
The Efforts Of The French Occupation To Erase The Identity Of The Algerian People And The Role Of The Association Of Algerian Muslim Scholars In Resisting Them

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Received: 21/09/2024

Published: 31/03/2025

Abstract:

The French occupation spent one hundred and thirty-two years trying to distort the identity of the Algerian people. Illiteracy reached its peak as ignorance spread throughout the country, leaving the vast majority of the population unable to read or write. Poverty cast a shadow of humiliation and disgrace over the population, while various diseases proliferated in both cities and villages. This vicious cycle of ignorance, poverty and disease took a terrible toll on the minds and bodies of the Algerian people.

Reform advocates became deeply despondent about the prospect of revitalising the core elements of this nation. They began to believe that reform was a futile pursuit and an attempt at the impossible. This state of despair affected not only reformists and national movement leaders, but also visitors from Arab and Western countries.

Following decades of France's exhausting efforts to detach the Algerian people from their identity and eliminate their core values, the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was established to resist these efforts. The nation's fortunes changed, and rays of hope began to penetrate the hearts of the people. Remarkably successful in returning the Algerian people to their religion, language, and homeland, the association prevented them from losing all connection to these aspects.

Keywords: Identit, Component, French Occupatio, Association of Scholars, Despair in Reform.

Introduction:

The period of French occupation in Algeria lasted one hundred and thirty-two years, during which time the French exercised all forms of oppression and injustice. The Algerian people, from all walks of life, experienced the most brutal forms of occupation. France made every effort to destroy the core elements of this nation, leaving the population surrounded by backwardness. A century after Algeria was occupied, and following the decline of all resistance movements, despair prevailed among the Algerian people. It was in this dark void that the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was founded to resist France's ongoing efforts.

Did the association succeed in countering France's efforts to undermine the identity of the Algerian people? This is the question that the article seeks to address.

In order to answer this central question, it is necessary to address the following sub-questions:

What efforts did France make to undermine the core elements of Algerian identity?

What were the results of these efforts among those concerned with reforming Algeria?

What actions did the Association of Scholars take to restore the Algerian people's confidence in their identity, and what were the outcomes of these efforts?

To answer these questions, we have structured our plan to include an introduction and three sections that address the sub-questions of the issue, followed by a conclusion.

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The first section discusses France's efforts to erase the identity of the Algerian people and comprises two branches. The first branch addresses moral elements, which include:

1. Religion
2. Language
3. History

The second branch covers tangible elements, including:

1. Health
2. Economic conditions
3. Education

The second section focuses on individuals concerned about the state of Algeria who have become disheartened by the prospect of reform. This section is divided into two branches: the first examines despair among Algerians, while the second addresses despair among non-Algerians.

The third section is dedicated to the Association of Scholars' efforts to restore the Algerian people's confidence in their moral identity, and the results of these efforts. This section comprises three branches. The first branch discusses the initiatives undertaken by the association to resist French efforts. The second branch addresses the association's status among the Algerian people. The third branch focuses on the outcomes of the association's efforts.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings of this article.

Section One: France's Efforts to Erase the Identity of the Algerian People

From the moment French soldiers landed at Sidi Fredj, France sought to eliminate all links to the core values and sacred elements of the Algerian people, including their religion, language and history. To achieve this, France mobilised all its vast resources for a fierce campaign which some writers refer to as a policy of cultural genocide in Algeria¹.

In its relentless pursuit, France sought to disseminate all forms of physical and moral weakness among the Algerian population. These factors inevitably led to the gradual erosion of identity. France promoted ignorance and illiteracy, impoverished the population and allowed diseases to devastate communities.

France fully understood that controlling Algeria required the annihilation of the Algerian people's moral and material foundations.

Subsection One: Moral Elements

One hundred years after occupying Algeria, France held grand celebrations to commemorate the occasion, inviting the whole world, as Sheikh Bashir al-Ibrahimi² noted. During the celebrations, the leaders and speakers competed with each other to express their overwhelming joy at the supposed eradication of Islam and the Arabic language from the country. Many French speakers proclaimed that the celebration's true purpose was to bid

¹- Dr. Ahmed Naaman, "The Religious Immunity of the National Personality," p. 55.

²- Imam Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, the Works, (5/280).

farewell to Islam in Algeria³. For example, the Cardinal of Algeria at the time stated, 'The era of the crescent in Algeria has passed, and the era of the cross has begun, and it will continue forever.'⁴

Gustave Mercier, the general commissioner for the centenary and a member of Algeria's high council, declared that the fates of France and Algeria were forever intertwined, and that even in their most ambitious aspirations, Algerians no longer dreamed of liberation from French colonial rule⁵.

During the celebrations, the French erected a statue in honour of the engineer Boutaine in the Dali Ibrahim neighbourhood of Algiers. They inscribed a message of gratitude to Boutaine, the marine engineer who helped France take revenge on Algiers and make Algeria French forever⁶. These statements and actions undoubtedly provoked the feelings of Algerians, reminding them of the defeats and tragedies inflicted upon them by France.

During this prolonged period of occupation, France attempted to eliminate three fundamental pillars that represent the core components of any nation's identity: religion, language and homeland, in an effort to erase the identity of the Algerian people.

1. Religion:

From the outset of its occupation, France recognised that it could not establish lasting control over Algeria without eradicating Islam from the hearts of the Algerian people. Therefore, it prioritised this matter, incorporating the destruction of Islam into its strategic objectives.

To this end, France devised a calculated plan based on three main axes.

The first axis was spreading Christianity wherever possible.

Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that, from the very beginning, France brought bands of missionaries with its invading armies⁷. The White Fathers sought to convert the population in both the north and south.

One of the most notable figures in this endeavour was Cardinal Charles Lavigerie (born 1825), who worked from 1868 to 1892. He gathered around 1,800 homeless and ill children and distributed them among various centres and shelters that he had established in neighbourhoods of the capital, such as Bouzaréah, Belouizdad, Ben Aknoun, El Madania and Boufarik. The aim was to treat and convert them. He also established villages for the same purpose in various regions of Algeria⁸.

He addressed the French authorities, stating: 'This people must be saved; we cannot leave them confined to their Qur'an. France must either allow them to receive the Gospel or send them into the deserts, far from civilisation.'⁹

Thus, France sought to spread Christianity through various means.

Second Axis: Vigorously Opposing Islam

³- The same reference, (5/300).

⁴- See Dr. Muhammad Fathi Othman, Abdul Hamid Ben Badis: Pioneer of the Contemporary Islamic Movement in Algeria, Dar al-Qalam, Kuwait, 1987, p. 69, and Abdul Karim Bouasf Saf, The Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria and Its Role in Developing the Algerian National Movement 1931-1945, p. 84.

⁵- Refer to Camille Risler in the appendices of her book: French Cultural Policy in Algeria: Its Goals and Limits 1830-1962, published in French in 2004, and translated by Dr. Nadhir Tayyara, p. 448.

⁶- Abdul Karim Bouasf Saf, The Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria and Its Role in Developing the Algerian National Movement 1931-1945, p. 85, quoting from Al-Najah newspaper, No. 958, dated June 13, 1930.

⁷- See Fatima Hussein al-Mafraji, "French Missionary Activity in Algeria 1830-1876," published in Humanities Journal, Faculty of Education for Humanities, University of Babylon, Iraq, June 2016, p. 16.

⁸- Khadija Baktash, The Missionary Movement in Algeria 1830-1871, Chapter Four titled: "Cardinal Lavigerie or the Peak of Missionary Work in Algeria," pp. 105-136.

⁹- The same reference, p. 116, quoting from: Colonel Robin, The Insurrection of Kabylie in 1871, Paris 1901, p. 32.

The French authorities demolished mosques or converted them into churches and stables. When France occupied Algeria in 1830, there were 106 mosques in Algiers alone. By the time they left in 1962, only eight remained in the capital.

France adopted a policy of combatting mosques and their worshippers from the start of its occupation¹⁰. On 18 December 1832, the French killed four thousand worshippers who had taken refuge in the Ketchawa Mosque to prevent its seizure by France. The worshippers were coldly murdered and the historic mosque was converted into a church named 'Saint Philippe', where priests recited hymns over the remains and blood of the Muslim worshippers¹¹.

In order to weaken the dominance of Islam over the daily lives of Muslims, France introduced new cultural practices into Algerian society, such as the consumption of alcohol and the unveiling of women. These practices were normalised until they gained public acceptance. In her book *French Cultural Policy in Algeria: Its Goals and Limits, 1830–1962*, that these changes were considered necessary¹².

The third axis: distorting Islam from within and establishing a French concept of Islam.

France sought to distort Islam from within by creating a specific interpretation termed "Algerian Islam" (*L'Islam algérien*)¹³. This concept was first articulated by Edmond Doutté¹⁴ in 1900, when he published a book on the subject. In it, he described Algerian Islam as a form of Islam characterised by superstitions, the veneration of saints, and the offering of sacrifices¹⁵. According to Belkacem Saâdallah, it represented an Islam of mysticism and magic, and the inheritance of blessings¹⁶.

In 1910, Alfred Le Châtelier¹⁷ described 'Algerian Islam' as a unique form of Islam, devoid of endowments and featuring administrative mosques and imams who were carefully selected by the administration¹⁸. Consequently, France took control of endowments, mosques and imams, thereby distorting Sufi practices and disseminating superstitions. France encouraged the veneration of the graves of saints and righteous individuals, holding feasts and making vows at these sites and invoking the dead for relief from distress. It also elevated and sanctified those who claimed to possess spiritual authority, urging the masses to offer money and gifts to gain their favour, and out of fear of their deceit.

In his aforementioned book, Edmond Doutté noted that no other state had previously exerted such control over the management of mosques and the appointment of their leaders as France did¹⁹. Boasting, he stated, "In reality, no Islamic state has religious leaders organised as ours

¹⁰- Bassem Al-Asali, Abdul Hamid Ben Badis and the Foundation of the Algerian Revolution, p. 29.

¹¹- The same reference, p. 32.

¹²- Camille Risler, *French Cultural Policy in Algeria 1830-1962*, p. 88-89.

¹³- For an expansion on this term, refer to Imam Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, *the Works*, in several places including: (3/63, 160, 196, 197).

¹⁴- Edmond Doutté, as described by Belkacem Saadallah in *Cultural History of Algeria* (6/425): "He was a sociologist influenced by Durkheim's theory, and an advisor to the French government in Algeria during World War I on Islamic affairs, and the author of the book *Algerian Islam*."

¹⁵- Edmond Doutté, *L'Islam algérien en l'an 1900*, Giralt imprimeur, Alger-Mustapha, 1900, pp. 39 and 95.

¹⁶- See Belkacem Saadallah, *Cultural History of Algeria*, (5/588).

¹⁷- A. Le Chatelier, a French military officer, was born in Paris in 1855, graduated from Saint-Cyr, and worked in various regions of Algeria between 1878-1886, as part of the Arab Bureau officers. He later returned to France and shifted to Oriental studies to promote colonial thought, serving as a professor at the Collège de France in Paris, and founding the monthly journal *La Revue du monde musulman*, which published his book "The Raid on the Islamic World" in installments between 1906-1925. See the previous reference (4/30) and (6/74), and the introduction by Mohib al-Din al-Khatib to "The Raid on the Islamic World," (pp. 5-7).

¹⁸- Refer to the same reference, (7/104).

¹⁹- Edmond Doutté, *L'Islam algérien en l'an 1900**m, p. 116.

are, and this is certain. The religious leaders are entirely in our hands, and they are well organised.²⁰

It is also worth mentioning the testimony of French priest André Lucertua, who visited Algeria in 1953 and wrote a book about it titled *Algeria in the 1950s*. In it, he claimed that France controlled the Islamic religion through agents chosen by the colonists²¹. This statement was made just before the outbreak of the liberation revolution, illustrating that France maintained its iron grip over all matters related to Islam until its departure from Algeria.

In an attempt to impose its own warped interpretation of Islam, France persecuted scholars and students who resisted it.

Second: language

France actively sought to suppress the Arabic language, striving to replace it with French. The French recognised that language is not merely a means of communication, but also a vessel for culture and thought. From the outset of its occupation, France tried to eradicate Arabic usage among Algeria's general population, culminating in a law that prohibited Arabic teaching and declared it a foreign language. This decision was made by the French Prime Minister, Camille Chautemps, on 8 March 1938²². The decree also prohibited teaching history, geography and arithmetic in free Arabic schools²³.

Ibn Badis noted that no period in the history of Islam and the Arabic language in Algeria had been as dire as that created by this decree, describing it as unjust. He referred to 8 March as an ominous day for the Arabic language²⁴. These strong words reflect the profound impact of this decision on two of the most vital components of Algerian identity: religion and language. Consequently, the newspaper *Al-Basair* labelled the decree an attempt to demolish and eradicate the 'Islamic identity'²⁵.

Third: history.

France sought to erase all connections to Algeria's history, claiming that there was no such nation. This was reflected in Prime Minister Chautemps' decree prohibiting the teaching of history and geography in free Arabic schools. The aim was to cut Algerians off from their glorious past²⁶, when they were sovereign and independent of France.

During this period, a class of Algerians emerged who claimed that Algeria was an inseparable part of France. Some Algerian leaders even stated that Algeria did not exist, neither in reality nor in history²⁷. Abdul Hamid Ibn Badis later responded to this assertion, causing the leader to retract his statement²⁸.

Fourth: French disdain for the Algerian people

In order to further oppress the Algerian psyche, France deliberately treated them with contempt and disdain. French officials repeatedly stated that the Algerian people were not like

²⁰- The same reference, same page.

²¹- French priest André Lucertua, *Algeria of the 1950s*, p. 126.

²²- See Colette and Francis Johnson, *Revolutionary Algeria*, translated by Muhammad Alawi Sharif and Henry Youssef Sardar, Dar Al-Hilal, Cairo, and priest André Lucertua, *Algeria of the 1950s*, translated by Abdelkader Bouzid, p. 137. For more details on this decision and its consequences, refer to Mazen Mattakani, *The Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria and Its Role in the Algerian National Movement*, pp. 220-228.

²³- See Belkacem Saadallah, *Cultural History of Algeria*, (10/53).

²⁴- In a handwritten letter by Ben Badis, unpublished, of which I have a copy, sent to Ahmed Qusiba Al-Aghwathi a year after the issuance of the Shawtan decision, dated March 12, 1939.

²⁵- *Al-Basair* newspaper, No. 107, dated April 8, 1938.

²⁶- See Belkacem Saadallah, *Cultural History of Algeria*, (10/53).

²⁷- His statement will be elaborated in the second section of the second requirement.

²⁸- Refer to the first section of the third requirement.

other humans, likening them to animals and claiming that they were incapable of managing their own country and resources. Some French politicians even declared that Algerians were an uneducable race.

In 1892, it was announced that Arabs were an inferior race incapable of education²⁹.

The French priest André Lecourt³⁰, who travelled throughout Algeria from north to south and east to west, described the class prejudice he observed, stating: 'We, but also — these two are intertwined ³¹— the deep contempt for the native: he is an inferior being, incapable of managing a country, organising an effective administration or fostering economic progress as we have.'³²

He noted that Algerians were often disparaged in public spaces with terms such as 'vermin', 'insects', 'historically void', 'extremely poor', 'inferior beings', 'lacking intelligence' and 'incapable of any initiative'³³. He recounted how the pied-noirs (European settlers) would proclaim, 'There is no resemblance between us and these vermin'³⁴, referring, of course, to the Algerian people.

In response, publications such as *Al-Shihab* cited a statement from a British minister to emphasise the obvious fact that Algerians and Arabs, like other peoples, were of comparable intellectual capacity. In 1929, *Al-Shihab* published a statement from Lord Rothmere, a former British minister, which asserted that if the Abyssinians could manage their affairs, then surely the Arabs could too. When Europe was engulfed in darkness during the early Middle Ages, the Arab kingdom under the Caliph Harun al-Rashid was flourishing, its court a fountain from which the arts and modern civilisation sprang. Arabs are highly intelligent and, if left to themselves, can live within the freedoms we have long promised them during the war.'³⁵

The minister felt it necessary to draw a comparison with the Abyssinians in order to demonstrate the Arabs' ability to govern their own lands. This was in response to Europeans, particularly the French, who claimed that Arabs were unfit to manage their own countries.

Subsection Two: Tangible Elements

France did not limit its efforts to undermining the moral foundations of the Algerian people, which were of paramount importance. It also sought to eliminate their material foundations in an attempt to eradicate them completely, attacking their health, economy and education in the process.

1. Health:

France allowed various diseases to ravage the Algerian population, deliberately neglecting their healthcare needs and failing to provide doctors or hospitals, except for those catering to European settlers. Consequently, the average Algerian life expectancy dropped to fifty years, whereas the average life expectancy of Europeans in Algeria was seventy-two years³⁶. Diseases such as tuberculosis and blindness spread among Algerians at unprecedented rates.

2. Economic conditions:

France impoverished the Algerian people by enacting unjust laws that favoured settlers at their expense. This encouraged an influx of Europeans, particularly French settlers, into

²⁹- French priest André Lucertua, *Algeria of the 1950s*, p. 233.

³⁰- The same reference, p. 119.

³¹- The term "black feet" refers to Europeans born in Algeria after the occupation and raised there.

³²- The previous reference, p. 115.

³³- The same reference, pp. 68, 114, 119, and others.

³⁴- The same reference, p. 115.

³⁵- *Al-Shihab* magazine, No. 12, 1929, p. 17.

³⁶- See Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *This is Algeria*, Egyptian Renaissance Library, p. 134.

Algeria. Consequently, Algerians became labourers for the settlers, working long hours for low wages that barely allowed them to provide their families with the most basic necessities. The dire conditions faced by Algerians resulted in over half a million deaths from famine in 1920 and 1921, following the First World War³⁷.

For example, by 1900, a total of 2,250,000 hectares of the best agricultural land had been confiscated from Algerians as part of this deliberate policy. On average, each European farmer owned 108 hectares of land, compared to just 14 hectares for each Algerian farmer³⁸. Between 1904 and 1927, the French government distributed 237,000 hectares of fertile land to settlers, offering them substantial financial incentives. The settlers agreed that if they ever needed to sell the land³⁹, they could only sell it to another settler, thus prohibiting sales to Muslims.

This policy led to increasing wealth and prosperity for the settlers, while the Algerians sank deeper into poverty. It became commonplace to see Algerians in tattered clothing, with their children cleaning the shoes of the French. Such practices had previously been rare among Algerians and shoe-shining was almost non-existent in Algerian society, as it is viewed as a symbol of the humiliation imposed by the French occupation. The occupation intentionally sought to demean Algerian children by forcing them to shine shoes, a practice that was common in many societies but has all but vanished in Algeria for the aforementioned reasons.

Third: education

It is important to note that the Algerian people were not illiterate prior to French colonisation. To illustrate this, we can refer to the testimony of the German traveller Wilhelm Himbr, who visited Algeria in December 1931 and stayed for ten months. He stated: 'I deliberately searched for an illiterate Arab in Algeria, but I could not find one. In southern European countries, however, it is rare to encounter a literate person in the general population.'⁴⁰

He noted that the languages spoken in Algiers included Arabic, Spanish, French, Italian, German, English and Dutch, among others⁴¹. This indicates that the residents of Algiers possessed significant cultural knowledge and education before France enforced its policy of ignorance.

Mahdi Bouabdelli mentioned that, in 1890, there were only three schools in Algeria, located in Algiers, Constantine and Tlemcen, serving just 82 students in total. Only 14 students⁴² graduated from these schools in the same year. Eighty-two students for the entire Algerian population is a number that would barely suffice for a small village, let alone a country.

Over 132 years, French colonisation managed to render most Algerians uneducated through its continuous efforts. French priest André Lecourt testified that 90% of Algerians were illiterate when he visited Algeria in 1953⁴³.

The aim of this article is not to delve into statistics detailing the atrocities committed by France against the Algerian people in this area — such data is widely available in sources documenting this historical period. Instead, we intend to highlight the deliberate French policy

³⁷- See Mazen Mattakani, *The Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria and Its Role in the Algerian National Movement*, p. 42.

³⁸- See Turki Rabah, Ben Badis and the Algerian Personality, *Al-Asalah* magazine affiliated with the Ministry of Original Education and Religious Affairs in Algeria, No. 2, May 1971, p. 64.

³⁹- See Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *This is Algeria*, previous reference, p. 99.

⁴⁰- See: Abu Al-Aid Doudou, *Algeria in the Works of German Travelers, 1830-1855*, p. 13.

⁴¹- The same reference, p. 12.

⁴²- Al-Mahdi Al-Bouabdli, *The French Occupation of Algeria and the People's Resistance in the Spiritual Field*, *Al-Asalah* magazine, affiliated with the Ministry of Original Education and Religious Affairs in Algeria, No. 8, May 1972, p. 315. Bouabdli relied on a report from a parliamentary investigation committee formed by the French government in 1892 and sent to Algeria, most of whose members were from the French Senate.

⁴³- French priest André Lucertua, *Algeria of the 1950s*, p. 52.

of eradicating the foundational elements of Algerian identity, using these figures merely to support that assertion.

Section Two: Despair for Reform Among Those Concerned with the Situation in Algeria

Over time, Algeria has found itself in a state of deep despair. French policies led to the emergence of a significant proportion of the Algerian population who felt frustrated, hopeless and psychologically shattered. Many concluded that there was no hope of reforming the situation in Algeria. They asserted that those who sought change were attempting the impossible and that such hopes were merely dreams that could never be realised.

To illustrate the depth of this despair experienced by the Algerian people, we present several testimonies from scholars and thinkers who lived through that era and expressed their hopelessness regarding reform.

Subsection One: Despair for Reform Among Algerians

Here, we present examples of scholars, thinkers and prominent leaders who engaged in significant reform activities. As the pressures of French colonisation intensified and the conditions of the Algerian people deteriorated in various areas—religious, political, scientific, moral, social and economic—they experienced profound despair. Many believed that the nation was lost forever and that there was no hope for the future. This despair took hold of the hearts and minds of these elites, driving some to the brink of insanity.

Example One: Artist and journalist Omar Rasem

Rasem founded the newspapers *Alger* and *Dhufar* in 1908 and 1912⁴⁴, respectively. In the introduction to *Dhufar*, he wrote: ‘When we heard Islam groaning from the wounds inflicted by its enemies and the homeland lamenting for its sons, we founded this newspaper to combat the enemies of religion, expose the hypocrites’ secrets, reveal the Jews’ and polytheists’ schemes, and criticise the corrupt.’⁴⁵

In a letter to Ahmed Toufic El Madani, published in the latter’s book *Life of Struggle*, Rasem expressed his sorrow over Algeria’s past and its great historical figures, saying: ‘But when they perished and a corrupt faction emerged, honour was lost, the nation failed, and there is no hope for the future.’⁴⁶

Despairing for Algeria, he signed his letters: ‘The wretched, hopeless one, rebelling against his time and its people: Omar Rasem.’⁴⁷ Ahmed Toufic El Madani quoted him as saying: ‘We do not have a people at all; what you see around you is nothing but livestock grazing on land, or, as they say, “God’s cattle in God’s harvest”.’⁴⁸

Due to the thorough control that the French occupation exercised over all aspects of Algerian life, and the loss of identity that the Algerian people experienced as a result, which continued to erode over time, it seems that Omar Rasem lost hope for any form of reform in Algeria.

Example two: Sheikh Abdul Halim Ben Smaïa

He was one of the most prominent teachers at the Thaalibia School, where he taught for a long time. A reform advocate in Algiers, he brought this issue to the attention of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars before its establishment. He supported Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, who visited him during his trip to Algeria in 1903.

⁴⁴- See Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *Algeria*, pp. 368, 369, and Ammar Talbi, *Introduction to the Works of Ben Badis*, (1/55).

⁴⁵- Omar Rasem, in *Dhu al-Faqar*, No. 1 (15/10/1913), quoting from Muhammad Nasser, *Algerian Arabic Newspapers from 1847 to 1939*, p. 40.

⁴⁶- See Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *Life of Struggle*. (2/56).

⁴⁷- The same reference.

⁴⁸- The same reference, (2/53).

As mentioned in The History of the Imam, Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Rida regarded him as one of the most distinguished scholars in Algeria⁴⁹.

Sheikh Ben Smaïa's despair deepened when he heard discussions about France celebrating the centenary of its occupation of Algeria. He fell into a state of silence, isolation and hopelessness. Ahmed Toufic El Madani interviewed him and referenced the interview in his memoirs, *Life of Struggle*, in which Ben Smaïa expressed his despair and pessimism regarding the return of Algeria to its Islamic identity.

El Madani summarised the state of this esteemed scholar, who was deeply affected by the country's overall condition: 'This man was consumed by despair, suffering under the flames of French colonialism and living in a state of mind that awaited either death or madness. Unfortunately, it was the latter. Not long after our meeting, I learned that Sheikh Abdul Halim Ben Smaïa had lost his mind, begun babbling, and had no idea what he was saying.'⁵⁰

He took a horse and a sword and wandered through the outskirts and neighbourhoods of the capital, occasionally travelling to nearby towns such as Blida, Cherchell and Qal'at. He paid no attention to where he spent the night or where the sun rose. During this time, Sheikh Ben Smaïa began to express his repressed feelings without hesitation, becoming indifferent to his appearance and behaviour⁵¹.

This illustrates the extreme pressures that some scholars and reformers faced, and highlights how unbearable French oppression had become. Ultimately, Sheikh Ben Smaïa lost his sanity, uttering foul and inappropriate language without concern. Many accounts of his life describe instances where he spoke in ways that he would never have done had he been in a sound state of mind. May Allah have mercy on him.

Example 3: Scholar Abdelkader Ben Ibrahim El-Masadi

Despair for reform had spread widely among scholars and students of knowledge. This is evident from figures such as Abdelkader Ben Ibrahim El-Masadi, a contemporary of Ibn Badis and Al-Ibrahimi⁵². He contributed to magazines such as *Al-Shihab* and *Al-Basair* and had a regular column in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*. He lamented to Sheikh Muhammad Ben Abdul Rahman El-Daisi, saying: 'This is the time when the lowly have prevailed and falsehood has spread. The verses have faded, leaving only the remnants.'⁵³

In another message, he expressed his frustration with life: "In an age where the judge of thought has declared the lowly and the scoundrels to be in charge, leaning towards every base character while turning away from every noble... Here I am among the Ben Nail, yet I find no support from them; and among the Ben Saad, yet Saad brings me no fortune'⁵⁴.

Example Four: Politician Ferhat Abbas

Ferhat Abbas epitomised the state to which the intellectual and political leadership of the national movement had descended. He stated: 'I am not prepared to die for the Algerian homeland because this homeland does not exist; I have not discovered it. I have asked history, the living and the dead. I have visited graves in an attempt to find someone who can tell me

⁴⁹- Muhammad Rashid Rida, *The History of the Teacher Imam*, (1/871).

⁵⁰- Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *Life of Struggle*. (2/56).

⁵¹- See Murad Bin Hamouda, "The Reformist Approach in the Thought of Sheikh Abdul Halim Bin Sumayya 1866-1933," published in the *Algerian Journal of Historical Research and Studies*, University of Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria, Volume 03, Issue 06, December 2017, p. 100.

⁵²- See his translation by Omar Bin Qina, *Dissi: His Life, Works, and Literature*.

⁵³- See Abdul Aziz Nara, PhD student, "The Reformist Journey of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Bin Ibrahim Al-Masadi," *Haqaiq Journal of Psychological and Social Studies*, No. 10, Ahmed Draia University- African University, Adrar, p. 216.

⁵⁴- See Salihah Bin Abdullah, *Poems of Abdul Qadir Bin Ibrahim Al-Masadi*, Master's thesis, from Hadj Lakhdar University, Batna, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Academic Year: 2014-2015, p. 295.

about it, but I have found no one. We should not build on sand. I have definitively dismissed the idea of tying our fate inextricably to the French presence in this land⁵⁵."

He further stated: 'France's interests are our interests, and they have been since the moment our interests aligned.' He added, 'We regret taking school textbooks seriously. Perhaps they want to take us back, but it is too late. We are the children of a new world, shaped by the spirit and efforts of France, and our motto is 'Forward'.⁵⁶"

This illustrates how the national movement's cultured elite came to believe that the Algerian nation had never existed and that any thought of reviving it was mere fantasy.

The primary reason for the despair of these reformers was the miserable state of Algeria during that era. This was poignantly described by the reform advocate Mohamed Saïd El-Zahri in *Al-Shihab* in 1928: 'Algeria is in a state of distress and hardship that breaks hearts with tenderness and sorrow, melting souls with regret and grief. Yet it cannot even relieve itself with a tear or a complaint. Our tongues are tied from complaining and speaking, and our mouths are sealed from lamentation and moaning.'⁵⁷

The miserable state of Algeria during those harsh years, coupled with the inability to even complain, drove these individuals to despair and, in some cases, madness.

Subsection Two: Despair for Reform Among Non-Algerians

Despair regarding the situation in Algeria was not confined to Algerians suffering under French colonialism; non-Algerians who visited the country during that era were affected too. Below, we present two examples, one from the east of the country and one from Morocco.

Example Five: Egyptian writer and politician Mohamed Farid Pasha

In 1901, Mohamed Farid Bak⁵⁸ visited Algeria and later wrote a book titled *From Egypt to Egypt: A Journey through Andalusia, Marrakech, and Algeria*. In it, he described his observations and conclusions about the deteriorating conditions of the Algerian people.

He documented the stringent restrictions that France placed on Algerians with regard to education and awareness, stating: 'The locals are subjected to extremely harsh and severe laws. They are deprived of the freedom to write, assemble, travel and read books and newspapers. It is difficult for someone familiar with the French love of freedom and equality to comprehend this. However, anyone who visits Algeria will realise that what is permissible in France is not allowed for Muslims in the colonies, even if it is permitted for the French.' They are not permitted to establish associations or open schools to promote education. Such permission is never granted. They cannot set up a printing press or a newspaper; the only

⁵⁵- See Ahmad Tawfiq Al-Madani, *Life of Struggle*, (2/61).

⁵⁶- Farhat Abbas, "France is Me," an article published in the French-Islamic newspaper *Al-Wifaq*, dated 27/02/1936, No. 24, see Abbas Muhammad Al-Saghir, Farhat Abbas: *From French Algeria to Algerian Algeria (1927-1963)*, Master's thesis, from Mentouri University in Constantine, Academic Year: 2006-2007, p. 56.

⁵⁷- Muhammad Al-Said Al-Zahari, "On the Algerian Issue," published in *Al-Shihab* newspaper No. 139, March 1928, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁸- Muhammad Farid (Bey), (1284- 1338 AH = 1868- 1919 AD), son of Ahmad Farid (Pasha): Head of the National Party during the British occupation in Egypt and one of its luminaries, of Turkish descent. Born in Cairo and educated in the Schools of Languages and Law, he served as Deputy of the Appeals Court, later practicing law and engaging in public service, accompanying Mustafa Kamel (Pasha) on many trips to Europe. After Mustafa Kamel's death, Muhammad Farid was elected president of the party (in 1908), imprisoned and exiled (in 1912), traveled extensively, and died in Berlin. His body was returned to Cairo.

He authored several published books, including *History of the Ottoman State* and *From Egypt to Egypt: A Journey through Andalusia, Morocco, and Algeria*, and *The Joyful Toafiq in the History of the Founder of the Khedive Family and History of the Romanians*. See his biography in *Al-Alam* by Al-Zarkali (6/328). His book *From Egypt to Egypt: A Journey through Andalusia, Morocco, and Algeria* records his journey to Algeria in 1901, published in installments by *Al-Liwa* newspaper in 1901, then printed by the Moroccan Cultural Heritage Center in collaboration with Dar Ibn Hazm, with commentary by Dr. Abdul Majid Khayali.

newspaper in Algeria is L'Illustration, an official publication that glorifies France and encourages loyalty.

Farid Pasha also noted the prevalence of ignorance and the decline of the Arabic language among Algerians.

Farid Pasha also noted the prevalence of ignorance and the decline of the Arabic language among Algerians. He wrote, 'The lands of knowledge have been abandoned and libraries destroyed. Homes have become breeding grounds for ignorance and the ignorant. The features of the Arabic language are nearly vanishing⁵⁹.'

He predicted that Arabic would completely disappear if the situation continued as it was. He stated: 'The state of education in Algeria is very poor. If this situation persists, the French language will replace Arabic in all areas and it may even disappear entirely over time, as the government does not strive to preserve it and the locals do not form associations to open schools.⁶⁰'

This testimony from Mohamed Fared Pasha, a prominent Egyptian politician and a leading figure in the Egyptian national movement during the British occupation, carries significant weight⁶¹. His assessment of Algeria's situation is not casual, and his words reveal his foreboding predictions about its future.

Example 6: Moroccan scholar Mohamed Ibrahim El-Kettani

I delayed mentioning this example because its author also emphasised the role of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars in alleviating despair surrounding the situation in Algeria and its people. El-Kettani visited Algeria in 1935, having studied the country's religious, social, political, moral and literary conditions for over twelve years prior to his visit. This study had formed a bleak image of the situation.

He declared: 'I was aware of the level of decline that the Islamic community in this region had reached, and I imagined the horror of the miserable state of affairs resulting from the teachings of Islam, its language, and its literature. I learned much about the efforts of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars in addressing these fatal maladies afflicting this nation.'

However, when he visited Algeria in September 1935, having been invited by the Association to attend its fifth conference, he found that the situation was even worse than he had imagined. The reality was even grimmer than he had imagined, leading him to despair of any possibility of reforming the Algerian people and viewing such attempts as futile.

He lamented: 'But when I visited, I realised that I had not fully understood what I believed. I witnessed the misery of Muslims, their religion and their language in a way I had never imagined: an appalling ignorance of the Arabic language and the horrific obliteration of religious identity.'

By God, I cried multiple times during the four days I spent there before the conference. Many times, I thought that attempting to revive the nation was a futile endeavour; an attempt at the impossible.'

El-Kettani expressed this sentiment before attending the conference, where he witnessed the Association's efforts firsthand and heard from its members about their work.

⁵⁹- See Dr. Muhammad Nasser, *Algerian Arabic Newspapers from 1847 to 1939*, pp. 11-12, quoting from *Al-Liwa* newspaper, No. 3, October 1901.

⁶⁰- See Ahmad Naaman, "The Religious Immunity of the National Personality," pp. 55-56, quoting from *Al-Liwa* newspaper, No. 13, published in October 1901.

⁶¹- For his efforts and biography, refer to the great Egyptian historian Abdel Rahman Al-Rafii's book *Muhammad Farid, Symbol of Loyalty and Sacrifice*, as well as *The Papers of Muhammad Farid: Correspondence* edited by Dr. Mustafa Nahhas Jabr, and the introduction by Dr. Raouf Abbas Hamid to *The Memoirs of Muhammad Farid*, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

Section Three: The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars' Efforts to Restore the Algerian People's Confidence in Their Moral Foundations and the Results of These Efforts

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars was founded amidst France's grand celebrations marking one hundred years of its occupation of Algeria and was officially established on 5 May 1931. After such a long period of horrific colonial practices, the condition of the Algerian people that the reformers encountered was dire. The task they undertook was monumental, yet they approached it with sincerity and determination.

Subsection One: Efforts of the Association to Counter French Policies

The Association recognised the true objectives of the French colonisers: to eradicate the core components of Algerian identity — religion, language and national belonging. In response, they adopted the enduring motto, 'Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland'. This slogan reflected the members' deep understanding of the nature of the struggle against France and the necessary actions in those difficult circumstances.

The president of the association, Ibn Badis, summarised the purpose of his life as serving Islam and Algeria. In a 1937 article in *Al-Shihab* titled 'For Whom Do I Live?', he emphasised the need for those working in education to align their goals. He posed a question and answered it succinctly to ingrain the response in the minds of his audience: 'Q: For whom do I live? A: I live for Islam and Algeria'⁶², boldly highlighting the answer.

Less than a year before his death, he promised the people that he would continue to pursue this goal until the end of his life and urged them to do the same. In the final issue of *Al-Shihab*, published on 17 August 1939, he wrote, 'I pledge to you that I will devote my life to Arabic and Islam, as I have devoted my darkness to them. These are my duties, and I will dedicate my life to Islam, the Quran and their languages. This is my covenant to you, and I ask one thing of you: die for Islam, the Quran, and the Arabic language.'⁶³

In response to remarks by nationalist leader Ferhat Abbas that sparked widespread debate among Algerian activists⁶⁴, Ibn Badis wrote a powerful article titled "A Candid Word," published in **Al-Shihab**. He stated: "One of the prominent deputies claimed to have searched for Algerian nationalism in the annals of history but found no trace, nor did he find any in the present. Finally, enlightenment dawned upon him, and he exclaimed: 'France is me...'

This Algerian Islamic nation is not France, cannot be France, does not want to become France, and cannot become France even if it wished. It is a nation entirely distant from France in its language, morals, ethnicity, and religion. It does not wish to integrate and has a specific homeland: Algeria with its known borders⁶⁵.

Ibn Badis's words were echoed by his colleague Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, who described the phrase 'Algeria is French' as false and derogatory, disrespecting our dignity and insulting our honour, religion and history.' He asserted: 'We do not accept it. We will not tolerate its humiliation, and we will continue to refute it with truth, even if colonialism glorifies it at night and rewards those who recite it. We consider it a vile and repugnant term.'⁶⁶

Ibn Badis's statement had a significant impact in both French and Algerian circles. He later remarked in *Al-Shihab*: "The candid word we published in the previous issue had the desired effect, creating the significant echo we anticipated. To our knowledge, this was the first time

⁶²- *Al-Shihab* magazine: Vol. 10, No. 12, p. 425, Shawwal 1355 AH- January 1937, found in the works of Ben Badis (2/144).

⁶³- *Al-Shihab* magazine: Vol. 7, No. 15, Rajab 1358 AH or August 1939, p. 346.

⁶⁴- Previously mentioned in the first section of the second requirement.

⁶⁵- Published in *Al-Shihab*, Vol. 1, No. 12, Constantine, April 1936, titled "A Clear Word," by Imam Abdul Hamid Ben Badis, p. 42.

⁶⁶- Issue 111 of the newspaper *Al-Basair*, dated March 13, 1950, found in the works of Imam Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi (3/349).

that the government and political figures had faced such a clear truth — the truth believed by the nation and expressing the emotions and feelings of the vast majority of the Algerian population.⁶⁷

Consequently, Ferhat Abbas visited the Al-Shihab office to meet Ibn Badis and explain his position. The magazine noted this visit, stating: 'Mr Ferhat Abbas was neither distressed nor upset, and he followed in the footsteps of great politicians who appreciate criticism and adhere to the truth. He visited Al-Shihab to confirm his appreciation for its efforts and had a conversation with Ibn Badis that reflected his good manners and political acumen.'⁶⁸

In the same issue that announced the visit, Al-Shihab published an article titled 'Principles and Facts'⁶⁹, which clarified Abbas's position. Gradually, Abbas began to retract his previous stance, ultimately calling for Algeria's full independence from France — a view that contrasted starkly with his earlier stance.

Subsection Two: The Status of the Association Among the Algerian People

The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars' scholars gained significant respect and stature in the hearts of the Algerian people due to their substantial efforts in reform and education. One notable figure was Imam Ibn Badis, who undertook numerous tours across Algeria. These visits had two important implications.

Firstly, they played a crucial role in disseminating reformist ideas to the general public, as his educational initiatives helped to train future teachers who would continue the mission of reform. For the largely illiterate Algerian population, these visits provided an opportunity to hear the scholars speak directly, countering any misinformation spread by their opponents. Consequently, the reformist messages of the scholars gained acceptance among the people

The second implication of Ibn Badis's visits was that they indicated how the public responded to the reformers' efforts. A warm welcome from large crowds signified acceptance of the association's ideas, whereas a lack of enthusiasm suggested otherwise.

Incident One: Ibn Badis's visit to Biskra in 1931

During his visit, people came out in droves to welcome him and benefit from his teachings. Students and dignitaries flocked to participate in the reception and attend his lessons. While visiting Sidi Okba, the entire population came out to greet him. Crowds met him at the town's entrance, and as he walked, they followed him, raising their voices in takbir and tahleel until they reached the grand mosque. However, the mosque had been closed on orders from the French governor.

Finding the mosque locked, Ibn Badis calmly sat on the ground in his clean white garments in front of the entrance. He told the governor, "Inform the general governor that Abdul Hamid Ibn Badis is sitting here on the ground and will not leave until he is allowed to enter the mosque." Many of his companions joined him.

The governor became visibly anxious and hurried to inform the general governor. A young postal worker testified that the governor compared Ibn Badis's sit-in to Mahatma Gandhi's during a major protest in India, saying: 'I will not leave this place until the protest begins.'⁷⁰

This incident exemplified the fear that the French administration felt regarding Ibn Badis's efforts and movements. Shortly afterwards, the governor returned and told Ibn Badis that the general governor had allowed him to visit the mosque, but not to deliver a sermon.

Ibn Badis entered and the crowd followed him. He then delivered a lesson lasting an entire hour. The day culminated in Sheikh Al-Tayeb Al-Aqbi's garden with Quran recitations, lessons

⁶⁷- Al-Shihab magazine, Vol. 3, No. 12, Constantine, April 1936, titled "About Our Clear Word," by Imam Abdul Hamid Ben Badis, p. 141.

⁶⁸- The same reference, p. 142.

⁶⁹- The same reference, p. 148.

⁷⁰- Memoirs of Muhammad Khair al-Din, 1/82.

and speeches. Upon returning to Constantine, the scholars were filled with joy and encouragement from the support they had received, and from the realisation that their reform movement was thriving and would leave a lasting impact on people's lives. Joy spread throughout the hearts of Muslims in the desert region⁷¹.

Example incident two: the release of Sheikh Al-Tayeb Al-Aqbi after he was accused of assassinating Mufti Sheikh Kahloul.

In 1936, Sheikh Al-Tayeb Al-Aqbi was accused of assassinating Mufti Sheikh Kahloul. After his innocence was proven, he was released and the news spread rapidly. Large groups of people flocked to his home to congratulate him. Sheikh Al-Bashir Al-Ibrahimi described this event, stating:

'The people began to congratulate one another in the streets, joy evident on their faces, and tears of happiness flowed. The sight of the crowds gathering to congratulate the professor and celebrate his release was magnificent, showcasing feelings of love, Islamic brotherhood and gratitude towards dedicated individuals.

That evening, telephone and telegraph lines buzzed with the good news, spreading it to the farthest reaches of the country and beyond. Reports flooded in, saying that night had been like a joyful feast across all regions, with many people celebrating until dawn and putting the sadness and pain they had felt during the professor's detention behind them.

In the days that followed, congratulatory messages poured in from across Algeria and other regions, both in the form of telegrams and letters.

In the following days, we received an overwhelming number of congratulatory messages—both telegrams and letters—from Algeria and other regions. We received dozens of telegrams every hour, from morning until 10pm, followed by delegations of well-wishers from near and far, driven by joy and eagerness. The distance, hardships and heavy workloads did not deter them. We witnessed an extraordinary sense of unity, sincerity of brotherhood and genuine appreciation for the dedicated men, which we had not anticipated. Perhaps a calamity concealed a blessing.

These two incidents clearly demonstrate the success of the reform movement throughout Algeria and its deep penetration into Algerian society. The Association managed to build a broad base that embraced its reformist views. As Sheikh Muhammad Khair al-Din noted, 'This outpouring expressed a new spirit and broad hopes, reassuring people about the future of the reform movement in this region and reflecting its deep roots in the hearts of the Algerian Muslim people.'

This warm welcome was not limited to these two events, but was repeated during all of Ibn Badis's visits to various parts of the country. During his numerous visits across the nation, the Algerian people displayed remarkable support for the reform movement and its symbols⁷².

To illustrate the significant efforts made by the Association's members and the results of those efforts, we return to the words of Mohamed Ibrahim El-Kettani, whose perspective changed after he met the Association's members and witnessed their reform plans firsthand. He stated: 'Then the conference was held, and I attended all its sessions. I met the prominent figures of the association, whom I had heard of, and learned about their noble struggles. Before me were tremendous efforts, organised work and successful endeavours by men who fully understood the immense responsibility placed upon their shoulders by God, by the rising Islam and by future generations.' He continued, 'My sorrow turned to joy, and my despair transformed into a strong, great hope.'⁷³

⁷¹- This is a summary of what Sheikh Muhammad Khair al-Din mentioned about this journey in his memoirs, 1/82-83.

⁷²- Al-Basair newspaper: No. 33, Year 1, Friday, 17 Jumada al-Thani 1355 AH / September 4, 1936, pp. 1 and 4, found in the works of Imam Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi (1/273-274).

⁷³- The previous reference, 1/82.

This highlights the enormous credit that is due to the members of the Association for awakening the Algerian people from their deep slumber and revitalising them after France had almost eradicated all aspects of their way of life, putting their identity at risk of complete erasure⁷⁴.

Western Testimonies on the Association's Strength and Success:

Several Western writers have acknowledged the Association's strength and success in fulfilling its mission⁷⁵. In his book *Modern Trends in Islam*, English orientalist Hamilton Alexander Gibb noted that the Association's members had achieved great success, going further than the followers of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. He wrote, 'The Algerians have gone further than the people of *Al-Manar* achieved. Apart from their printed and oral campaigns, they have begun reviving primary Quranic schools across the country to influence the rising generation, and despite the difficulties they faced, their efforts have met with success.'⁷⁶

French priest André Lecourt described the Association as follows: 'Although it is not a political party, it strongly opposes colonial domination, and its slogan defines its programme.'⁷⁷ This motto is: 'Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland.'

In 1954, a French administrator wrote to the general administration in Algeria stating that the Association had been, and still was, a barrier between Arab and French civilisations. He described it as the nucleus of national parties and a solid foundation upon which Islamic national sentiment grew. This testimony highlights how the association served as a formidable barrier against French attempts to erase the identity of the Algerian people, instead fostering the growth of their national Islamic consciousness⁷⁸.

We previously discussed the despair felt by many scholars and thinkers regarding the situation in Algeria. However, after the Association's activities spread, such pessimistic declarations became rare. Instead, a sense of optimism about Algeria's future emerged.

Only a few years after the Association was established, its effects became evident. In March 1937, less than six years after its foundation, Ibn Badis stated: 'Thanks be to God, we have succeeded in religious reform to the extent that those who once opposed us can only advocate for themselves in the name of knowledge, the Book, and the Sunnah. May God guide them to what is true. We have also succeeded in political reform to the extent that preserving our identity has become a collective matter, even for those who were indifferent or unaware, and it is officially recognised as essential in every programme proposed for Algeria.'⁷⁹

Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi regarded this success achieved by the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars as extraordinary, comparing it to reviving the dead. In 1951, he said: 'If it is extraordinary for great individuals to build strength from weakness, create existence from nothing, and bring life from death, then all of this was accomplished by Abd al-Hamid ibn Badis for the Algerian nation.'⁸⁰

As the nation regained its identity, thoughts about seizing freedom and independence from French colonisation began to emerge. These continuous efforts culminated in the outbreak of the liberation revolution on 1 November 1954, 23 years after the Association was founded —

⁷⁴- Which was previously mentioned in the second section of the second requirement.

⁷⁵- See his complete lecture in the records of the Conference of the Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria, (pp. 271-273).

⁷⁶- H. A. Jib, *Modern Trends in Islam*, translated by Hashim Al-Husseini, p. 63.

⁷⁷- André Lucertua, *Algeria of the 1950s*, p. 150.

⁷⁸- See Dr. Abdul Karim Bouasf Saf, *The Association of Muslim Scholars in Algeria and Its Role in the Development of the Algerian National Movement 1931-1945*, p. 291.

⁷⁹- *Al-Shihab* magazine: Vol. 1, No. 13, 1 Muharram 1356 AH- March 14, 1937. Opening of the Year (13).

⁸⁰- Works of Imam Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi (3/589), published in issue 151 of the newspaper *Al-Basair*, April 16, 1951.

akin to the period of the prophetic mission during which Islam triumphed before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) passed away.

Conclusion:

After reviewing France's extensive efforts to erase the identity of the Algerian people, and examining the numerous consequences of these efforts over more than a century, which led to deep-rooted despair regarding reform among those concerned with Algeria — both Algerians and non-Algerians — we came to the following conclusions:

1. France spared no effort or means in its quest to obliterate the identity of the Algerian people, employing coercion and incentives to achieve this goal.
2. France fully understood the moral foundations of the Algerian people that it sought to dismantle. France identified these foundations — namely religion, the Arabic language, and a sense of belonging to Algeria — and systematically worked to destroy them through scientific studies, the promotion of Christianity and the French language, and the fostering of allegiance to France as the motherland.
3. The French colonial authorities also attempted to undermine tangible aspects of Algerian life, such as health, economic conditions, and education. They unleashed destructive forces that resulted in widespread diseases, extreme poverty and ignorance, affecting the vast majority of the population.
4. The intensity and longevity of these efforts led many prominent scholars and reformers to despair over the prospects of improving Algerian conditions, with some even succumbing to madness, as was the case with Sheikh Abdul Halim Ben Smaïa.

However, after this dark period of a century of harsh occupation, a glimmer of hope emerged in the form of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. This light grew stronger, eventually leading to the outbreak of the liberation revolution on 1 November 1954 and the dawn of freedom.

Clearly, the situation of Algerians changed after the Association was founded in 1931. The scholars' efforts to restore and reform the core elements of Algerian identity — encapsulated in the motto "Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our homeland" — played a crucial role in rekindling pride in their identity.

The founders of the Association thus left a significant legacy for all Algerians, as they were instrumental in saving the nation and its people from certain death and the complete dissolution of their identity.

As a result of the association's reform efforts, a large proportion of the Algerian population came to believe that peaceful means were ineffective against colonial oppression. This led to serious contemplation about preparing for a widespread liberation revolution that would encompass the entire nation.

We conclude that reform advocates should never despair of improving society, no matter how dire its circumstances may seem.

Our final prayer is: Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.

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