence to assume responsibilities such as issuing fatwas, exercising *ijtihād*, administering Islamic justice, and managing mosques. This position was based on the Law of Separation issued in 1905 (Bel’īfa, 2008, p. 204).

The demand for the separation of religion from the state was among the proposals submitted by the Association to the Islamic Congress held in Algiers in June 1936. Among its resolutions was the following : “*The transfer of mosques to Muslims, with the allocation of a portion of Algeria’s budget commensurate with their endowments, and their administration by religious associations established in accordance with the laws governing the separation of religion from government.*”

In addition, the Association submitted a report to the French government in Algeria in August 1944, in which it placed the issue of separating religion from the state at the forefront of its demands. The report stated : “*We now, in the name of religion and in the name of the nation, adhere firmly to the principle of separating Islam from the Algerian government.*” (Bel’īfa, 2008, p. 106).

The same position was reiterated in the Association’s memorandum addressed to the French Minister of the Interior during his visit to Algeria in April 1947. In this memorandum, the Association called for freedom of Islam on an equal footing with other religions in Algeria, while also demanding the independence of mosques, religious endowments, and education (Ṣāliḥī, n.d, p. 21).

In 1951, Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī addressed the issue of the separation of religion from the state, stating : “*Do you think this government can procrastinate in this matter as long as it wishes, mock us and our religion with all the treachery and tyranny it desires, until time passes and we forget, or paths become so complex that we stray, or opponents multiply so that the voice of truth is drowned out by the voices of falsehood? Time has already extended for one hundred and twenty years : our predecessors may have forgotten, but our successors have not. As for the complexity of paths, we have prepared a guide that does not mislead—truth—and a support that does not falter—patience. As for opponents, let them multiply as they wish, for their abundance is weakness... The word ‘freedom’ alone has come to shake nations profoundly and has become a driving force in the hands of reformers.*” (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, pp. 142-143).

Through its demand for the separation of religion from the colonial French state, the Association aimed to :

- Benefit from freedom of action, particularly through establishing schools and freely delivering religious lessons in official mosques.
- Prevent the French colonial authorities from exploiting Islam for political purposes (Mas‘ūdī, 2018, p. 205).

1.4 Islamic Judiciary

Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī stated : *“The French state opposed Algerians’ demands for political rights because of their adherence to the Personal Status Law. Consequently, it proceeded to curtail the Islamic judiciary, monopolizing judicial positions for those trained under its authority and according to its doctrines. It placed the annulment and review of judicial rulings in the hands of French judges. As a result, Islamic justice became weak and subordinate to French judiciary, and judges, out of necessity, no longer based their rulings on jurisprudential texts, but rather on regulations drafted by French public prosecutors. This represents a level of injustice and oppression inflicted upon Islamic justice that Muslims cannot accept”* (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 135).

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars devoted considerable attention to the judiciary and sought to reform it. From its perspective, the judiciary constituted an integral part of religion (Ṣāliḥī, n.d, p. 19), as it possessed a religious foundation and legitimacy derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Accordingly, the Association worked toward the gradual rehabilitation of the Islamic judicial system through a set of measures :

1. **Revising the training program for judges** by emphasizing the Arabic language, Islamic law (Sharī‘a), the history of Islamic judiciary, and psychology, as well as establishing institutions dedicated to implementing this curriculum in order to graduate competent Muslim judges well-versed in Arabic and Islamic law.
2. **Establishing a Supreme Judicial Council** composed exclusively of judges, whose primary function would be the appointment and supervision of judges, operating independently from the French judicial apparatus.
3. **Providing Islamic courts of appeal**, whereby rulings issued by Muslim judges could only be annulled or upheld by other Muslim judges (Al-Zubayrī, 1999, pp. 51-52).

Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī summarized the Association’s vision for judicial reform as follows : *“We seek dignity and status for our judges, and we seek reputation and rank for the men of the judiciary. We are jealous in safeguarding these values and defend them with zeal and enthusiasm. We demand the reform of the judiciary and then its independence, for we believe that no nation can attain dignity unless its judiciary and judges themselves possess dignity.”* (Al-Ibrāhīmī, 1997, p. 132)

2. Arab-Oriented Orientation

2.1 The Arabic Language

The Arabic language constitutes one of the most important intellectual and cultural foundations that contribute to the unification of the nation. As the language of Islam and Muslims, Arabic must be learned and mastered. For this reason, the currents of the Algerian national movement, including the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, devoted considerable attention to the Arabic language, emphasizing its acquisition and striving to establish schools dedicated to its instruction.

The Association viewed education as the cornerstone of national reform and called for active engagement with learning. Shaykh Ibn Bādis stated in this regard : *“The sciences in Algeria, as I believe is the case elsewhere, include sciences acquired through the Arabic tongue—namely the sciences of religion and language—and sciences acquired through foreign languages* (Mādin, 2005, p. 255).

This statement reflects Ibn Bādis’s commitment to the teaching and preservation of the Arabic language.

Given that Arabic is the language of the Holy Qur'an, it was considered essential to teach it to Algerian youth as both a cultural necessity and a response to the persistent efforts of the French colonial administration to impose linguistic and cultural assimilation upon Algerian society. These efforts were part of systematic plans aimed at eradicating Algeria's civilizational affiliations. In response, the Association established its own schools for this purpose. The considerable efforts devoted to defending the Arabic language were intended to prevent the success of the French campaign to suppress the language and culture of the country (Zouzou, 2013, p. 18).

The revival of the Arabic language led to the emergence and widespread circulation of Arabic national anthems within student circles. New Algerian Arabic expressions and concepts also appeared, such as *the Algerian nation* and *the homeland*, fostering a growing sense of national consciousness, Arab identity, and Islamic belonging in Algeria (Ben Azzāw, 2013, pp. 98-99).

Accordingly, the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars sought to revive the prestige of the Arabic language and continuously demanded its recognition as an official language, considering it a symbol of the homeland. It also called for freedom in teaching Arabic, viewing this as a natural right due to its status as a symbol of national culture (Murād, 2007, p. 503). Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī emphasized that the Association's most important mission was to restore Algeria's pure Arab lineage, free from distortions, and to revive the Arabic language in Algeria in its original form (Dirā', 2008, p. 66).

Aware of the implications of the Association's focus on the Arabic language, the French colonial administration sought to suppress it, recognizing that its elimination would ultimately lead to the destruction of Algerian identity. Consequently, the French Minister of the Interior issued a decree on 8 March 1938 restricting the use of the Arabic language and targeting Arabic teachers. Shaykh Ibn Bādis regarded this measure as a grave development aimed at undermining Islamic belief, including the Arabic language itself. In response, the Association assumed responsibility for expanding Arabic education through the establishment of numerous educational institutions (Ben Ḥāmid, 2016, pp. 308–309).

Between 1930 and 1945, the Association succeeded in opening approximately seventy schools (Ṣārī, Qaddāsh, & Ḥarāth, 1987, p. 26) to educate Algerian children of both genders across various regions. It also integrated youth into Islamic clubs (Al-Jābirī, 1990, p. 113). Furthermore, the Association extended its educational activities to France and organized student missions to educational institutions in the Mashriq and the Arab Maghreb.

2.2 Arab Unity

Throughout its reformist and nationalist struggle, the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars sought to reconnect Algeria with its Arab past and civilization (Bel'ifa, 2008, p. 115). It also endeavored to strengthen fraternal ties with Maghrebi reformist movements, particularly in Tunisia. This was largely influenced by Shaykh Ibn Bādis's studies at al-Zaytūna University and his numerous visits to Tunisia and the Khaldūniyya School. In this context, the Tunisian newspaper *al-Zahrā'* published a report on 27 December 1936 concerning Ibn Bādis's visit, stating: "*It is certain that relations between Algerian and Tunisian scholars will lead to religious, social, and political unity in North Africa.*" (al-'Umri, 2010, p. 295)

Among Ibn Bādis's most notable writings on Maghrebi unity is an article published in *al-Shihāb* in July 1937, entitled "*The Unity of North Africa : The Sons of the Arab Maghreb in the Arab East.*" In this article, he wrote: "*Wherever we turn to any chapter of history, we find this Arab Maghreb—Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—bound by strong spiritual and material ties that make its unity evident to all. We do not intend here to discuss ancient history, but rather to present a page from contemporary history. There was a period when the Arab East nearly forgot the Arab Maghreb, and until recently, Eastern Arab journalism often referred to the Maghreb as if it were merely a part of central Africa and its unknown lands. Even today, its existence is overlooked in some valuable works, such as *Ḍuḥā al-Islām* and others. Yet this Arab Maghreb—despite political neglect by its Eastern brethren—continued to*

produce men of the sword and the pen who reminded others of its presence and upheld its name." (Al-'Umri, 2010, p. 300).

A review of articles written by members of the Association in its newspapers—particularly *al-Shihāb* and *al-Baṣā'ir*—reveals the predominance of Arab nationalist sentiment. Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī consistently emphasized slogans of unity and solidarity among Arab countries, both in the Mashriq and the Maghreb (Dirā', 2008, p. 64). Shaykh Ibn Bādīs likewise authored numerous articles on this theme. Examples of titles of his writings include :

1. *Immortal Days in the Modern History of the Maghreb*
2. *Green Tunisia's Days of Glory and Pride : The Days of the Destour Party*
3. *Algeria's Days of Honor and Prestige : The Days of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars*
4. *Morocco's Days of Heroism and Noble Martyrdom : The Days of the National Action Bloc* (Ḥamīdī, 2015, pp. 76-77).

Similarly, the Association's second leading figure, Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, called for solidarity and cooperation among the peoples of the Arab Maghreb in order to form a united front against French colonialism and to unify efforts toward establishing Maghrebi unity. On 2 November 1954, from the Association's office in Cairo, he issued a clear appeal for Maghrebi solidarity to confront brutal colonialism. In this appeal, he stated : *"North Africa has inherited from Arabism and Islam many unifying elements, brought together by divine will, and it has also been united by one thing born of satanic design : French colonialism. If today it unites in revolution against France's injustice and tyranny, perhaps this will be the final divine bond that returns it to its origins, just as the last broken link of a chain returns to form a circle."* (Al-'Umri, 2010, p. 303).

Shaykh Ibn Bādīs firmly believed in the unity of the Arab nation, worn down by colonial oppression, and he frequently referred to it while discussing Algeria. He stated: *"Yes, beyond this particular homeland, we have other homelands that are dear to us. They are always present in our minds, and as we work for our own homeland, we believe that we are also serving them and bringing benefit and good to them through our service to our particular homeland."* (ʿAmāmira, 2013, pp. 142-143).

The Arab Mashriq also occupied a significant place in the Association's worldview, as it was considered a civilizational extension of the Arab Maghreb, sharing customs, traditions, and a common destiny as one nation. In this regard, Shaykh Ibn Bādīs wrote in an article entitled *"Arab Unity"*: *"When we speak of Arabs, we mean this nation extending from the Indian Ocean in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, numbering over seventy million people who speak Arabic, think through it, draw nourishment from their history, and share a substantial measure of common blood. The centuries have fused them in the crucible of history into a single nation. This Arab nation is bound together—not only by language—but also by ties of lineage, history, and shared suffering. Therefore, national and cultural unity among them is inevitably realized."* (Mas'ūdī, 2018, p. 185).

2.3 Arab Nationalist Sentiment

The Palestinian cause was among the most significant issues addressed by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. The Association highlighted the suffering endured by the Palestinian people as a result of the oppression inflicted upon them by the Zionist entity. One of its newspapers stated: *"We have no doubt that the Palestinian issue is merely a pretext used by the enemies of the Arabs to attack them in the service of imperialist interests."* (Bel'ifa, 2008, pp. 85-86).

The Association's press devoted considerable attention to the Palestinian cause, most notably the newspaper *al-Baṣā'ir*, which addressed the issue from its very first issues (Ḥamīdī, 2015, p. 287).

Members of the Association also demonstrated strong engagement with the Palestinian cause. Among them was al-Ṭayyib al-'Uqbī, who founded the *Committee for the Defense of Palestine* in 1947 at the Taraqqi

Club in Algiers. This initiative coincided with the Arab League's decision to designate Friday, 13 November 1947, as *Palestine Day* in order to express solidarity with the Palestinian people. In his speech, al-'Uqbī declared : *"The time has come to demonstrate scholarly unity and effective solidarity. I shall carry the banner of jihad and go myself, leaving behind family and children."* (Abrīr , 2015, p. 91).

Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī likewise consistently upheld the principles of fraternity and solidarity among Arab brethren in both the Mashriq and the Maghreb (Būṣafṣāf, 2008, p. 64). He participated in the Islamic Conference held in Jerusalem on 3 December 1953, which addressed the Palestinian issue and the necessity of finding a solution to it. He was subsequently elected as a member of the Permanent Bureau of the Islamic Conference, tasked with fundraising for Palestine (Ma'ūshī, 2016, p. 402) .

3. The Right to Citizenship

The second leading figure of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, called for the recognition of Algerians' right to citizenship based on Algerian nationality. This position was articulated in his report submitted to the Committee for Islamic Reforms on 3 January 1944, in which he stated : *"The Algerian people believe that adopting a nationality other than their own leads to assimilation, while they refuse to lose their personality at any cost—let alone in exchange for nothing."*

Accordingly, al-Ibrāhīmī demanded: *"The establishment of an Algerian nationality from which all inhabitants of this homeland may benefit without distinction of race or religion, with equality in rights and duties."* (Lounīsi, 2005, p. 172).

II. THE ASSOCIATION'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE POLICIES OF ASSIMILATION AND NATURALIZATION

From its very inception, the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars rejected the policies of naturalization and assimilation. From its perspective, these policies fundamentally contradicted religion and the teachings of Islam. The Association considered those who advocated or demanded such policies to be apostates. This position was articulated by Shaykh al-Ṭayyib al-'Uqbī, one of the Association's leading figures, who stated : *"Naturalization, in its commonly understood meaning in North Africa, is prohibited, and undertaking it is in no way permissible."*

Similarly, Shaykh Ibn Bādīs argued that choosing a nationality other than an Islamic one constituted a repudiation of the sacred laws that are meant to regulate the affairs and lives of Muslims and provide them with worldly legislation (Rashīd, 2016, pp. 258–259).

In 1936, Ferhat Abbas published an article in which he denied the existence of an Algerian nation, asserting that "Algeria is France" and that Algerians should regard themselves as French. He further stated : *"I searched for Algerian nationalism in the depths of history books and found no trace of it ; I searched for it in the present condition and found no trace either."* Shaykh Ibn Bādīs responded forcefully to these claims, declaring : *"We searched the pages of history and examined the present condition, and we found the Algerian Muslim nation to exist—formed as all nations of the world have been formed. This nation has a rich history filled with great deeds ; it possesses religious and linguistic unity, a distinct culture, customs, and morals. Moreover, this Algerian Muslim nation is not France, cannot be France, and will never become France, even if it wished to. It is profoundly distant from France in its language, morals, ethnic composition, and religion. It does not wish to assimilate, and it possesses a defined and specific homeland : the Algerian homeland."* (Rashīd, 2016, p. 259).

The newspaper *al-Shihāb* likewise responded to Ferhat Abbas through its pages, criticizing the stance of certain local deputies and high-ranking officials who claimed that Algeria was purely French and that no homeland existed other than France. The newspaper stated : *"They have no objective other than full and complete assimilation into France, yet they have no hope of achieving such assimilation. One perceptive deputy even claimed that he searched for nationality in the depths of history and found no trace of it, and searched for it in the present and*

found no sign of it—until, finally, a moment of supposed enlightenment dawned upon him, and he cried out: 'France is me.'" (Ḍāwī & Laʿrībī, 2012, p. 576).

Shaykh Ibn Bādīs consistently called for the rejection of assimilationist policies, asserting that one of the earliest fruits of the Association's advocacy was the dismantling of the era of assimilation promoted by certain officials who were willing to harm Arabism and Islam in order to secure the approval of the French administration. He stated: *"Our advocacy will also lead to the end of that 'spiritual assimilation' embodied by certain Westernized individuals who are ignorant of the nobility and depth of their own origins, adorning themselves with Western appearances to the extent that it becomes difficult to distinguish them from their colonial masters."* (Gillespie, 1961, pp. 62-63).

Shaykh Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī likewise maintained that the Association fought naturalization and assimilation in all their forms and manifestations. This struggle, in itself, constituted a direct challenge to colonial policy and obstructed colonial plans aimed at severing Algerian society from its identity and Arab roots. The Association pursued this struggle through its newspapers, religious lessons, and cultural activities, while promoting Arab-Islamic culture in order to instill pride in Algerians regarding their Arab and Islamic heritage (Ḍāwī & Laʿrībī, 2012, p. 577).

CONCLUSION

Although the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was fundamentally a religious reformist organization whose primary objective was the education and moral upbringing of Algerian youth in accordance with Islamic teachings and Arab-Islamic heritage, this did not preclude its engagement with political issues. On the contrary, the Association employed every available means to preserve the national identity of Algerian society and to combat French colonial policies aimed at imposing assimilation and severing Algerians from their identity. These policies sought to erase Algerian identity and manipulate Algerian consciousness by casting doubt on the very existence of an Algerian homeland.

The Association defended the Arab and Islamic character of Algerian society, along with its customs and traditions, calling for respect for Algeria's social and cultural specificity. Through its newspapers, lectures, sermons in mosques, and outreach among the Algerian masses, the Association emerged as a steadfast defender of Algerian society, its religious values, and its Arab-Islamic identity.

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