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THE LINK BETWEEN THE ART AND THE CULTURE OF ALGERIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The arts in Algeria have existed since the existence of humankind, occupying and influencing people as both a material and moral medium that surrounds them and within which they live. Practicing art became a unique style that distinguishes individuals from other environments where arts originated and flourished. It is used to re-educate societal emotions and instill behaviors of beauty. The forms of artistic representation and expression have diversified according to the culture and environment of Algerian society. From the design of stone hunting tools to mural paintings, to dancing as an expression of emotions, and performances that descended from religious rituals and mass ceremonies to ward off evil spirits, art has been an integral part of human experience. At other times, people celebrate by singing and chanting during war and peace, just like people worldwide, reflecting their inner emotions, whether negative or positive.

Furthermore, the Algerian individual has mastered drawing strength from unity and adhering to the principles of social cohesion derived from the actual conditions and fundamental elements of Algerian society's culture across various historical periods. The cultural pattern, imbued with adherence to values, customs, and traditions, has played a significant role in shaping the Algerian audience's taste for artistic works. These works, in turn, are governed by principles that enable artists to achieve aesthetic, utilitarian, and industrial goals, or simply provide pleasure and entertainment. Sometimes, they even cater to psychological desires, including erotic stimulation, considering that the artist seeks to employ their imagination and freedom, which govern their behavior and orientation.

Art narrates the history of humankind and provides us with cultural knowledge, as it intersects with various aspects of life and the prevailing sciences of each era. It offers different perspectives from multiple angles, remaining both enduring and renewable due to its intrinsic nature. Art is a refined creative activity, constantly evolving and deeply rooted, as it stems from the human spirit. Thus, artistic beauty is the highest form of beauty, whose significance is undeniable due to its rank. It reflects the level of human progress in a specific society within spatial and temporal boundaries and, beyond that, serves as an expressive language linked to the spirit of the nation.

KEYWORDS

Art, Culture, Algerian Society, Beauty

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1. Introduction.

Art is inherently connected to humankind, whether as an audience, a practicing artist, or a researcher in the field. As a result, it has become intertwined with philosophical and empirical sciences and has intersected with various literary genres. The subject of art is one of the essential topics, no less significant than other fields. Therefore, there is a strong need for artistic writings, particularly regarding Algerian theater, visual arts, and cinema, to provide a comprehensive understanding from all aspects and enrich the scientific field with different perspectives and multiple angles.

Art remains both enduring and renewable due to its intrinsic nature. It is a refined creative activity that continuously evolves and is deeply rooted, as it stems from the human spirit. Thus, artistic beauty is the highest form of beauty, whose significance is undeniable due to its rank. It reflects the level of human progress in a specific society within spatial and temporal boundaries and, beyond that, serves as an expressive language linked to the spirit of the nation.

Through thousands of years, the arts have told the history of humankind, providing us with knowledge, beliefs, ethics, laws, and traditions. Its fields have extended across social, political, economic, and religious domains, prevailing in every era.

Problematic.

The artist, in turn, bears a heavy burden in their artistic works, as they are linked to the spirit of the nation or the era in which they lived. These works have their own alphabet, foundations, and unique elements. Within this dynamic, Algerian artist stand between affirming and denying their identity—between preserving their heritage and advocating for renewal, and between embracing artistic movements leaning toward modern and postmodern arts and a culture of alienation.

Thus, a cognitive concern arises, leading to the formulation of the following problem: To what extent is Algerian society connected to art? How does our local society perceive beauty?

This phenomenon, in all its dimensions, may contain indicators of profound transformations within Algerian society, necessitating the proposal of certain hypotheses.

Hypotheses.

The cause of conflict and the fragmentation of Algerian society is a cultural issue. There is a necessity to change our closed culture and shift towards an open culture. Before we can appreciate beauty, beauty must be an intrinsic part of our lives, embedded in our souls, actions, and behaviors before we seek it in the tangible world.

Research Methodology.

This study falls within the descriptive and analytical framework that aims to analyze Algerian society's culture to understand the crisis of connection and explore ways to strengthen its ties with art. This will allow us to later provide explanations for our local society's perception of beauty.

2. The Cultural Map of Algerian Society.

Algeria is the beating heart of the geographical unity of the Maghreb and Africa. Historically, it has represented a social unit encompassing Maghrebian peoples from the earliest human settlements to the present, as indicated by historical sources and archaeological studies. "Algeria is a purely Arabic name for the nation's capital and the mother of the country. This name was not used for the entire territory until the Turkish era. Before that, Arabs referred to it as the 'Central Maghreb' due to its position between the 'Far Maghreb' (Morocco) and the 'Near Maghreb' (Tunisia). In ancient times, Berbers called it 'Argel'" (Mohamed El-Djilali, 1965). If we consider its geographical location, we can say without exaggeration that it is the heart of the world, given the natural resources and wealth bestowed upon it by God, making it a target for invaders throughout history.

Mohamed El-Djilali (1965) also mentioned, "After the Stone Age and before the Islamic conquest, Algeria was ruled by five great nations: the Berbers, the original indigenous inhabitants, followed by the Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals (one of the Eastern Germanic tribes), and Byzantine Romans. This is what we refer to as Ancient Algeria." The remnants found in the city of Mascara suggest that Algeria was the cradle of civilized humanity, as various tools and artifacts indicate the advanced state of Algerians in those ancient times. Despite their simple and primitive lifestyle, they demonstrated intelligence, creativity, and craftsmanship (Tammar, 2007).

The writer (Aref, 1972) also noted, "The remains of early humanity found in Africa and Europe, despite their widespread distribution in the northern region from Rhodesia to the Sahara in Algeria and Morocco, suggest that Europe was the first home of humankind. However, we do not find skeletal remains in these areas that could help us study the creative human behind those artifacts."

According to (Bakhoush, 2002), "It is plausible that early Algerians practiced art for various ritualistic purposes and out of a deep-seated need to mimic nature and confront the existential question that shakes all humanity in the face of death, which is the antithesis of existence, civilization, and eternity."

The remnants of drawings, engravings, sculptures, architectural relics, and arts in general contributed greatly to humanity. "From this evidence, we can deduce that Africa witnessed the emergence of the first humans and that the most verifiable remnants are the tools left behind" (Aref, 1972).

2.1 Components of the Cultural Identity of Algerian Society.

The topic of societal culture has become closely linked to the issue of identity. When we question whether they are distinct or identical and which one constitutes the other—whether culture shapes identity or identity defines culture—we arrive at the concept of 'cultural identity.' This term has gradually gained prominence to the point that some analysts see it as a product of modernity. These questions lead us to establish the premise that "identity is always composed of three elements: a belief system that provides a worldview, a language for expression, and a long-term cultural heritage" (Al-Munir, 2000), which carries various cultural components. This explains why cultural elements shape individual identity.

Examples of these components in Algerian society include religion, language, customs, traditions, social values, means of production and consumption (reflected in clothing, eating, and drinking habits), structural power organization (whether tribal, urban, or legally regulated), superstitions, beliefs, and all aspects related to Algerian cultural heritage. Culture is defined as "a set of ways of life of a particular people—the social heritage an individual acquires from the community in which they live. It is also the part of the environment created by humans that determines lifestyle patterns, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. It is the collective knowledge of a human group, stored in its members' memories, books, materials, and tools" (Calhoun, 1964).

This aligns with thinkers' views that culture is an integral part of identity and its extension.

Culture, within the framework of Arab-Islamic civilization, is defined as the cultivation and refinement of the human self in accordance with Islamic law. The thinker Malek Bennabi defined culture as "a set of moral qualities and social values that influence an individual from birth and unconsciously become the bond linking their behavior to the way of life in the environment in which they were born" (Bennabi, 2000).

In this social environment, the personal, social, and cultural identity of the Algerian individual was formed and developed, accompanying them through all stages of life. Over time, culture becomes the cognitive and referential framework for their sensory and intellectual perceptions, as well as their aesthetic and ethical system, which they use to judge artistic work. "From what has been presented, it appears that the Algerian in ancient times developed his intellect, solidified his ideas, and began to form and distinguish his personality. He took significant steps forward socially, economically, and culturally and did not stop there but continued his efforts, taking broader strides forward until he entered the era of recorded history" (Tammar, 2007).

Since identity essentially means uniqueness, cultural identity is also cultural uniqueness. Thus, every Algerian individual perceives and feels a deep connection to the environment in which they grew up. "This production gave the Algerian experience and wisdom. Like others in the Mediterranean basin, he mastered stone craftsmanship, made arrows, created fascinating drawings, and practiced weaving and textiles. The stone tools discovered in Algeria resemble those found in Egypt, leaving no doubt that there were connections between Algerians and Egyptians for thousands of years. Whether the Egyptians were influenced by Algerians—considering North Africa as the original homeland of humanity—or the Algerians were influenced by Egyptians during their passage through Egypt to reach these lands" (Tammar, 2007). This suggests that there are shared elements among nations with similar cultural components.

Algerian society's culture has been linked to various cultural elements and manifestations, most notably "the unity of the Arabic language and creed within the framework of Islam. The Maghreb region's population devoted themselves to construction and civilizational creativity in its broadest domains, in an atmosphere of political freedom and economic prosperity. Significant cultural centers emerged, rivaling those in the Islamic East, such as Kairouan, Fez, Tahert, M'sila, Ashir¹, Qal'at Bani Hammad, Bejaia, Marrakesh, Tlemcen, and Constantine, alongside the cities of Al-Andalus, which were part of the Maghreb region and a product of its

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¹Asher is an Algerian city in the southeast of the province of Medea

creativity" (Bouaziz, 1995). This means that "Algerian artistic taste developed and evolved in relation to both the eastern and western Mediterranean basins, indicating that Algerians had artistic inclinations from ancient times, progressing gradually and uninterruptedly towards material and spiritual refinement" (Tammar, 2007).

Nations, including Algeria, strive to define their cultural framework that embodies their identity to ensure their survival and continuity or out of fear of assimilation and disappearance. Algeria has relied on glorifying its cultural pillars—arts, literature, and history—whether oral, performative, visual, written, or drawn, and transmitted through old or modern media. This serves as a vessel for scholarly culture, promoted by the educated elite, as well as what can be called popular culture, which belongs to the general population, whether urban or rural. Among the most significant aspects is "Algerian Berber literature, which was occasion-based. The Berber people had a natural inclination for musical singing, drawing their evocative expressions from poetry that flowed from the deepest sources of nature. They also had an appreciation for art, as evidenced by museums filled with pottery and tools showcasing remarkable artistic taste. The decorations found in textiles and tattoos on the hands, face, and legs are remnants of ancient Berber art, resembling in form the art of the Negroes, Greeks, Egyptians, and Mediterranean islands" (Tammar, 2007).

3. The Connection Between Artistic Practice and Algerian Society's Culture.

Undoubtedly, Algeria's historical experiences have given it a unique cultural character, making this connection observable in popular art in general and in storytelling and theater in particular. Before independence, "the writings of Rida Houhou, Ahmed Ben Achour, and Al-Shafi'i provided a literary outlet. These writers focused on artistic elements such as inspiration, character depiction, and interaction with events. After independence, storytelling evolved to reflect the reality of Algerian society, encompassing all its cultural, political, and social issues" (Tammar, 2007). This was done "to restore Algerian values and strengthen national identity. For instance, theater was not merely for entertainment but also a means of guiding the people. One of the earliest forms of theater known in Algeria was Karagöz puppet shows, performed as early as 1835 during Ramadan—though they may have been known even earlier. These performances were attended by locals and even some Europeans, where Karagöz would only appear on stage to engage in physical skirmishes with other actors, becoming enraged upon seeing them dressed as French soldiers" (Tammar, 2007).

Recognizing the potential reactions that these discoveries about the arts and their connection to societies may provoke, there is a firm conviction that "based on a critical approach to the Algerian society's perception of beauty and art—considering its cultural and historical elements—it is unlikely to deviate significantly from the general characteristics of the Arab-Islamic society" (Bakhouche, 2002). This is because "brain development does not stop at primary culture, and it is appropriate to nurture sensory perception from childhood through colors, games, manual skills, sports, and training in vision and hearing, as these open their mental lives. The arts primarily provide human beings with perspectives they would not perceive otherwise" (Konanck, 2004). Thus, society cannot do without art, and there is no reason to doubt the role of the arts and their various forms in education and culture. "Music, for example, has an existential nature and penetrates intensely into our decisions. It seeps into the soul and takes hold of it more effectively, as musical culture holds the privilege of supremacy. It facilitates perception, and from this arises the influence it exerts on the will—that is, on the listener's emotions—making them experience beauty effortlessly" (Konanck, 2004). This also applies to its national role through patriotic anthems and passionate speeches, as well as the emotional and aesthetic experience of art and its applications in life for enjoyment.

"As an Algerian society whose destiny has been shaped by Islam as part of universal rationality for fifteen centuries, it has established certain normative specifications for beauty—its criteria, significance, and its place for individuals and the collective" (Bakhouche, 2002). The arts, as such, inspire and enrich human experiences, fulfilling profound meanings for the human spirit. "The preservation of different cultures occurs through their embodiment in artistic works. For instance, contemplating the details and engravings of diverse artistic works on the walls of temples and ancient places of worship aids in understanding the culture of the people, their society, and the prevailing beliefs of that era. Additionally, art helps in illustrating and clarifying the differences in cultures within a single place over different periods" (Radwan, 2010). Art has played a significant role in previous civilizations, such as those of the ancient Greeks and Egyptians. "Over time, especially after the Greeks established the Olympic Games in 776 BC, their fascination with the naked body influenced their artistic expression, signifying their civilization and glorifying its symbols. The ultimate purpose of this art was to depict the hero, not for himself, but as a representation of an ideal—Apollo, the embodiment of beauty" (Bakhouche, 2002). "If the value of ethics were to clash with the value of beauty, the Greeks would favor beauty. This compels us to distinguish between their understanding of ethics and ours. As

an Algerian and Arab society, our standards differ from those of Western societies, sometimes contrasting in how we perceive these values, leading to differing perspectives and reactions" (Bakhouche, 2002).

Numerous studies and programs emphasize the necessity of art as a natural means to enhance creativity among innovators, as well as for patients and individuals with psychological or mental disorders. "Through artistic culture—which refers to the level of expertise in the fine arts—one can be trained to distinguish and compare different artistic styles, analyze artistic works, understand different execution techniques and their characteristics, which helps in appreciating artistic works based on sound artistic principles" (Jassem Abdel Qader, 2003).

Given the link between art and societal culture, it is essential to highlight that "as traditional Arab societies, where honor is limited to women as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives, the same concept has a different perspective in Western art. In the West, honor is a distinct issue intertwined with the human condition and carries a different standard, as it varies from one nation and its culture to another. It is deeply rooted in the collective conscience of each nation" (Bakhouche, 2002). This means that ancient arts can still be considered a standard model, while simultaneously acknowledging potential cultural differences. "The West is characterized by a mindset focused on the self and nature, whereas the Eastern mindset—being nurtured in the cradle of divine messages—is more inclined toward transcendence, the metaphysical self, and the heavens. Thus, it is more receptive to accepting religious beliefs and adhering to the teachings of sacred scriptures that advocate moral principles and spiritual virtues, rather than polytheism, the struggle of wills, and superiority based on power and beauty" (Bakhouche, 2002).

Recognizing the reactions these discoveries may provoke regarding the arts and their connection to societies, there is a conviction that "based on a critical approach to Algerian society's perception of beauty and art, which is shaped by elements of culture and history, we do not believe that it significantly diverges in its characteristics from the broader Arab-Islamic society" (Bakhouche, 2002). This is because "brain development does not stop at primary culture, and it is appropriate to nurture sensory perception from childhood through colors, games, manual skills, sports, and training in sight and hearing. These elements open their intellectual lives, and it is the arts that primarily allow human beings to perceive what they would not otherwise see" (Konank, 2004). Thus, society cannot do without art, and there is no reason to doubt the role of various forms of art in education and culture.

For instance, "music, which is existential in nature and intensively penetrates our decisions, infiltrates the soul and takes hold of it more effectively, as musical culture enjoys a privileged status. It shapes perception, and from there arises its influence on the will, affecting the listener's emotions and enabling them to experience beauty effortlessly" (Konank, 2004). Additionally, the arts serve a national role through patriotic anthems and impassioned speeches, as well as fostering emotional engagement and aesthetic appreciation in everyday life.

"As an Algerian society, whose destiny has been shaped by Islam as part of a universal rationale for fifteen centuries, we have assigned specific standards to beauty, considering its significance, criteria, and place in relation to individuals and communities" (Bakhouche, 2002). The arts, as they inspire and cultivate human experiences, achieve profound meanings for the human spirit. "The preservation of different societies' cultures is realized through their embodiment in artistic works; for example, contemplating the details and engravings of diverse artistic works on the walls of temples and various ancient places of worship aids in understanding the culture, society, and prevailing beliefs of that time. Art also helps illustrate and clarify the diversity of cultures in a given place over time" (Ridouane, 2010).

Throughout history, art has played a vital role in civilizations such as ancient Greece, the Romans, and the Egyptians. "Over time, especially after the Greeks established the Olympic Games in 776 BC, they were influenced by their admiration for the naked body as a demonstration of their civilization and a tribute to its symbols. The ultimate goal of this art was to depict the hero, not as an individual, but as an ideal representation—Apollo, the embodiment of beauty" (Bakhouche, 2002).

"If moral values were to conflict with aesthetic values, the Greeks would prioritize beauty. This compels us to distinguish between our understanding of ethics and theirs. Our standards as an Algerian and Arab society sometimes contrast with theirs as Western societies, leading to differing perspectives and reactions toward these values" (Bakhouche, 2002).

Numerous studies and programs emphasize the necessity of art as a natural avenue for fostering creativity, whether for innovators, patients, or individuals with psychological and intellectual disorders. "Through artistic culture—which entails expertise in visual arts—it is possible to train in distinguishing and comparing different artistic styles, analyzing artworks, understanding various techniques, and recognizing characteristics that facilitate the appreciation of art based on sound artistic principles" (Jasem Abdelkader, 2003).

Given art's connection to society's culture, it is essential to highlight that "as traditional Arab societies, honor has historically been confined to women in their roles as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. However, in Western art, the concept of honor is viewed differently because it is an inherently distinct issue with varying standards across nations and cultures. It is deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of each society" (Bakhouche, 2002). This means that ancient arts can still serve as a benchmark today. At the same time, cultural differences should be acknowledged, as "Western thought is largely self-centered and focused on nature, whereas Eastern thought, having emerged in lands that are the cradle of divine messages, is more inclined toward transcendence, the divine self, and the heavens. Consequently, it is more receptive to religious doctrines and moral teachings rather than polytheism, the struggle of wills, and the dominance of power and beauty" (Bakhouche, 2002).

Therefore, the claim that our culture must change because it is closed in on itself and that it must embrace an open culture, along with the argument that it is necessary to alter aesthetic standards due to the impositions of modernity—where one must either accept everything or reject everything—is incorrect. Such a view represents the obliteration of a dominant culture by a subjugated one and constitutes cultural infiltration.

The common ground between us and others lies in the fact that "the fine arts, in truth, hold a more vital and refined value for humanity than technology and technical science. They once again relate to the entirety of the human being. Jean Piaget has clearly demonstrated that sensory-motor intelligence seeks only practical adaptation, meaning it aims solely for success or application, whereas conceptual thought aspires to knowledge for its own sake" (Konank, 2004).

"The differences between us" do not imply elevating the West or diminishing the East, and vice versa. These remain general characteristics that require scrutiny, verification, and rigorous analysis. The fundamental distinctions between these civilizations do not originate from human lineage or race, as some claim, but rather from the unique formation of each mindset based on its environmental factors, accumulated knowledge, experiences, and beliefs. Thus, the Western historical trajectory has triumphed through the authority of reason, while the Eastern historical trajectory has triumphed through the authority of revelation. Together, they form the complete narrative of human history" (Bakhouche, 2002).

This underscores the immense importance of culture and its broader impact on shaping individual character. "Margaret Mead explicitly states that culture is an abstract yet existing phenomenon. Individuals create, transmit, and transform culture. Ultimately, understanding cultures stems from observing the behaviors of individuals, who, according to Mead, 'are the culture'" (Ghamari, 1989).

The way societies interpret artistic works reflects their vision and behavioral approach, preserving the identity and continuity of the collective. Culture shapes individual character and can be a driving force behind societal progress or stagnation. When examining artistic works, whether in theater, cinema, sculptures, or paintings, audiences often focus on specific aspects such as clothing details, body proportions, or the general background of the artwork. This artistic perspective, whether in reading a painting or any other artistic form, is a hallmark of Algerian culture and part of its identity rather than a characteristic of the artwork itself. We engage with art through our personal vision, which is shaped by our lived experiences.

"Every society has its literature and arts, which distinguish it from others and express its cultural identity through storytelling, poetry, visual arts, painting, theater, acting, architecture, and more—each carrying a message to be conveyed to others" (Zaghou, 2015).

The colonial reality in Algeria created a cultural crisis marked by fragmentation and national distortion, affecting the people culturally, socially, and politically. Religion remained the sole refuge throughout the transformations Algeria experienced. Through Islam, the Algerian people overcame significant hardships and crises, despite ethnic and ideological disputes. "There is no denying that the Algerian nation has been Berber since ancient times. No nation has ever managed to erase its identity or strip it of its Berber essence, nor to assimilate it entirely into another identity. Instead, Algeria has historically absorbed its conquerors, who, in turn, became part of its fabric. When the Arabs arrived and introduced Islam to Algeria, not to impose dominion but to spread guidance, the Berbers willingly embraced Islam and learned Arabic. They found open doors to advancement, intermarried with Arabs, competed in scholarship, and shared governance and life's resources with them" (Ben Badis, 1981).

Considering that values and principles are among the main determinants of the behavior of the Algerian individual and guide his interaction with the outside world, they serve as a reference in understanding the civilizational and cultural framework of society. They determine what is artistically desirable or rejected, whether in speech, performance, or visual representation. "Values are the foundations of social life; without them, life becomes impossible, and the social system cannot perform its functions in achieving the goals of the

group, even partially, without values. These values act as a safety valve that ensures order instead of chaos, allowing members of society to live securely and preventing the collapse and disintegration of society" (Aidi&Jirou, 2016).

From this literature, we conclude that the aspect of Algerian culture being complemented by the artistic component is, in itself, a science. "Visual artistic culture is an essential part of an individual's overall cultural fabric, enabling them to understand the dimensions and aspects of other cultures. It is unimaginable to have any field of science without the mediums and tools of art that facilitate and simplify scientific knowledge. There is hardly any scientific book in any field of sciences or literature that does not contain numerous illustrations, images, and artworks that relate to these different fields and enrich knowledge and communication" (Deqman, 2005).

3.1 The Crisis of the relationship between Algerian society's culture and art.

We cannot deny that some forms of interpretation of the cultural crisis (in art, writing, freedom, belonging, etc.) are deeply rooted in Algerian society. Abou El Kacem Saâdallah pointed out that Algerian scholars fled during the era of the sultans due to their oppression and injustice, as well as the rulers' silence over foreign raids and their internal decay. "As happened with Al-Wansharisi and the Sultan of Tlemcen, his house was looted, and he faced many hardships. We also find that Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi was faced with the choice of either revolting against the situation, as Al-Maghili did, emigrating from his country, as Al-Mushaddali did, becoming a poet praising the rulers, as Al-Hawdi, Al-Tanisi, and Ibn Al-Qunfudh did, or isolating himself from people, as his students Muhammad bin Yusuf Al-Sanusi and Ahmad bin Abdullah Al-Jazairi did" (Saâdallah, 1998).

The astonishing paradox is what Saâdallah further notes: "Algerians have long been known for not giving due weight to their scholars, nor recognizing their sanctity or honor. This phenomenon was harsher on scholars than the oppression of rulers and the injustice of the era. Perhaps this is what forced many of them to emigrate during the nineteenth century and live outside Algeria. A glance at the biographies of some of them in works such as (Al-Daw' Al-Lami') by Al-Sakhawi, (Nayl Al-Ibtihaj) by Al-Tinbukti, (Al-Bustan) by Ibn Maryam, and (Anba' Al-Ghumr) by Ibn Hajar is enough to realize the extent of the loss suffered by Islamic culture in Algeria" (Saâdallah, 1998).

Saâdallah mentions other names, clearly illustrating that "the ordeal in Algeria is fundamentally cultural, resulting from the absence of serious culture—the culture of unity and unification—and the marginalization of serious intellectuals, replacing them with opportunists to fill the void. This led to the dominance of the illiterate politician over the cultured politician, allowing space for absurd discourse, partisan buffoonery, and cultural and political deception. Consequently, the cultural identity, established over thirteen centuries, became subject to revision and even bargaining in life, exploited by pressure groups and colonial forces that vowed revenge upon us" (Bin Qaina, 2000).

Based on the nature of these components, problems, and political decisions affecting our Algerian society, we will explore the reasons for the Algerian cultural crisis and the response to this structure:

- 1. The suffering endured by the Algerian people is still evident today due to the periods of Ottoman expansion. "The Turks focused their efforts on the military field, creating a scientific gap between Muslims and Europeans, preventing Algerians from accessing the technological and scientific advancements in Europe" (Bin Qaina, 2000). Here, we do not seek to deepen the accusations that completely strip the Ottomans of civilization and culture but rather to establish the fact that they isolated Algerian society from the outside world and neglected the cultural aspect. "This was not a priority for the Turks, whether in Istanbul, Algeria, or elsewhere. If we were to demand this from them, it would be akin to demanding something beyond their nature. Moreover, how could we expect them to encourage the production of a language they neither knew nor appreciated? The language of Islamic civilization was undoubtedly Arabic" (Saâdallah, 1998).
- 2. There is a historical fact regarding a well-known event: "After subduing the Kabyle regions and suppressing the resistance of the religious leaders between 1844-1857, French officers and administrators, known as the 'Arab Offices' and mixed municipal circles, focused their attention on local affairs. Encouraged by officers and officials sympathetic to the Kabyle cause, such as Marshal Bugeaud and General Randon, who abolished Islamic law among the Djurdjura tribes through Instruction No. 497 on January 11, 1858, the Arab Offices in Kabylie were instructed to abandon any dealings related to Islamic law and replace them with a local organization tailored to the tribes. There was also Marshal MacMahon and Marshal Doumma, who issued directives to separate the Kabyle people from other Algerians in dealings and laws, believing in the necessity

of a 'Berber policy' that would bring the Kabyle people closer to the French system. This policy was first documented by historian Robert Ageron and orientalist Victor de Parade" (Saidouni, 2004).

3. When "the Institute of Living Oriental Languages was established in 1795 in France, every Western capital had an orientalist institute where scholars gathered to exchange information on their mission. They held international conferences every five years, with Islamic studies being their main focus" (Mutaqani, 2001). The validity of the questions posed is not necessarily dependent on the clarity of the answers given. We ask: Were these conferences driven by political necessity or scholarly pursuit? Regardless of the answer, "French presence was notable at these conferences, such as the one held in the 1980s (1984). Some of the topics discussed included lectures on dialects. For example, Orientalist Henry Basset presented a lecture on the evolution of Berber studies since the Brussels Conference, French orientalist Brunot¹ delivered a lecture on French expressions borrowed into Arabic dialects, and orientalist Roux presented a lecture on Berber manuscripts written in Arabic script in southwestern Marrakech" (Mutaqani, 2001).

Now, "it is observed from these conferences that they are concerned with Berber affairs, which is one of the issues that Orientalism has long devoted its attention to, as it causes division among the people of a single nation. It is no surprise, then, that France established the Institute of Berber Studies in Paris. Moreover, those who advocate separating the Amazigh from others are, in fact, individuals educated in the French cultural system" (Mutaqqani, 2001). These individuals, having been overlooked by the newly independent states, have now become a harvested crop, being imitated and empowered to occupy sensitive decision-making positions in Algeria and similar previously colonized countries.

- 4. "The French contribution regarding the Kabyle region and the establishment of the Berber question has resulted in a substantial body of literature and studies addressing the ethnography of the Kabyle people in terms of traditions, customs, oral narratives, folklore, social phenomena, linguistic indications, and archaeological remains. Currently, French research centers are working to make these studies available in libraries as a reference for proponents of the Berberist ideology in Algeria" (Saidouni, 2004).
- 5. The claim of racial purity has deceived us through cunning manipulation and has been woven into a negative cultural framework. As a result, the Algerian cultural issue has become a reality we wake up to and live with daily. "The colonial authorities in Algeria, along with political, journalistic, and literary professionals, manufactured the myth of the Berbers/Kabyles. Colonial administrators and French academics promoted this myth, asserting that Arabs and Berbers are entirely different elements—that Arabs were later invaders, culturally inferior, while the Berbers were the true indigenous people, superior in nature. This myth was built on a policy of 'divide and rule,' which essentially meant the Francization of the Berbers" (Saâdallah, 1996).
- 6. Today, this cultural issue is expressing itself, "as French hegemonic ideology has failed, and those working for it have rushed to seek a servant to act as their enforcer or collaborator for its protection. This servant is the Amazigh identity. The secularist integrationists have worked to separate religion from language and politics to establish French dominance, leading to the emergence of the Algerian cultural problem as a conflict between Arabic, with its religious and social heritage, and French, with its political and ideological content, in direct opposition" (Ben Oina, 2000). This is not a coincidence but rather a result of colonial heritage.

This has had a negative impact today on Algeria's cultural, artistic, political, and social life. By addressing the Berber issue in this manner, we move beyond political positions and ideological convictions to an analysis that considers only Algeria's cultural and social reality. This so-called myth is a nationalist awakening based on ethnic distinction and the cultural specificity of an alienated and Westernized elite, which emerged as a product of French colonial reality. The evidence for this is that "none of the associations, research centers, or linguistic scholars have undertaken a project comparing the Berber and Arabic languages to highlight their similarities. Instead, they focus solely on what is assumed to be unique to Berber and absent in Arabic. This effort is not due to scholarly curiosity but rather a deliberate attempt to eliminate Arabic vocabulary and preserve a rich and extensive Berber lexicon. The reality, however, is that the significant presence of Arabic words in Berber is what troubles those who deny its connection to Arabic" (Darwudi, 2010).

7. "In addition to the cancer of illiteracy, poverty, and underdevelopment lasting over 132 years, much of what we suffer from today is a direct consequence of that painful colonial period, during which the people of this wounded Algerian nation were classified as animals, stripped of their human status, and described with degrading terms that denied their very humanity. They were even deprived of their affiliation with their own homeland" (Ghanem, 2011).

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¹A French orientalist born in Algeria (1888-1948), he studied at the universities of Algiers and Paris and has many studies on Islamic law, but he was interested in the Berbers and their own laws (Al-Aqiqi, vol. 01, p. 280)

8. The result of these atrocities and imposed trends was that they infiltrated Algerian society against its will and negatively affected its culture. Furthermore, "our distorted understanding of freedom and democracy, our deviation from the principles for which the nation's martyrs sacrificed, and our abandonment of the national state project—which should not disappear with the departure of individuals or political parties—are what have led us to this level of thinking and behavior" (Ghanem, 2011).

3.2. Activating Cultural Dialogue within Society.

Nations that have opened discussions about their cultural identity calmly and aligned themselves with their historical and cultural continuity—without prioritizing narrow regional ethnic perspectives—have seen their intellectuals, scholars, and politicians engage in debate with composure, ultimately resorting to rationality without losing balance or leaving space for those who exploit identity issues for their own agendas.

"For example, in Egypt, intellectuals debated the Pharaonic identity of the Egyptian people, with figures like Salama Musa and Taha Hussein contributing to the discourse. Much ink was spilled before they finally concluded that Egypt has been, and will remain, a civilization rooted in Arab-Islamic identity while respecting religious minorities. They affirmed that Arabic would remain their language, while their Pharaonic heritage would serve as a subject of academic and historical research. In this way, they designated hieroglyphic writing as a research tool in universities, used only for studying their ancient civilization" (Hourani, 1978).

A similar scenario occurred in Syria and Lebanon. The proponents of modernity in Syria, emerging either from purely ideological affiliations or as a result of sectarian realities—particularly among the Alawites allied with Christian and Shia minorities—tried to impose identity divisions. Among them were sectarian expressions such as Druze and Sunni factions, which were frequently fueled by certain groups that benefited from these trends. Some political, social, and economic elites used these divisions to reinforce fragmentation, claiming that Syrians and Lebanese people were of Phoenician rather than Arab descent and that Arabization was merely a linguistic shift. According to them, the Lebanese vernacular was not an Arabic dialect but an entirely separate language. The Phoenician identity was thus embraced as a cultural foundation to deepen divisions within society.

"The Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals who debated their Phoenician identity included figures such as Saeed Aqla and others who were highly passionate about the topic. However, in the end, Syrians and Lebanese alike accepted that their primary identity remained Arab—whether Muslim or Christian. That did not prevent them from utilizing their historical heritage for academic research in their universities" (Najjar, 1988).

The identity struggle is also evident in Iraq, where the issue has been manipulated and carefully crafted. Some groups have presented it as a deeply painful and historically rooted problem, claiming it stems from ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian heritage. "Iraq's cultural heritage is indeed rich, especially when compared to the Berber heritage in Algeria. The latter relies on oral traditions that have been passed down for generations but do not extend beyond the sixth century BCE. These traditions were not accompanied by the Punic or Latin scripts, nor by the Tifinagh script, which evolved from rock carvings in the Sahara and was not used until the second century CE" (Ghanem, 2011). This led representatives of the Assyrians, Turkmen, and other minorities to engage in identity struggles, demanding the same recognition as the Kurds to safeguard their minority rights.

"Despite these conflicts, Iraqis eventually acknowledged their Islamic civilizational identity while respecting the beliefs and languages of minorities and utilizing their entire heritage in academic research and university instruction of their ancient written languages" (Durant, 1959).

The course of the conflict has been repeated in different details in the Turkish state, with sectarian slogans and historical national repressions, which were restrained by nationalist ideologies through their connection to power. These repressions resurfaced when their script was changed, leaving their marks on the issue of identity acquired by birth or by affiliation with the Greeks. "Atatürk was driven under the pressure of the educated Christian current in Turkey, descendants of the two Trojan Greeks, who dreamed of restoring their Greek civilization after being overcome by Turkish tribes and their preference for their civilizational script over the script of the Islamic faith" (Al-Husari, 1965).

In South Africa, "the argument was that race and culture are two independent matters and that respecting cultural differences should be the foundation of a just society, a proposition that is not dangerous in America but could become so in South Africa, the last stronghold of the apartheid system. Radical Afrikaners practiced a policy of racial segregation, but it was not race but culture that was the true basis of difference. National institutions transcended cultural boundaries and concluded that apartheid was impossible and that South African nationalism should be a national identity composed of both whites and blacks" (Cooper, 2008).

This same issue continues to trouble European countries from within in their struggle with minority demands. Even France has not been spared from the demand to promote dialects into languages, such as Breton and Corsican. Every time French presidents address the people of Corsica, they do so with a firm and stern tone, emphasizing the impossibility of constitutionalizing a second language or raising a second flag for these minorities other than the French flag. They urge their government to keep the French people united as a single entity and to prioritize France's interests above all, avoiding tension and the misuse of the issue for misleading purposes. Meanwhile, these same presidents do not hesitate to fuel hostility, spread the spirit of racial hatred, and promote extremism within African, Arab, and Algerian societies, under the pretext of protecting minorities and preserving the ethnicity of indigenous populations.

Amid these crises that have affected the cultural landscape of Algerian society, the crises within Algerian culture are not merely issues of identity; they are also societal crises rooted in the incompetence of leaders who failed to recognize the importance of expertise. Instead, they gave excessive attention to material aspects of progress without considering the human being as the core of development. The policy of a single-party rule, its monopoly on power, and its dominance over all sectors for years have exacted a price that today's rising generations must pay.

Moving away from a pessimistic and negative perspective and closer to professionalism and objectivity, we say: "Neither the cultured self nor the cultural space produced in Algeria has been able to achieve our historical identity, for the following reason: the Algerian intellectual self has absolved itself from the task of making history because it has relegated itself to a historical moment that controls the cultural future, a moment that has not yet arrived. It is on the verge of obliterating its identity and essence. Specifically, we mean the revolutionary event/political independence, which we call: an Algerian intellectual who has never thought about what it means to think outside the actual, completed historical timeline" (Bousdiq, 2016), which has generated a state of pessimism within the intellectual elite.

4. Algerian Society and Its Perception of Beauty.

At the outset, what can be said is that "the sense of beauty in Algerian society is spontaneous and does not manifest in conscious expressions. Instead, attention is directed toward actions that create enduring beginnings, such as rural architecture and its festive aspects. During construction, modesty and solidity are taken into account—qualities that combine utility and ethics. As for beauty, it remains a transient state dependent on artisans and their sensitivity, artistic finesse, and imagination in choosing colors. The weaver of a piece of fabric usually adheres to the tradition of his predecessors, thus imitating the ancients in a monotonous manner" (Al-Sadiq Bakhoush, 2002). Furthermore, "the future of Algerian artistic expression, influenced by its Arab-Islamic and Amazigh cultural references—especially in music, visual arts, and miniatures—will remain linked to the extent to which artistic practices spread among Algerian youth" (Al-Hussein Al-Zawi, p. 209).

It is undeniable that Algeria has a rich and diverse historical heritage. However, aesthetic appeal is noticeably absent in architecture, as evidenced by slum buildings and the uniform style of constructing neighborhoods and buildings seen at city entrances. Despite Algeria's distinguished status due to the density and diversity of its historical heritage, which remains to this day as a fundamental cultural component of rural communities in the Maghreb, the artistic ingenuity of Algerian tribes and inhabitants, evident in various drawings, is no longer reflected in today's reality. "A viewer of the residential neighborhoods in our country is confronted with terrifying realities, where poverty is coupled with the absence of beauty. This is because the idea of beauty, absolute happiness, and complete justice in Algerian culture are matters postponed to the gardens beneath which rivers flow and to houris untouched by humans or jinn. Algerian society, in its rationality, venerates these ideals, respects and anticipates them more than it seeks to understand and imitate them, as they are, in its belief, forbidden to it in this world" (Bakhoush, 2002). As Al-Sadiq Bakhoush points out, these phenomena are repeated across different parts of the world but at varying levels.

In some Arab countries, such as Algeria, the aesthetic sense is virtually absent—not only in our daily lives but also in our environment. When it does exist, it is often artificial, reserved for exclusive locations or rare occasions, such as official visits by dignitaries. A genuine belief in aesthetics, one that emanates from the Algerian spirit, is nearly non-existent. From a neutral, objective, and scientific perspective, we are in dire need of applying the principles of aesthetics to our everyday lives before we can appreciate beauty in paintings or any other form of artistic expression.

The beauty that should manifest itself in collective behavior is almost absent in Algerian society, appearing only in isolated and exceptional cases. One of the main reasons for this lack of aesthetic behavior and awareness is the absence of aesthetic culture and the strained relationship between individuals and their

surroundings. The Algerian people, fragmented by colonial rule, have found it difficult to reconnect with their environment or achieve inner stability. The Algerian self has become alienated from its surroundings, leading to a loss of mental clarity, vitality, and the enthusiasm to embrace life with love, joy, creativity, and innovation. (*Bakhouche*, 2002)

As the evolution of art progresses over extended periods, it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint the social and cultural factors that shape each form of artistic expression. Undoubtedly, the historical events experienced by Algeria have given it a distinct cultural identity, which is clearly reflected in its folk art. Every fragment of our collective memory highlights the unique characteristics of a land where, since ancient times, people from diverse backgrounds have converged. Over time, they have woven a tapestry of belonging from the threads of their differences, creating Algeria—a place where everyone feels at home. (*Cheikh*, 2007).

This is evident in the rich heritage Algeria takes pride in, particularly in the period before the French occupation when art initially flourished. Back then, Algerians enjoyed a more fortunate artistic and aesthetic experience than they do today, as evidenced by the remnants of historical sites scattered across cities in the west, east, south, and north. Intelligence and simplicity coexisted in a harmonious and thought-provoking aesthetic balance. However, "now, 45 years after independence, what remains of this coastal paradise? Only crumbling palaces eroded by geographical factors, a diminished aesthetic and civic sense among the new residents and city administrators, and the transformation of many beautiful villas into neglected courtyards, often marred by haphazardly added rooms. Only a few structures have retained their original beauty and charm. Meanwhile, the culture of tourism has regressed significantly. Today, our beaches host only impoverished children selling snacks in baskets or fishing near sewage outlets. As for literature and the arts, they have seemingly abandoned this land—perhaps forever." (Fawzi Saadallah, 2007)

The Algerian society has thus come to associate beauty with mere ornamentation, lacking a general awareness of aesthetics as a way of life, a mindset, and a perspective on existence. "We acknowledge that post-independence Algeria neglected a crucial element in its national development equation—culture. The country's leaders adopted a materialistic and mechanical vision of the future, failing to invest in human capital. Some advocate for a societal project based on values inherited from the French colonial era, others call for a neo-Salafist vision rooted in a theocratic state, while a third group promotes a national project—one that faces persistent obstacles and challenges." (*Bakhouche*, 2002)

Despite these shortcomings, (*Hussein Zawi*, 2014) notes that "Algerian art has achieved global recognition through two distinct forms of expression. The first is music, where pioneers delved into the depths of folk heritage to find voices that best convey the authenticity and diversity of Algerian musical traditions, reflecting elements of identity and cultural belonging." The second is cinema, which, through select works, has garnered numerous awards. "Those who closely follow Algerian cinema can observe its richness and the depth of its narratives, inspired by the ingenuity of Algerian heritage and geography. Its creators have successfully portrayed the complex and diverse reality of Algerian society." (*Hussein Zawi*, 2014).

Conclusions

These insights in our study highlight the importance of shaping Algerian society's cultural awareness and its impact on local perceptions of art. They also expose the gaps and challenges that hinder this relationship while suggesting possible remedies. We have examined the Algerian individual's perception of beauty and the historical ruptures that have deepened the disconnection between Algerian society and the arts—between academic researchers in their educational and pedagogical fields, artists with their brushes and canvases in their studios, and their communities. This widening gap has made it increasingly difficult to bridge the divide, especially as we strive to keep pace with the rapid evolution of contemporary art. Despite nearly two centuries since the concept of beauty and art first emerged in the modern world, Algeria still struggles to integrate these notions meaningfully into its cultural framework.

The overwhelming complexity of this cultural abundance does not exhaust us more than the reality itself. However, when this obsession with intricate details is applied to beauty and art, we find ourselves unable to distinguish between the fundamental elements that shape our culture and those that have dismantled and distorted it. Discussing Algerian culture inevitably leads to discussions about the intellectual elite and their freedom. Yet, freedom is the foundation of thought and expression, and without it, culture cannot thrive. This is not to say that artistic creation and appreciation exist in isolation from historical, cultural, and social conditions. Rather, these conditions present diverse historical possibilities that make our cultural identity unique and distinctive.

As long as art—whether in its classical forms, such as folk arts, or its modern expressions—remains marginalized and confined to museums as mere displays for foreign tourists, the culture of the people is either perceived as lifeless or reduced to exoticism, mysticism, and spectacle. In reality, every segment of Algerian society navigates daily through multiple cultural mindsets, engaging with artistic culture according to contemporary demands. Pierre Bourdieu described Algerian society as a theater for emerging theories and contradictions, where cultural crises have often been diagnosed through ideological frameworks. These ideological influences have led to a discourse that speaks on behalf of the people rather than allowing them to express themselves through a genuine artistic and scientific lens.

Algerian society is not isolated from global transformations or from the cultural model that emerged during the Enlightenment and evolved through modernity and postmodernity. However, predicting the trajectory of this model remains challenging, as it is still in the process of shaping a new cultural paradigm that both adapts to and responds to contemporary challenges. This model is still under discussion and exploration, as its essential components have yet to fully crystallize, and its defining features remain incomplete.

Undoubtedly, formulating this new model—one that balances Algeria's integration into global cultural currents with the need to preserve its unique identity—places significant responsibilities and burdens upon us. Constructing such a model, inspired by Arab heritage yet deeply rooted in Algeria's contemporary realities and challenges, while remaining open to global intellectual and cultural advancements, requires a fresh consciousness, a new approach, and an innovative way of thinking. It necessitates engagement in a dialogue of civilizations, cultures, and languages, fostering mutual interaction and enrichment in the pursuit of a dynamic and evolving cultural identity.

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