Language Conflict and Identity Malaise in Algeria and the Maghreb

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Edited by

Abderrezak Dourari
and Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi

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PRESENTATION

ABDERREZAK DOURARI
AND KHAOULA TALEB IBRAHIMI
ALGIERS2 UNIVERSITY

Language Conflict and Identity Malaise in Algeria and the Maghreb is a new book on language conflict, intended to foster a vivid, deeper understanding of the conflicts taking place in these societies. It delves profoundly in the troubled waters of language and identity in a geographic and human space completely undermined by the very ancient impressive Arab and Islamic ideology in search of a renewed legitimating discourse for the Arab violent conquest of the North African territories under the cover of the propagation of the Islamic faith, while disregarding the requirements of the living together in peace for the benefit of the social, cultural and economic development of the modern societies. However, the Quran, the holy text supposed to guide strictly the behavior of disciples, never asked believers to conquer other people's land and even less to dominate and reduce to slavery the peoples living there. However, this is what really happened, and it remains an up-to-date and perplexing issue.

When we deal with language conflict, wherever it might occur, in any region in the world as well as at any level of the intrastate relations of a specific society, we do not focus on the languages in question themselves, but on what they do represent for the peoples living within the same society and who use them for communication on the one hand, as well as banners for different antagonistic, competitive or complementary objectives, on the other hand. Basically, language is a symbolic system that serves as a mediator between the world of objects and the human brain's apprehension of this world in praesentia as well as in absentia. However, when it's an actor itself in the midst of a societal conflict, it becomes a meta-symbol, the symbol of symbols. The aims explicitly set for language conflict by different social actors are not merely material in nature but, in some societies, material only in second place. After mediating the world of objects for its locutors, it goes on to stand for a system of ideas at an upper level, playing

the role of a metasymbolic function or an ideology before which people would line up orderly, eager to sacrifice for it or to 'open fire' on the adversary.

In human societies, ideology, identity, and politics are highly contentious, conflictual issues, but are generally shrewdly concealed behind deliberately deafeningly expressed confusing language (Dourari, A., 2021). These issues usually are regulated and solved cyclically as soon as they arise through discussion in States ruled within the framework of democratic politics. Elsewhere, they fuel an everlasting squabble between socio-political proponents while veiling the substantial underlying issues really at stake. This scheme of thought can be an acceptable comprehensive basis for understanding language conflict. However, language tensions differ in grade from one society to another.

To provide a proper benchmark for comparison between the Maghrebi states and societies and other African or Asian countries, we briefly outline the situation in Cameroon and Malaysia. In **Cameroon**, a Central African country where the main second language is French, spoken by 56p.c. of the people, and the second one is English, spoken by 23p.c. of them, the conflict between "Francophones and Anglophones" indicates, according to Comfort Nchang Numfor (2022: p.18):

> Some kind of shift from French to English that reflects the latter's position as a global lingua franca, associated with the Western-style of life, prosperity and economic development, scholarship, career opportunities, science and technology, to name just a few.

In this African country where over 250 indigenous languages are spoken, with a dominant English-based Pidgin "used as a language of wider communication throughout the country" (Ibid., p.18) and where eight regions out of ten are francophone and only two Anglophone, the lead is widely for English. Moreover, Anglophone doesn't necessarily mean mastering English; instead, it just means belonging to regions that were once colonized by Great Britain. The rush toward English is not out of necessity but, as the author puts it, by an identity **opportunism**. This situation may ultimately lead to a specialization of language use, assigning foreign languages to specific functions and for intercommunication, and the indigenous ones to identity and culture.

We may call this type of language conflict, following the concepts of geopolitics, mutatis mutandis, a low-intensity conflict, since it doesn't mingle with the affirmation and/or negation of anyone's identity, involves

no risk to jeopardize the societal peaceful coexistence, and doesn't give ground for political unrest.

In Malaysia, a southeastern constitutional monarchy, according to Paolo Colluzzi (2017: pp. 17-38):

> In total there are more than 200 million speakers of Malay/Indonesian, making it the 9th most spoken language in the world, either as L1 or L2…Malay is the official language of Malaysia where it is spoken as a first or second language by most of its population of about 28 million.

After the National Language Act in 1967 revised in 1971, Malay was the only official language and the only medium of education in secondary schools. Advocating Chinese as a second official language was considered an **offense** despite the fact of the presence of a Chinese minority community. Other communities live in this country, and their languages are also used. In this Muslim (64 p.c.) multilingual and multiethnic state, around 140 languages are used (p19), and the overall sociolinguistic picture would give, in addition to Malay, the majority and official language, the following elements:

> Arabic is spoken by few people, but it retains a high level of prestige among the majority Muslim community due to its religious significance. The remaining languages occupy the low position in a diglossic relationship with English, standard Malay and Chinese.

Things didn't go without incidents and the 1969 racial riots caused by the "frustration of some sections of the Malay population, who felt outdone by other communities" led to the imposition of Malay with Rumi script (simplified Latin English Vs Jawi: Arabic) as the sole language of education so that English schools have been converted into National ones sharing the same national syllabus with Malay as a compulsory subject. However, this didn't destabilize the position of English, which remained "the preferred even when the addressee belongs to the same ethnic group" (p. 27). The author concludes that "the key to making Malay attractive is to make it prestigious and useful on the one hand, and neutral on the other.*"*

The sociolinguistic situation in Cameroon seems somewhat less intricate than that of Malaysia. In the last cited state, many languages are correlated with differentiated social functions, nationalism, religion, ethnic minorities, and the linguistic requirements of modernity, which seem to overpower all other functions inhibiting, by the same, the roots of any dire language conflict.

Compared to these two countries, one Asian and the other African, the situation in Algeria and the Maghreb is very complex. The main multifariousness lies in the way people are attached to their representation of identity, and this latter to religion, culture, and language. Then, what motivates the relationship between the different proponents of national identity goes far beyond mere peaceful competition for social or economic positions within a non-democratic political and cultural context, wayward of rationality.

The struggle over language choice is confounded with imposing one's ontological truth on identity to maintain one's domination, and this latter is confounded with strife for access to or keeping power. This part of the world, namely North Africa, while enjoying globally a deeply anchored Amazigh matrix going as far back as prehistoric times, has undergone through time so many invasions that necessarily left their cultural, linguistic, and human influence: Punic, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, French, etc., resulting in many dissimilar points of identity crystallization. The French and Arab features are the most antagonistic and are put into fierce competition with the Amazigh matrix in a crisscrossed manner. For a certain trend of thought, French is correlated with modernity and democracy. In contrast, while scholarly Arabic is correlated with religion and tradition, it is perceived by this trend of thought as a repository of outdated ideas. It is also associated with the negation of Tamazight perceived by the opposing trend as a danger to the affirmation of the exclusive Arab origin and culture of Amazighs (Berbers). Then, Tamazight, in this case, is correlated with the very ancient prehistory, history, and authenticity. Each opinion plays up its own preferred features and plays down the others'. The official language policy and planning resulted in a tentative discourse seeking a conciliatory attitude among all these antagonistic positions. In fact, playing up the status of scholarly Arabic and Islamic religion in line with the PPA/MTLD (Algerian Popular Party, renamed the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties) during the crisis in 1949. The recent decision to substitute English for French participates in this "conciliatory" biased attitude, since, against the long-time used efficacious argument that Scholarly Arabic doesn't ease the access to science and modernity in anything, is opposed blatantly and abruptly by the substitution of English for French and, to a lesser extent, for Scholarly Arabic. The Franch is being ferociously opposed by the Islamist and Arabist movements for its purported link with laicism and colonialism, and this stance can be traced back to the beginning of the late 20th century to the leader of the so-called Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt, Hassan Al-Bana.

This book seeks to deeply and overtly discuss, from a new perspective, the complex sociolinguistic situations of the most prominent countries of the Maghreb: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, by well-known researchers from these three countries.

For Abderrezak Dourari, the language conflict in Algeria, which has everlastingly gotten in the way of any settlement of the intellectual, cultural, and, subsequently, the political strains in Algerian society, falls into two parts. The first one is linked to the intricate ideological sphere and the historical foundations of the misunderstandings that cleave the elites into opposing blocks, fighting each other instead of seeking accommodation and synergies to positively influence the evolution of society and bring it to more rational positions. The second one is the sociolinguistic domain proper, the way it is construed and handled by influential professionals, sometimes regardless of well-established scientific research methodologies and ethics, and which, in the long run, fuels ideological conflict rather than bringing them methodically and progressively to an accommodating position. This atmosphere is aggravated by the lack of democratic spaces dedicated to free intellectual and cultural debates.

M Kamel Igoudjil points out that Algeria faces a challenging linguistic dilemma due to its complex history and diverse population. After gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria promoted Arabic (scholarly) as the sole official language to assert a unified national identity and distance itself from the colonial past. However, French remains widely used, especially in higher education, business, and government. Additionally, Algeria is home to several minority languages, including Tamazight varieties. This linguistic reality creates a **challenging** compromise between asserting scholarly Arabic and accommodating multilingual realities. This book's chapter analyzes Algeria's linguistic dilemma and its roots in colonial history. It explores the promotion of scholarly Arabic after independence and examines why the French retained its privileged status despite nationalist linguistic policies. The precarious position of Tamazight varieties is also discussed. Challenges and tensions around multilingual education are highlighted. Additionally, the author considers the broader implications of Algeria's linguistic dilemma for national identity, economic development, and social cohesion. It argues that a rigid nationalist linguistic ideology has failed to resolve Algeria's difficult compromise. More nuanced policies recognizing multilingualism may be needed to move forward. However, compromises remain elusive given the complex linguistic politics. This chapter provides an in-depth look at Algeria's intractable linguistic dilemma. It sheds light on the historical and contemporary

factors complicating language policy. The challenging compromise between scholarly Arabic, French, Algerian Arabic, and Tamazight underscores the difficulties of language planning in diverse postcolonial societies. Algeria's linguistic politics have far-reaching impacts on national identity and social unity.

Heikel Ben Mustapha shows that studies of the linguistic context of Tunisia have rarely explored language conflict. Moreover, the few studies were centered on attitudes and representations, so that the intellectual production on the languages of the Tunisian repertoire was usually neglected. The scope of this study is to review linguistic conflict and its manifestations in textual sources published between the late 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century, as well as speakers' attitudes toward languages and language use in contemporary Tunisia. Unlike epilinguistic discourse, which reflects the covert dimension of the conflict, intellectual production, being historically contextualized, enables us to better undertstand the conflict and its specificities. The study is, then, a combined approach that seeks to ally sociolinguistic inquiry with text analysis for the Tunisian context, which is perhaps one of the rare contexts that experienced an intellectual debate on languages and their role in the future of the country that is textually documented.

For Ibtissem Chachou, the project to re-Berberize Algeria is based on a mythical, even mythologized, conception of the Berber language (Tamazight) and the territories where it has been and continues to be spoken. Indeed, it is a militant vision of the Berber language and identity that posits the unified character of a language that all Berbers purportedly spoke at a given point in history. The structural unity of this language is used by some Berberists (Berber activists) to reconstruct the imagined territory of Tamazgha, where Tamazight is spoken—a term that replaced "Berber" in the 1970s. In the absence of clearly defined motivations to guide a linguistic policy aligned with Algeria's diverse and complex linguistic realities, the generalization of "official" Tamazight or Berber languages raises questions of both rationale and common sense. This initiative seems to stem more from a symbolic objective aimed at preventing separatism than from a pragmatic approach addressing the actual needs expressed by speakers, particularly in Algerian Arabic-speaking regions. While language policies often involve a balance between symbolic and pragmatic considerations, applying the same policies to all linguistic communities is unnecessary and risks exacerbating linguistic and identity conflicts rather than resolving them. In linguistic contexts such as those in North African countries, it would be more appropriate to adopt a pragmatic approach language

decision-making, placing less emphasis on symbolic aspects. Although these symbolic elements are undeniably significant, they should not interfere with the design of linguistic policy frameworks.

Khalil Magharfaoui affirms that 'Morocco's linguistic diversity is a defining feature, reflecting its rich historical heritage and unique geopolitical position. Arabic and Amazigh, the country's official languages, coexist in various forms and dialects, creating a complex and dynamic multilingual ecosystem. Additionally, foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and English contribute to this diversity, reinforcing Morocco's openness to the global sphere but also posing challenges for linguistic and educational policy. This study focuses on Darija (Moroccan Arabic), a colloquial variety of Arabic and the mother tongue of most Arabic speakers in Morocco. Despite its widespread use in daily interactions—spoken by over 94% of the population (official statistics, 2014)—Darija lacks official recognition and is often dismissed as a "vernacular." This exclusion highlights deep-rooted sociolinguistic tensions within 'Morocco's multilingual landscape, particularly in the context of its relationship with Standard (scholarly) Arabic. While Standard Arabic dominates numerous sectors, Darija is primarily restricted to informal interactions. This contrast highlights the intricate and hierarchical structure of Morocco's diglossic system, a key focus of the discussions presented here. The author concludes that Darija's journey from marginalization to potential standardization reflects Morocco's struggle to reconcile its diverse identities in a rapidly changing world. Monitoring user-driven practices and fostering community contributions to orthographic norms can ensure alignment with the speakers' lived experiences. This grassroots strategy may offer a sustainable path for normalization, unifying Morocco's linguistic diversity while respecting its inherent complexities. Ultimately, Darija's future depends on balancing tradition and modernity, authenticity and pragmatism. Whether as a symbol of Moroccan cultural identity, a practical means of communication, or a site of sociopolitical debate, Darija remains a vital component of Morocco's multilingual reality. Its standardization, though fraught with challenges, offers an unprecedented opportunity to reshape Morocco's linguistic landscape, honoring its rich heritage while embracing globalization.

Finally, Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi tries to explain that the issue of the languages of schooling, their mastery as languages of instruction, and their involvement in the learning of other disciplines and other forms of knowledge is the Gordian knot that has marked the establishment of the Algerian school system. It has been a focus of interest not only for

specialists but also for public opinion. The choice of language(s) of schooling has been, and still is, a central and eminently political issue for those who have decided and continue to decide on the 'country's future, as well as for the various social actors involved: the elites, families (parents and schoolchildren), and the media. To this day, this issue remains the subject of lively and passionate debate in society. The State's choice by the state of the language(s) of schooling, with its constant stubbornness in asserting identity, has given rise to passionate controversy at every stage of its implementation, demonstrating that specific fundamental and sensitive issues relating to the history and the future of the nation have still not been resolved.

It may be relevant to note that, at the time that we were trying to conclude our project, a critical study was published on the question of teaching languages in public schools in Morocco raising a very striking similarity on the conclusions with our approach reinforcing by the way the necessity of promoting comparative perspective pointed out in this presentation (see the reference below).

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CONTRIBUTORS

Dourari Abderrezak holds a doctorate in discourse analysis from the University of Sorbonne, France (1993). He is a professor in Language sciences and translation at the University of Algiers 2 and the head of the National Pedagogical and Linguistic Center for the Teaching of Tamazight (CNPLET). He has published many articles in in Arabic, French, and English in scientific journals. He also authored and edited some books among which : *Les malaises de la société algérienne, crise de langue et crise d'identité*. (Casbah ed. Algiers, 2003) ; *Cultures populaires et culture nationale*, (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002) ; *Penser les langues en Algérie*, (Frantz Fanon, Boumerdes, Algeria, 2022). He is the editor- in- chief of the scientific journal *Timsal n Tamazight* (The Tamazight Issues) published by the CNPLET.

M Kamel Igoudjil has been an educator in the Washington, DC Public School System for two decades, teaching English Language, Literature, and Composition. His research explores literary and cultural studies, multiculturalism, postcolonial theory, and critical literacy, with published works on Algerian and Francophone literature, as well as Native American, Indian American, and Caribbean narratives. He edited *The Global Rise of Indigenous Languages Symposium* (2015) and *Creating Myths as Narratives of Empowerment and Disempowerment* (2016) and authored *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Critical Pedagogy and Critical Literacy in Education* (2017). Mr. Igoudjil's educational contributions have earned him the 2009 Mayor's Award for English Teaching and the DCPS 2015 Excellence in Classroom Innovation Award.

Heikel Ben Mustapha holds a doctorate in sociolinguistics from the University of Sousse, Tunisia (2009). He has been an assistant professor of linguistics at the University of Manouba, Tunisia, and has been since 2004. His main interests are contact linguistics in the Tunisian context, syntax, and Discourse Analysis. He is the author of *Le code switching observé chez les diplômés de l'université en Tunisie* (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres des Arts et des humanités de Manouba, 2021) and coedited with Foued Laroussi "Louis-Jean Calvet, un linguiste parmi les siens". He

published other articles and chapters in academic Magazines and collective books**.**

Professor **Ibtissem Chachou** is a lecturer and researcher in Language Sciences at the University of Mostaganem. She is also an associate researcher at the CRASC (Centre for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology). She is the Director of the *Plurality of Language and Discursive Dynamics Laboratory* (Pluridylang). Her research focuses on language contact in the media sphere, the status of languages in Algeria, and sociolinguistic dynamics in Maghreb urban contexts. She has published numerous scientific articles in these fields and is the author of several individual and collective works, the most recent of which include: *Pour un plurilinguisme algérien intégré* (éditions Riveneuve, 2016), *Sociolinguistique du Maghreb* (2018 ; Hibr éditions), *Langues et dynamiques urbaines au Maghreb* (2020, Hibr éditions, Algiers), *Introduction à l'histoire des langues en Algérie* (2023, Hibr éditions, Algiers) and *Les discours contestataires à l'ère des RSN*, (Lambert Lucas, forthcoming book 2025).

Professor **Khalil Mgharfaoui** is an academic and the Director of the École Supérieure d'Éducation et de Formation (ESEF) in El Jadida, Morocco. A specialist in linguistics, didactics, communication, and journalism, he is also a writer and researcher. In addition to his research, Professor Mgharfaoui has been a visiting professor at Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada) and the University of Haute-Alsace (Mulhouse, France). He holds a Ph.D. in Language Sciences from the University of Nancy and began his academic career at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech before joining Chouaïb Doukkali University (UCD) in El Jadida. In 2021, he was appointed Director of Studies at the Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication (ISIC) in Rabat. In 2024, he assumed the role of Director of ESEF El Jadida.

He is also a novelist and the author of three literary works: *Les épines des roses*, *Étranges rencontres*, and *Fortune* (forthcoming).

His research focuses primarily on didactics and applied linguistics, with a particular interest in Darija, the first language of the majority of Moroccans. He has published extensively in the fields of language and didactics. He is the co-author of the first monolingual Moroccan dictionary of Darija. He serves as the Director of the Center for the Promotion of Darija, where he actively promotes and contributes to the recognition and promotion of this language in education and media. He has also organized several scientific conferences dedicated to language and communication.

Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, Professor in language sciences at the Department of Arabic Language and Literatures, University of Algiers 2. Doctor of Stendhal University of Grenoble (France), Head and founder of LISODIL (Linguistics, Sociolinguistics and Didactics of Languages Laboratory). She has long been working on the issue of languages in Algeria, the Maghreb and in the Arab World. In this context, she has supervised many theses and memoires and participated to numerous scientific events devoted to this issue. Among her publications we can cite: *Les Algériens et leur (s) langue (s). Eléments pour une approche sociolinguistique algérienne.* Dar El Hikma, Alger, 1995 ; « Quelques considérations sur la politique linguistique en Algérie », in *Mondialisation et Enjeux linguistique. Quelles langues pour le marché du travail en Algérie ?* Edited by Benguerna and Kadri, CREAD, Algiers, 2001 ; « Passeurs et parcours algériens en langues ». Images du « dire en langues » pluriel et plurilingue in *Le social par le langage. La parole au quotidien*, sous la direction de Myriam Achour-Kallel, Paris, IRMC-Karthala, 2015.

ALGERIAN ALGERIA OR ARAB ALGERIA AND LANGUAGE CONFLICT: AN OLD THEME AND NEW FALLACIOUS PRETEXTS

ABDERREZAK DOURARI
ALGIERS2 UNIVERSITY

Part I: Identity Formation and Definition Misunderstandings

The language conflict in Algeria, which has everlastingly gotten in the way of any settlement of the intellectual, cultural, and, subsequently, the political strains in Algerian society, falls into two parts. The first one is linked to the intricate ideological sphere and the historical foundations of the misunderstandings that cleave the elites into opposing blocks, fighting each other rather than seeking accommodation and synergies to positively influence the evolution of society and move it toward more rational positions.

The second one is the sociolinguistic domain proper (part 2), the way it is construed and handled by influential professionals, sometimes regardless of well-established scientific research methodologies and ethics, and which, in the long run, fuel the ideological conflicting postures, instead of bringing them methodically and progressively to an accommodating position. This atmosphere is aggravated by the lack of democratic spaces dedicated for free intellectual and cultural debates. Kevin Dwyer (2016: 25), about conflicting societal positions, appropriately notes:

> One must do more than simply hurl one absolute claim at another absolute claim. However, in a world where members of different communities refer to very different absolute values and sources of authority, it is far from being evident how we can go beyond situations where apparently contradictory absolutes confront one another; and whether such conflicts can ever be rationally settled.

Frequently, implicit opinions, which are not straightforwardly put into words as such, underlie these antagonistic positions upon societal values and unfortunately go undiscussed. The questions that subsume this outline of the Algerian ideological serious concern can be formulated straightforwardly as follows: Do the Amazighs (Berbers) exist by themselves? Are they North African indigenous people, Arabs, or Phoenicians (Punic)? Have they come from elsewhere, just like everyone? Are they specifically of oriental origin? What kind of Arabic did the Arab conquerors speak when they first overpowered North Africa? Was this the language that gave birth to the present-day Algerian Arabic? Was it comprehensible for the indigenous people on the sole basis that it was a branch of the same language family, namely Semitic? What was the mother tongue of the indigenous people?

If we assume today that the Algerian society, as it would have logically stemmed from its true historical formation process, could not have been anything else than characterized by diversity, then how are we to reasonably take into account this multicultural and multilingual reality within an integrated State that corresponds more faithfully to its true history and reality?

These are the main questions we try to tackle in the first part of this chapter. This inquiry will be conducted in the form of a dialectical discussion of the main ideas that underlie the ideological conflict, or value confrontation, over language and identity in contemporary Algerian society, which we consider, by the way, for all intents and purposes, globally similar to that of Tunisia and Morocco.

1. "North Africa" or the" Maghreb"? Identity Perception between history and ideology

1.1 Not that the denominations "**North Africa**" and/or "**Arab nation**" would have no pragmatic consistency at all, or would they be groundless assertions and sheer nominalism, but they are, in fact, both of them particularly questionable. To assign the concept of North Africa the meaning of the ancient homeland of the Amazighs (Berbers), one would, in fact, first have to exclude Egypt, focusing only on the ancient territories where Amazigh populations and civilisation live. Their territory indeed stretches, as documented by a significant number of medieval historians and chroniclers, from the western shore of the Nile River to the Canary Islands in its northern part (Naylor, P. C., 2009). This space also has a profound hinterland stretching from the Mediterranean coast to Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Chad's northern borders.

Egypt is indeed a distinct civilizational entity, so specific and so deeply rooted in history: 5000 years before our Era. In comparison, the Saharan civilization of the Tassili in Algeria is dated to 7000 to 10, 000 years B.C.E. (Hachid, Malika, 1988).

This discussion is not unheard of before[1]. Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) argued, through time, and space, with Al-Maqdisi al-Bichari (945/6-991 C. E.), Ibn Hawqal (d. in 988 C.E.), and Abu l-Fida (1283-1331 C. E.), well-known Arab travellers, chroniclers and Geographers, whereby he insisted to consecrate the concept "**Maghreb**" specially to term that part of North Africa that was, as he put it, "*the ancient territory of the Berbers*", with the exclusion of Egypt. Because he said, the inhabitants of the Maghreb do not consider Egypt and Barqa as part of their country.

1.2 After the cruel and bloody military conquest of North Africa in the 7th century C.E., during the Byzantine Empire, Arab conquerors eventually controlled all North Africa after more than half a century of battles. They gradually began imposing their culture, language, and religion on the Amazigh (Berber) original inhabitants of North Africa. This latter has been so widely incorporated that Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania were eventually considered part of the so-called "Arab world," which also included Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan, and the Arab Gulf countries. Subsequently, the following narrative is commonly shared by most historians:

In 640, an Arab force invaded Egypt, then part of the Byzantine Empire... From Egypt, various Arab generals moved westward, taking over the northwest African coast. This territory, known as the **Maghreb**, was inhabited by the **Berbers** (Amazighs), who surrendered in large numbers to the invaders and adopted Islam. By 705, the Maghreb had become a province under the control of the Muslim Umayyad dynasty. As colonial rulers, the Arabs brought their religion, customs, and language to the region.

This account represents the core narrative commonly accepted in academic circles about the people of North Africa (see below) and how they have progressively adopted Arabic and Islam. However, the Amazighs haven't abandoned their original identity; notably, those who settled in the higher, more remote mountains and Saharan areas have kept their lifestyles and languages.

2. A new debate on North Africa versus Maghreb in modern times

2.1 During the French colonial period: the first battle for the recognition of Tamazight

Created in 1926 under the instigation of the executive committee of the French Communist Party within the immigrant community, the "Etoile Nord-Africaine" (*North African Star Party*), according to Jacques Simon (2003), was the first Algerian leftist nationalist party dedicated to the struggle for the independence of Algeria from France. From the perspective of language acts, the syntagm "North-Africa", when concatenated with the name "Party", shifts its initial semantics, as a designation of a mere geographical position, to that of a political and cultural entity, thereby acquiring a new pragmatic content. This dialectical process of world-making through language acts (Austin, J.L., 1962) and performances introduces in the conscience of interlocutors a new sense of place and belonging. It assists them in moving through time and place while maintaining a more coherent representation of themselves and of what they belong to, consistent enough to stand in significant opposition to other places, other ways of being, other histories, other realities, etc.

This kind of language act is fundamental since it helps individuals construct their personal, local, transnational, and spiritual identities indeed by referring to extra-linguistic criteria: geography and history. A new mental reality was born when that speech was first uttered. That is the illocutionary force of the linguistic act. Therefore, it is as if Algeria (through the North African Star Algerian Party) has been *asserting* itself as, in a certain way, creating a kind of common image with North Africa.

Algeria is altogether Algerian and NorthAfrican, and this initial idea has come to be become very thorny over time. One may wonder why it is so challenging to assert that Algeria is simply Algerian while minimizing all peripheral ideological factors. In fact, militants of the Algerian Independence have had, during the 1949 PPA-MTLD nationalist party political crisis (Hadjeres, S., 2022), to resolve the issue of whether the future independent **Algeria** would be defined as **Algerian** simply or as **Arab and Islamic** altogether. Yet, these terms had not been discussed as such within the party and, through discussion, were converted into concepts. They worked as simple sloganeers.

Omar Carlier (1986, 347-370) says:

> Algerian Algeria" versus "Arab and Islamic Algeria», are presented as alternative terms, and mutually exclusive…the first slogan pretends that the "Arab" dimension of the country is not fundamental and unavoidable, whereas the second one pretends that "Berber" doesn't exist. (My Translation).

Most PPA/MTLD militants supported the latter option. Accusing their opponents of "**Berberism**" (Carlier, O., Op. cit:149), the official trend combatted this opposing minority vigorously. It assassinated some of them "*to prevent the division of the nation"* in its efforts against colonialism, they contend. The CCE (the Coordination and Execution Committee[2]) of the FLN revolutionary party, after the Soummam Congress on August 20th, 1956, decided to crush the so-called "berberist" militants by any means "to *avert the risk of division of the nation"* (Sadek, Hadjeres, 2022)**[3]** and the revolution over identity grounds.

After the Independence (July 5th, 1962), the FLN –Party-State decided to make a language and cultural policy aiming at reinforcing exclusively the Arab and Islamic features of the Algerian society identity by taking a distance from French, implementing an exclusively monolingual scholarly Arabic based language policy[4], and putting the Islamic religion in the highest status in the juridical, cultural and social life. It was an attempt to strengthen national identity and independence, far from the former colonial power[5] (See Remaoun, 2000:37-59). A series of resolutions, decrees, and party decisions was adopted to implement this drastic policy. The most explicit and powerful legal act is Law 91-05 concerning the generalisation of Arabization:

Article 4 of the law 91-05 stipulates (*my translation*):

> "The public administrations, the institutions, the enterprises and the associations, regardless of their nature, have to make use of the sole Arabic language in all their activities such as communication, administrative ruling, finance, technical and artistic activities."
>
> **Article 5***: "*...The use of any foreign language within deliberations and debates of official meetings is forbidden.*"*
>
> **Article 15:** *"*Teaching, Education, and Formation in all sectors, at all levels and in all the disciplines, are performed in Arabic, etc*..."*
>
> **Article 31***: "*Any breach of the articles 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 is punishable by a fine worth between 5000 and 10000 DA", etc."

Similarly, not only did the national authorities in the aftermath of Independence exclude North Africa and Amazighness from the definition of Algerian identity, but they also did everything they could to reduce its societal visibility, under the threat of severe repression, for allegedly "threatening the unity and integrity of the nation**"**. It's not a matter of Ethnicity, and this latter is certainly not race; it's not religion, culture, language, etc., yet all these aspects are parameters of it. People do not consider themselves linked by kinship at such a larger level as that of the Maghreb, they nevertheless feel vaguely that they do have some subtle but powerful link between them and a vague sense of sharing the same ancestors and future. Massinissa, Syphax, Jugurtha, Juba…, Dihya, Kuceyla, etc., are claimed as common ancestors by the Maghribis of various States.

2.2 New Battle for the recognition of Tamazight

Many political, cultural, and civil society actors conducted covert or open political and cultural battles (Dourari, A., 2014:91-106) since the aftermath of Independence, which resulted in the official recognition of "Tamazight."[6] Henceforth, this latter had been introduced into the Algerian public education system syllabi since 1995**, at** the same time as the creation of the first Tamazight institution: The Higher Authority for Amazighness (HCA), which had been instituted under the supervision of the Algerian Presidency of the Republic. This acknowledgement ha become a significant milestone in the formal political recognition process for Tamazight.

Essential steps followed later, one after the other (opening university departments dedicated to Tamazight, research centres, newspapers, television programs, celebrations of historic Berber Kings or of revolutionary personalities and martyrs from Kabylia, etc.), that brought the general impression that Algeria was officially recovering its historical, cultural, and anthropological formative elements. Some scholars anticipated that multilingualism and multiculturalism were on their way to achievement: Tamazight became a national language in **2002** and was elevated to the status of an official language in the **2016** revised constitution, and confirmed in the **2020s**. Yenayer 12^{th,} the ancestral agricultural calendar celebration of the new year, was elevated to the rank of a national and official public holiday.

After these successive legal steps, identity tensions had somewhat temporarily collapsed in society. One may usefully keep in mind, while discussing this question in the Maghreb, that there are some differences between the Maghrebi States regarding the progress of the Amazigh claim.

We agree with Mohamed Tilmatine and Thierry Desrues (2017) when they declare in the introduction to their book:

> The historical depth, the nature and the radicalism of the claiming realities diverge from one country to another… Recently, the status of the Berber language has significantly changed through its officialization in the Algerian constitution (2016) and the Moroccan one (2011). In Tunisia, the Amazighness of certain Amazigh minorities has not been mentioned in their constitution. In Libya, the Amazigh cause, while being present at the beginning of the "revolution", seems to have failed to secure the officialization of the Amazigh language alongside Arabic in the constitution of the future State. (*My translation*)

2.3 Back to tensions on Tamazight

However, the identity tensions, stirred by official decisions, did not take too long to revive in the light of the massive and generalised contestation of the Algerian political system. The ***Hirak***[7] popular movement, with millions of Algerians peacefully and orderly demonstrating in the streets throughout a significant number of departments, denounced a corrupted, illegitimate, and authoritarian regime and requested a radical change in governance, weeks after February 16th **(**in the town of Khenchela**,** East of Algeria**)**, then on February 22nd, 2019 **(**Algiers**),** initial demonstrations. The demonstrators pressed for the reconfiguration of the state based on democratic institutions emanating from the will of the people in conformity with articles 7 and 8 of the 2016 Algerian Constitution. The official leaders ruling the State, desperate to reach a satisfying[8] agreement with the Hirak, brutally took the excuse of the so-called North African Emblem waved by demonstrators[9] to progressively carry out harsh repressive measures against them, unleashing violent propaganda mobilizing all the Public and so-called private media[10]against the so-called "Berberists" and their supposedly covert ill political intentions. Political and cultural actors, on their part, assimilated this act led by the authorities into a downturn in the former positive process of Tamazight legal status recognition. This news blew on the old ashes of the former torch of contestation.

2.4 "North Africa" Vs. "Maghreb": the clash of civilisations (Amazighness Versus Arabness)?

The debate over the geographical reference of the terms "*Maghreb*" or "*North Africa*" is crucial to politics and identity in this region. This observation is neither new nor trivial. Long before, around the 10th. C.E. the

traveller and geographer Ibn Hawqal (938, d. in 990), as mentioned before, defined the Maghreb territory with a certain precision[11]:

As for the Maghreb, a part of it extends to the Maghreb Sea on its western side, and this sea has an eastern and a western part, both of which are inhabited. The part of the west extends from Egypt and Barqa, encompassing Ifriqya, the region of Tenes, Sebta, and Tangiers. The Arabs possess Zawila and its surroundings, particularly, whereas the oriental part of it belongs to the Romans, and extends from the Syrian frontiers to Constantinople, etc. (*My Translation*)

Thus, for Al-Maqdisi, "the Maghreb lies in two parts: an oriental part goes from the Egyptian frontier to Zawila, in Tripolitania, and a western one stretching from this very point to the Farther Sousse," as is summed up in the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

However, the well-known historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldoun rejects this mere geographical definition. He contends:

> The inhabitants of the Maghreb do not consider Egypt and Barqa as part of their country; the latter extends only to the Tripoli province and embraces the regions of the *country of the Berbers* in ancient times.

Gustav Yver (2004) states that the Maghreb is itself split into three main parts: the Ifriqiya, the Maghrib awsat (Central Maghrib), and the Maghrib aqsa (farther Maghrib).

Subsequently, since ancient times, the intellectual divide has been between the sheer geographical perception of this space and the anthropological one, and it seems that these two concepts (Maghreb and North Africa) are still ideologically heavily connoted, not to say emotionally loaded until now.

The Modern Amazigh quest re-introduced this issue into the political debate. The radical Arabist ideology, adopted by the Algerian Independent State, rejects the concepts of Maghreb/Mashreq (Dourari A., 2022: 103-148) because, notwithstanding their Arabic denominations, they would be an invention of Western colonialism with the ill-intention to split the Arab Nation into two opposing parts, in order to make them altogether fit to be dominated. Paradoxically, this dichotomy is disallowed by Berberism too- the opposing trend- as referring to the Arab Islamic empire after the conquest and domination of this space during the 8th century. E., overlooking the Amazigh historical and anthropological facts. The Amazigh Militants and activists would, therefore, prefer the concept of "North

Africa," even if it includes Egypt, which lies beyond the realm of ancient Amazigh territories.

3. The UMA Emblem Vs. The North African Emblem or Arabness Vs Amazighness

The way in which the Algerian authorities managed to turn over their own attitude toward the so-called North African or Amazigh emblem, a few weeks after the beginning of the Hirak movement, was nothing short of surprising. Could that be a mere alibi to switch their hesitating attitude in the direction of that phenomenal and threatening contestation movement- demanding a radical change of the political system, that rallied, at times, many millions in the streets all around the Algerian districts- to a blatantly hostile one? Was it the result of pressure from foreign Arab states? Whatsoever, instead of the highly expected dialogue with the Hirak, they immediately took unbending measures against protesters and ventured to imprison even young women, which is as unprecedented as a culturally inconceivable act when it is not upon criminal weighty reasons.

The authorities and their supporters, all of a sudden, arbitrarily branded the Amazigh or North African emblem as a symbol of separatism incompatible with the Algerian national unity represented by the unique official national emblem, and subsequently prohibited its display in the Algerian public space under the threat of harsh retaliatory sanctions.

Construed as a wicked enterprise of the Regime to split the Hirak by demonizing the emblem as an antinationalist symbol, and subsequently the whole region of Kabylia, which was most attached to it, the protesters hit back and chanted a rallying slogan: « Qbayli, Chaoui, 'arbi, Targui, Mzabi…khawakhawa » (Kabyles, Chaouias, Arabs, Targuis, Mozabites, etc., are altogether brothers). This slogan quickly became one of the most popular slogans of the February 22nd, 2019, so-called *Hirak* Movement.

This slogan can be interpreted as suggesting that citizens are cognizant of linguistic and cultural differences between people of various regions and that they do not consider a multilingual and multicultural Algerian identity, consubstantial to its historical formation, weird. Citizens are in search of a common space where to live in peace in a democratic State that fosters universal human rights and individual and collective freedoms. And this can easily be understood through a special attention to the numerous common slogans they have waved for more than two years.

3.1 Symbolism of the North African / Amazigh emblem:

The Algerian language conflict was formulated very explicitly during the PPA-MTLD[12] political crisis in 1949. But the crisis was surprisingly branded the "Berber Crisis". While other authors like Sadeq Hadjeres (2022) called it a "democratic crisis."[13] This conflict is still alive and is periodically refueled.

The protagonists of the "Algérie algérienne" perspective had written a lengthy argument in a classified historical brochure called "*Iddir Al-Watani.*"[14] Five militants of the PPA-MTLD co-authored the document. The tendency of the official majority, which followed the "Algérie Arabe" perspective, had only written the party's program and combatted their opponents, leaving no explanatory discourse.

It's worth saying, to put our reflection on sound neutral ground from the outset, that the conflict wasn't about the country's independence, which was consensual, but about Algeria's future and how this latter is to be construed culturally and linguistically.

The "Algerianist" perspective was not "Berberist", as it was accused of by its opponents, in the sense that it would nourish an ethnic based vision of society; the term "Berber" wasn't even mentioned in their doctrinal document "*Iddir al-Watani."* The opposing trend was not "anti-Berber", nor in the sense that it would be totally recoiled on itself and on "Arabism" after "having been contaminated," as it was accused by its rivals, by a kind of magical effect of a short contact between Messali El-Hadj, the nationalist leader of the PPA/MTLD, with the Arabist movement led by Chakib Arsalan[15]-- himself being from a Druze descent, i.e., a non- Arab.

In fact, the feeling of involvement in the so-called Arab Islamic Umma was latent in the minds of the Algerian and Maghribi elites for a relatively long time after the Arab armies conquered the Maghreb and the indigenous peoples capitulated. The first Amazigh dynasties, such as the Rustumids in Tihert (8th-10th c.), ruled under the flag of Islam (Ibadism) and with Classical Arabic. The Zirids, the Almoravids, the Almohads, the Hammadids, etc., followed globally the same ideological line of thought despite remarkable resistance, particularly that of Maysara Al-Madghari[16] to the discriminatory and oppressive policy of the Omayyad Arab caliphate administration against the indigenous Amazigh peoples.

The Turks who took over in the 16th century, in turn, were perceived as followers of the Islamic Ottoman Caliphate and did not create any rupture

in this ideological line. Subsequently, this PPA representation of Algeria's identity as Arab and Islamic was not at odds with the mainstream perception of the elites of that time. Sometimes it was even perceived as a way to heighten one's identity and prestige.

This brief overview is intended to relativize attitudes and discourses on the identity and the linguistic issue during this crucial phase of modern Algerian history (the 1949 crisis). I hope that the ideas will spark objective thought and, most of all, lead the way to less passionate debates on the language conflict and its objective causes and consequences in order to make it unemotional and fruitful. This overview, in my opinion, is the way to attain a composed perception of identity and to come to terms with the Algerian national complex history and identity for the edification of citizenship and living together in peace.

3.2 The Tamazight radical claim and the Arabization radical movement: two ideological nonrealistic parallels

If the linguistic and cultural claim of Tamazight has succeeded, after such great and longtime sacrifices, to heighten the status of the language to the level of "national and official language" within the Algerian last constitutions[17] (2002, 2016 and the revised 2020 one), that's to say it has solved one aspect of the two prerequisites of language planning of Tamazight; the second one related to the corpus's normalization, remains still unsolved.

The political and association militants have been followed in this approach by some young linguists in the Tamazight domain. Under the pressure of massive cultural and political movements, they have dismissed their critical, scientifically recommended attitude regarding methodology and scientific research ethics (Dourari, A., 2016; 2018).[18] Consequently, they modelled themselves on the same ideological posture as that of the Arabization movement, with Tamazight as their linguistic target instead of scholarly Arabic: "one language, one norm", for the so-called "*Tamazight*", were it artificial; "one people" (*Imazighen*), "one nation" and "one territory"[19] (*Tamazgha*). That "one language" horizon had to be nationally generalized and imposed[20] on all Algerian speakers, whatever their proper initial native mother tongue or region might be.

Their linguistic vision is paradoxical: at the national sphere of communication, they ask for the official recognition of a *multilingual* society and State; but within the "Tamazight" sphere of communication, they strive to impose a

monolingual policy based on the artificially constructed "Tamazight norm" hastily and clumsily fabricated on a Kabyle language matrix.

The models of language policies they are inspired by and that they put forward are marred by anachronism and are definitely inadequate. Neither the Hebrew, the French, nor the German unifications are comparable linguistically, historically, or even politically to Tamazight linguistic and cultural variation. The possibility conditions of such a process are not equivalent (Dourari, A. 2022b: 118-124).

The backgrounds of the Algerian linguistic conflict manifest themselves schematically in the following terms: On the one hand, the ideological exclusive Arabization trend acting under the multifaceted heavy pressure of the official instances, holding their own emblem for the Maghreb concretized by the UMA[21] (Arab Maghreb Union: a Union of five States), on the other hand, a complete "Amazighization" of this same space called "Tamazgha" (A Union of peoples and territories) animated by political parties, associations and personalities. They also have their own organizations and emblem: the World Amazighs Congress.[22] The North-African emblem was created by the Berber Academy in France in 1970 and adopted by their congress in Tafira (Canary Islands) in 1997. It is generally tolerated by various North African states, except Egypt. It is constituted of three horizontal superposed thick strips: Blue (the sea), Green (the vegetation of the North), and yellow (the Sahara Desert). These would have been mere geographical symbols if the Tifinagh Zed character hadn't been inserted in the middle of it to stand for Tamazight and Tamazgha.

One wonders why the Algerian authorities decided all of a sudden that this emblem was a kind of competitor to the Algerian national flag, harming national unity symbols because, as they inadequately claim, one State must be represented by only one flag, not two! Was it really an attack on the national sovereignty?

Obviously, this narrative is far-fetched and exposes a great deal of incongruity: Why, then, is the UMA official flag acknowledged and displayed on the UMA Headquarters building in central Algiers and, on some occasion, beside the Algerian national flag without rousing those worries of the imaginary competition and divide? More generally, why is the EU flag, for example, exposed beside any EU State's flag in official opportunities, without being perceived as an attack on their states' sovereignty?

When we compare the two emblems in question (the North African one and the UMA's), one must admit that, beyond the difference of colors and their symbolisms, the most prominent difference is the noticeable presence of the Zed Tifinagh alphabet character on the North-African one, which anchors the territory it symbolizes to another anthropological, linguistic and cultural reality that is autonomous from the Arab or Islamic nations. At the same time, the UMA organization does not directly represent a territory or a piece of geography as such but exhibits. It focuses only on the ideological symbols of Islam and Arabness (stars and crescents).

Once again, it's not really a matter of competition with the Algerian national emblem and sovereignty. Still, it's all about the perceived "seditious" idea of the Amazighs—peoples, culture and territories--put forth as independent entities from the "Arab and Islamic world," that's not tolerated.

4. Language, history, identity symbols, and confidence

The Algerian State, as we saw before, had formerly built a symbolic basis of trust by integrating Tamazight and its symbols (notably the official recognition of Yenayer as the first month of the Amazigh Calendar year) as national cultural landmarks of the whole society. Furthermore, these symbols had been constitutionalised. However, a surprising issue broke through as the police began arresting protesters of the Hirak upon the mere carrying or waving of the Amazigh North African emblem in the street rallies. The three-colour strips emblem representing the anthropological and geographical natural characteristics of North African people and geography had begun to be systematically chased, and Kabyle protesters were labeled with separatism based on this simple fact.

In this matter, just as is the case for the European Union's emblem or that of the Arab Maghreb Union's one, the Amazigh or North African emblem opens horizons of identity, on the contrary, on a larger geographical space susceptible to induce the overcoming of attitudes of withdrawal into oneself or of separatist drives.

The Maghreb, i.e., North Africa excluding Egypt, is a geographical and historical space of transition, settlement, and contact of peoples, cultures, and languages of diverse origins.

However, one must keep in mind very clearly that people had always lived in this continuous territorial space. As far back as we can go in history, and even in prehistory, all incoming peoples in this space had to confront the

indigenous peoples and find a *modus vivendi* with them before settling in turn. These indigenous, or first peoples, are what we nowadays call the Amazighs. While asserting this, we do not forget the horizontal perspective for North African history, as Yvon Thébert (1978: 64-82) recommends, which makes room for socializing, acculturation, alliances between people as well as cosmopolitism, and we do not focus only on the succession of peoples and cultures.

Naylor C. (2009:21) observes that North Africa appears almost like to be an island bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Sahara Desert to the south. Successive waves of human encounters and interactions have shaped its rich cultural and historical morphology, thereby endowing the region with its distinctive and significant transcultural heritage.

It goes without saying that the most significant and ostensible aspect of identity is language. If it is considered a good criterion by ethnologists and anthropologists, then, of course, it cannot be otherwise when it comes to the layperson in the context of multilingual societies.

In fact, identities are generally assigned to people spontaneously according to the language they speak. In Algeria, people are said to be Kabyle, Chaoui, Mzabi, Targui, Chenoui, etc., when they speak the corresponding Tamazight variety of that region. Speakers of any Tamazight variety are generally referred to as Amazighs worldwide. In contrast, the people who speak Algerian Arabic are commonly said to be "Arabs" (while they are in fact arabophones). This rudimentary characterization itself entails a misperception of the complex link between language and ethnicity.

Another commonly used identity categorization is based on the region where people live. You are "Jijel-i" if you live in the region of Jijel, Stayf-i if you live in Setif, Qbayl-i, if you live in the region of Kabylia, Sahraou-i if you live in the Sahara, Wahran-i if you live in the region of Wahran (Oran), and so on. People generally pretend to know very well what cultural behaviour is allegedly associated with that categorization, while in the majority of cases it's just about prejudice.

From this general perspective, Algerians seem to perceive their identity today as an intermingled reality encompassing different languages, accents, colours, cultures, and regions. Yet, they eventually recognize themselves as Algerians—a fruit Salad (Dourari, A., 2014, 2016). However, the official discourse as well as the legal apparatus, never go beyond general self-contradictory statements on "Amazighness" or "Algerianity", while insisting