

**The Construction of the Algerians Collective  
Cultural Identity in Abd al-Hamīd Ibn Badis's Poem  
"Sha3bo al Jaza'iri Moslimon: A Stylistic Analysis**



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**Abstract:**

During the colonisation period, the French invaders continued to oppress the Algerian population, which let allowed a group of Algerian elite, such as Abd al-Hamīd Ibn Badis, to work for the preservation of the Algerians' identity. As a sort of cultural resistance, literature, either oral or written, took a the shape of resistance and had was in charge the of reviving the Algerian cultural identity. Ibn Badis's poem "Sha3bo al Jaza'iri Moslimon", which had a decisive effect on Algeria's identity and history, attacked the French myth's of 'Algerie-Francaise' by defining the real Algerian people cultural affiliation. In This short paper attempts to analyze the literary style and cultural content of that peom poem by highlighting its significance in building a typical typical Algerian identity.

**Keywords:** Algeria, Cultural Resistance Identity, Ibn Badis, Sha3bo al Jaza'iri Moslimon, Stylistic Analysis

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Most accounts about the Algerian educational system before the French colonization in 1830, confirm the fact that Algeria back then had enjoyed a very sophisticated educational system. Education as well as culture were reputable in both urban and rural areas. According to localhistorical researches, there were schools in every tribe and every district Medrasa (College). For instance, Ammar Hellal (2016)<sup>1</sup> mentions that there were two schools in every village. Recognizingthe utility of education, 'relying on the Islamic revenues collected from the Algerian population, a quarter of [the] taxation went to primary education. It was estimated that 40% of the population have been awarded their qualification as literate from these Islamic institutions' (Djabri, 1981: 24). From this quote, it appears that the

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Algerians were literate. In fact, before the French occupation, the illiteracy rate was only 5 % at the beginning of the French colonialism 1830s (Aoudjit, 2010; 2016; Abou-El- Kacem Saadallah, 1991, and others)

Thus, soon after their conquest of Algiers in 1830, The French, as part of their supposedly civilizing duty, attempted by all means to destroy the Algerian educational system, burning some Mosques and closing others, destroying Quranic schools (Msids), Madrasas, Zaouias, and other cultural centers then imposing the French language as the official one. The idea was not to change a language for another. It was rather to end the Algerian culture and thus separate them from their past. By the end of the century, illiteracy rate of the Algerians was nearly 95% or thereabout (Abou-El- Kacem Saadallah, 1991)<sup>2</sup>. What has been outlined above is just a few from many examples, including administrative, economic, cultural and educational ways of oppression.

Herein, it is worth saying that colonialism does not include only political and economic occupation, but also colonialism of the mind. As pointed by Freire (1996 [1970]: 58):

The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creation of people, people themselves, time, everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal. ... The oppressed, as objects, as things, have no purposes except those their oppressor prescribes for them.

For this, Fanon (1961 [2004]: 82) reminds us that *'We must remember in any case that colonized people is not just a dominated people'*. For him, in Algeria, it was not simply domination but the decision to occupy literary all what presents the Algerians (dress of Haiks, the palm groves, the camels, and the like. Fanon (1961) also reminds us that the colonizers tend to force the dominance of their native language onto the peoples they colonized with the aim of strengthening their political power and colonialism on other lingual minority groups, and little by little they try to impose their culture and wear off the colonized identity.

In other words, colonizers tend to apply their linguistic improvement for the purpose of maintaining and strengthening their political base and colonialism on the lingual minority groups, on the one hand. On the other hand, by imposing their cultural and lingual sovereignty, *'they then try to convey their culture, thoughts, beliefs, and customs through language proportionately that they extend their military sovereignty conquering countries and their national wealth'* (Shakib, 2011: 118).

That is why when we talk about Ibn Badis's contribution, we are talking about a great achievement. The mission of Ibn Badis was not an easy task because of all the reasons that have been mentioned herein above. As the founder and the leader of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema (AOMA in 1931), which was a national grouping of many Islamic scholars in Algeria, Ibn Badis worked unstoppably days and nights to fight any kind of cultural domination exercised by

the French colonialism on the Algerian people, and to restore to the Algerian people their independent cultural and civilizational identity through educational projects which carried Islamic values along with their civilizational dimensions.

The French colonialism truly believed that they destroyed the Algerian identity, Ibn Badis improvised the poem (شعب الجزائر مسلم وإلى العروبة ينتسب) as a reaction against those, Algerians, who sought integration policy with France (Talbi, 1997)<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the importance of this poem in the life of many Algerians, this paper attempts to contribute thereupon by exploring how Ibn Badis presents the Algerian identity in the poem with regard to its aesthetic-literary style and cultural content.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

By providing a descriptive-analysis of the poem "Algerian People are Muslim -شَعْبُ الْجَزَائِرِ مُسْلِمٌ", this study seeks:

- a) To contribute to the existing literature regarding the heritage of the Algerians' resistance literature,
- b) To explore how cultural identity is constructed by Ibn Badis,
- c) To analyze the construction of identity through a stylistic evaluation,
- d) To relate the cultural principle of the poem to its today's influence and impact that still subsist in many educational and corporate sectors.

### 2.1 Research Questions

1) To explore the cultural resistance in this poetry, the following research questions are put forward:

2) How is the Algerian cultural identity constructed in Ibn Badis's "Algerian People are Muslim -شَعْبُ الْجَزَائِرِ مُسْلِمٌ"?

3) How is this identity linguistically and aesthetically achieved?

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 An Overview of Resistance Literature in Colonial Algeria

Literature plays an important role in the formation of the identity of the individual and society as it is a reflection of the time and the political, social and economic state of the peoples that who produced it. Poetry has long been used as a tool for showing dissatisfaction for political economic or social statuses. In fact, Resistance literature during the French colonialism in Algeria has not only been used as a means of resistance to the French colonialism, but also to encourage solidarity among the Algerian people and most importantly to preserve their identity.

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2عمار طالبي، اثار ابن باديس (1997)

The archive of the Algerians' heritage consists of a large reserve of local arts (folks, poetry, songs and traditional stories), that immortalized the heroics of the Mujahideen, documenting their history of resistance against the French colonialism.

Such a heritage can be considered as a preservation tool chronicling a crucial period in the history of Algeria, from deepening the national feelings to the deepening of the sense of belonging to the land and identity. In words of Fanon, it was used

To relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used. The formula 'This all happened long ago' is substituted by that of 'What we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, but it might well have happened here today, and it might happen tomorrow' (Fanon 2001: 193).

Whether be they resistant fighters, intellect, poets, story tellers, or common citizens, all had their share of oppression and abuse: how many of them had been imprisoned, tortured and killed, while those who had been saved were displaced, deported and exiled from their homelands, and only words that were fed by the torment of the throats of women who sung the heroism of men, these songs were blogs of epics and events.

Probably, many young people remember Cheb Khaled, Rachid Taha, and Foudil singing "tell my mother not to cry- قولوا لأمي ما تبكيش يا المنفى" in France, but they might not know its historical context.

#### المنفى

قولوا لأمي ما تبكيش يا منفى  
 ولدك ربنا ما يخلمهش يا منفى  
 كي دوني لدرينال يا منفى  
 جادرمية صغار وكبار يا منفى  
 والسلسلة توزن قنطار يا منفى  
 داربوني بعام ونهار يا منفى

Originally, according to Abou Yahia (2020)<sup>4</sup>, the poem dates back to 1864, and it was written by one of the prisoners of the 'Mukrani Revolution' who was exiled to Caledonia; it is a historical song that chronicles the tragedy of a large number of Algerian resistant fighters who were exiled between 1864 and 1921 to Caledonia. This song does not chronicle only their suffering from the unfair trial to the prisons of exile, but it also chronicles the Algerian collective memory associated with the history of the state and the French colonial era- the physical

and emotional separation of the exiled Algerians from the family and the homeland, Algeria

### 3.2 Ben Badis Philosophy of Identity

Abd al-Hamīd ibn Mustafa ibn Makki ibn Badis, an Algerian educator, exegete, Islamic reformer, scholar and figurehead of cultural nationalism, was born in Constantine in 1889. He belonged to a prestigious family of *ulama* and notables that descended from the Berber Zirid dynasty, rulers of Ifriqiya. Ben Badis' grandfather Si Makki ben Badis (died in 1889), was a *qadi*. His father, Muḥammad Mustafa (born in 1868), was an adjunct judge and member of the Financial delegations [fr], the colonial parliament (Talbi Ammar, 1997).

Ben Badis identity anxiety stemmed from his Islamic religious background and his personal life experience. He grew up in a scholarly and religious household and as a result memorized the Quran at the age of thirteen. He was still very young when he was placed under the tutorship of Hamdan Lounissi who had a significant influence on the youth of Ben Badis. He never forgot Lounissi's counsel. Lounissi remarked him "learn knowledge for the sake of knowledge, not because of duty." Lounissi was a stalwart defender of the rights of the Muslim inhabitants of Constantine. Lounissi made Ben Badis promise to never enter into the service of France (the Colonial power in Algeria) (ibid, 1997).

Later, when he grew up, 1931, Ben Badis founded the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, (AOMA) which was a national grouping of many Islamic scholars in Algeria. The Association had later a great influence on Algerian lives as it set up many institutions where thousands of Algerian children were educated.

However, the mission of the Ulemas (AOMA), under the leadership of Abdelhamid Ben Badis and Bachir Ibrahim and others, was not an easy task at all for many reasons that we mentioned earlier. Abdelhamid Ben Badis and his fellows worked unstoppably days and nights to fight all kinds of cultural domination exercised by French colonialism on the Algerian people and to restore to the Algerian people their independent cultural and civilizational identity through educational projects which carries Islamic values along with its civilizational dimensions.

## 4. Research Methodology

The study is purely qualitative, which uses a purely descriptive analytical approach. The researcher takes the poem "Algerian People are Muslim- شَعْبُ الْجَزَائِرِ مُسْلِمٌ" and attempts to analyze its aesthetic as well as cultural meaning together with the identity values of the Algerian people.

### 4. 1. Data Analysis

This study aims to analyze Ibn Badis's poem "Algerian People are Muslim - شَعْبُ الْجَزَائِرِ مُسْلِمٌ" so as to unveil how its construction of the Algerians identity through a stylistic analysis.

This patriotic poem is considered as one of the most famous revolutionary texts that immortalized the Algerian liberation revolution; it was written (improvised) by Sheikh Ibn Badis at a ceremony held by the School of Education in Constantine on Ramadan 27, 1356 hijria, corresponding to November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1937, on the occasion of the celebration of Laylat al-Qadr (Talbi Ammar, 1997)

This poem was said by Ibn Badis in a time where France spread the lie of Algérie-Française, and when some Algerians believed such myth and began advertising for a full integration with France. Therefore, as can be seen, one can feel that the poem is somehow filled with anger and resentment as it is expressed below:

شعب الجزائر مسلم وإلى العروبة ينتسب  
 من قال حاد عن أصله أو قال مات فقد كذب  
 أو رام إدماجا له رام المحال من الطلب  
 يا نشء أنت رجاؤنا وبك الصباح قد اقترب  
 خذ للحياة سلاحها وخض الخطوب ولا تهب  
 وارفع منار العدل والإحسان واصدم من غصب  
 واقلع جذور الخائنين فممنهم كل العطب  
 وأذق نفوس الظالمين السم يمزج بالرهب  
 واهز نفوس الجامدين فريما حي الخشب  
 من كان يبغي ودنا فعلى الكرامة والرحب  
 أو كان يبغي ذلنا فله المهانة والحرب  
 هذا نظام حياتنا بالنور خط وباللهب  
 حتى يعود لقومنا من مجدهم ما قد ذهب  
 هذا لكم عهدي به حتى أوسد في التراب  
 فإذا هلكت فصيحتي تحيا الجزائر و العرب

#### 4.2. Discussion: Construction of the Cultural Identity:

Using a reporting style, as can be seen, immediately from the beginning. The lexical choice (Algerian people are Muslim and belong to arabism شعب الجزائر مسلم وإلى العروبة ينتسب) is the starting line of the first stanza. Here, Ibn Badis seems outraged, disappointed and unsatisfied with his surrounding, especially with the advocates of "Algerie-Francaise". Herein, Ibn Badis insists of the "Algérie-Algerienne", defining the Algerian people cultural affiliation. The phrase "Muslim" is used to assure the Algerians religious identity, and the phrase "belong to Arabism /العروبة ينتسب" is used semantically to show that the Algerian people are affiliated to Arabism. Ibn Badis did not deny the regional origin of the land, Algeria; instead the phrase is used connotatively to mean the honor of belonging

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to the language of the Islam. So, it is a spiritual affiliation not a physical one. In the same stanza (line 2 and 3), he moved to say:

من قال حاد عن أصله أو قال مات فقد كذب  
أو رام إدماجا له رام المحال من الطلب

Without a clear context, such example would be too vague to be understood<sup>5</sup>. Out of context, we cannot understand "who" refers to, because it contains a number of expressions such as "Whoever says- departed from its origin, or said it died, has lied". All these lines depend for their interpretation on the immediate physical context in which they were uttered.

Ibn Badis wanted to cut the idea that the Algerian people have changed their identity or died, it was a message to those who wanted Algeria to be part of France. He also said that it was something impossible to happen.

Then Ibn Badis moved to express his belief in the role of youth in carrying the burden of the Algerian liberation by using motivating and encouraging expressions like:

يا نشء أنت رجاؤنا وبك الصباح قد اقترب  
خذ للحياة سلاحها وخض الخطوب ولا تهب  
وارفع منار العدل والإحسان واصدم من غصب  
واقلع جذور الخائنين فممنهم كل العطب  
وأذق نفوس الظالمين السم يمزج بالرهب  
واهزز نفوس الجامدين فربما حي الخشب

The stylistic characteristic used by Ibn Badis and which helped in transforming the message clearly is the repetition of the coordinating conjunction ("و" - "and") in lines 6, 7, 8, and 9. Probably due to its important cultural message, Ibn Badis adopted repetition of the coordinating conjunctions as a style choice to place emphasis on the future role of the young generation "يا نشء أنت رجاؤنا وبك" in the Algerian national and cultural prosperity. Herein, Ibn Badis applied the 'connotative' meaning. By saying (وبك الصباح قد اقترب), Ibn Badis means the near future.

Ibn Badis kept encouraging the younger generations to hold the torch of the defense against the colonizers and betrayers. He used terms like (day, life, arm, justice, poison, wood)

By the end of the poem, Ibn Badis demonstrates strongly Algeria's National, Muslim and Arabic identity, welcoming whoever accepts it and rejecting whoever rejects it:

من كان يبغى ودنا فعلى الكرامة والرحب

أو كان يبغى ذلنا	فله المهانة والحرب
هذا نظام حياتنا	بالنور خط وباللهب
حتى يعود لقومنا	من مجدهم ما قد ذهب
هذا لكم عهدي به	حتى أوسد في التراب
فإذا هلكت فصيحتي	تحيا الجزائر و العرب

As it can be seen in these last verses, Ibn Badis welcomed all who wanted the same future of the country and rejected any opponent's ideas, using opposite terms like «الكرامة والرحب, المهانة والحرب». In fact, these verses also reflect Ibn Badis's personal feelings and attitude towards the subject matter<sup>3</sup>.

Another stylistic feature which also helped in transformitting the intended message is the repetition of the rhyme during the entire poem. As can be observed, the poem falls on one constant rhyme pattern, i.e., the poem ends with (ب) and thus the rhyme scheme of this poem is: (1 \_a\_, 2 \_a\_, 3. \_a\_ ,4. a\_, 5. \_a\_, 6. \_a\_, 7. \_a\_, 8. \_a\_, 9. \_a\_). This ending affects the flow of the poem making it more rhyming and more organised structure. The repetition of similar sounds (b) along the entire verses could help in creating a musical rhythm, inciting enchantment and inspiring bliss, and probably it is this that makes the poem adopted in the today's school programs along with other favourite national ones.

In a nutshell, the poem is about the Algerians cultural identity which is portrayed in a significant literary and rhetoric style, as it is written in very simple language that could be understood by everyone, and consisting of five stanzas and fifteen verses with the same length.

##### 5. Conclusion:

By way of conclusion, Ibn Badis's poem "Algerian People are Muslim - شَعْبُ - الْجَزَائِرِ مُسْلِمٌ" reflects a beautiful amalgam of cultural theme and literary style. The thematic identity expressed in this poem is the Algerian Islamic national identity. The poem is written in a coherent framework with a very simple language consisting of 15 lines that reflect Ibn Badis's patriotism. That is, the poem is utilized as a mirror of Ibn Badis reaction against the French colonialism and their attempt to replace the Algerians' identity with one, which is neither quite French nor quite Algerian – but a hybrid.

In short, Ibn Badis's poem did not only immortalize the Algerian Liberation Revolution, but it also generated emotional and cultural bonds among the Algerian people by linking anti-colonial movements to the social identity, and thereby fostering solidarity and offering a solid basis for current Algeria. Indeed,

3 In his theory of 7 types of meaning, Leech (1881) calls this 'affective meaning', which refers to the "personal feelings of the speaker, including his attitude to the listener or his attitude to something he is talking about" (p. 5).



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such literary contributions succeeded in inspiring and informing the Algerian citizens that reviving the Algeria identity was a moral obligation.

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2021

**Appendix A**

المنفى

قولوا لأمي ما تبكيش يا منفى  
ولذلك ربنا ما يخلمش يا منفى  
كي دوني لدرينال يا منفى  
جادرمية صغار وكبار يا منفى  
والسلسلة توزن قنطار يا منفى  
داربوني بعام ونهار يا منفى

**Appendix B**

شعب الجزائر مسلم وإلى العروبة ينتسب  
من قال حاد عن أصله أو قال مات فقد كذب  
أو رام إدماجا له رام المحال من الطلب

يا نشء أنت رجاؤنا وبك الصباح قد اقترب  
خذ للحياة سلاحها وخض الخطوب ولا تهب  
وارفع منار العدل والإحسان واصدم من غصب  
واقلع جذور الخائنين فممنهم كل العطب  
وأذق نفوس الظالمين السم يمزج بالرهب  
واهزز نفوس الجامدين فريما حي الخشب  
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هذا نظام حياتنا بالنور خط وباللهب  
حتى يعود لقومنا من مجدهم ما قد ذهب  
هذا لكم عهدي به حتى أوسد في الترب  
فإذا هلكت فصيحتي تحيا الجزائر و العرب