

Aspects of the Contributions of Leading Figures from Colonised Algeria to Supporting the Maghrebi Unitary Struggle (1920–1962)

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Abstract. European colonial policies and objectives pursued in the Maghrebi region, together with the impact of shared foundations and commonalities uniting the region's populations, prompted leading figures of the national movements to adopt the idea of strengthening the common Maghrebi struggle and activating it on the ground. They regarded this approach as the most effective means of liberation from the colonial grip and of restoring usurped national sovereignty in all its pillars and components. Given that Algeria was among the earliest victims of French colonial domination, it constituted an early arena of resistance to colonialism and a platform for the articulation of unifying ideas that viewed the Maghreb as a single entity confronting the same danger and sharing the same destiny. This was manifested in the positions and contributions of prominent figures within the national movement and the liberation revolution, who enriched and reinforced the trajectory of the Maghrebi unitary struggle.

1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria was the first of the Maghrebi countries to fall under European occupation in 1830, a circumstance that rendered it an early arena of resistance to colonialism and a platform for articulating unifying ideas that perceived the Maghreb as a single entity confronting the same danger and sharing the same destiny. With the beginning of the twentieth century, the contours of unifying thought began to take shape among the Algerian national elite through the press, free schools, and reformist movements. This thought subsequently evolved with the modern national movement, which transcended the territorial horizon to a Maghrebi one. This development was reflected in the positions of prominent figures such as 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Bādīs and Muṣālī al-Ḥājj and later in the political discourse of the National Liberation Front during the War of Liberation. On this basis, the following problems emerge from the present study:

- What are the historical roots and intellectual references upon which leading Algerian figures relied in advancing the idea of Maghrebi unity?
- To what extent did the colonial context contribute to strengthening the idea of Maghrebi unity among Algerian elites?
- What roles were played by figures such as al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, Muṣālī al-Ḥājj, and al-'arabi Ben M'hīdī in promoting this thought? These are the issues that this study seeks to elucidate.

1.1. First: Definition of the Maghreb Region

The Arabic word *Maghreb* denotes the west and refers to the regions west of the Nile Valley.ⁱ The region has been known for several appellations, including ancient ones such as Numidia, Africa, Libya or Loubia, and Mauretania, as well as a contemporary designation, North Africa, a term employed by the French and Europeans more generally.

Ibn Khaldūn used the term *Maghreb* in his work *Kitāb al-'Ibar wa-Diwān al-Mubtada' wa-l-Khabar* to denote the region extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea.

The designation *Greater Maghreb* was adopted during the period from 1910--1920 and encompassed Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco; in more recent years, Libya and Mauritania were added.ⁱⁱ have been included. Many prefer this designation because it is a consensual term that does not impose Arabness or Islam upon the region.ⁱⁱⁱ

The term *Arab Maghreb* became more widespread at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that this is connected to events in the Arab East, particularly identity struggles under Ottoman rule, which led to the emergence of Arab nationalism in the Mashriq. Therefore, the writers, politicians, and historians who employed this term proceeded from the premise that the Arab homeland consists of an Eastern and a Western part. They defined the characteristics of the Arab Maghreb as unity among its constituent parts and, taken as a whole, as a component of the Arab homeland.^{iv}

Although Arab historians applied the term *Arab Maghreb* to the region extending from western Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean, the advent of French colonialism in its territories and the prolonged struggle against it altered its connotation. Owing to their

subjection to the same colonial power, it was confined to three countries, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, whereas Libya was under Italian control.^v

This view is articulated by the French historian Charles-André Julien, who stated, "Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria together constitute a geographical unit independent of the rest of the continent; they were even known as *Africa Minor* in order to distinguish them from other parts of the continent, owing to their association since ancient times through particular and close natural, political, and linguistic regional ties."^{vi}

The history of the Arab Maghreb has witnessed events that rendered it an integrated historical unit and shaped its shared destiny, as affirmed by numerous developments in the region, particularly the colonial incursions throughout its long history, beginning with the Phoenicians, followed by the Romans, the Vandals, and the Byzantines.^{vii}

In the contemporary era, the idea of Maghrebi unity became more pronounced with the coloniser's invasion of their lands, as the sense of unity and its inevitability intensified. This occupation awakened an awareness of the necessity of solidarity and collective defence, a reality reflected in Algerian–Moroccan–Tunisian relations during this period, which witnessed the highest forms of mutual support. Some consider this to be an indication of the renewed resurgence of the idea of Maghrebi unity after a period of decline.^{viii}

1.2. Second: Foundations of Maghrebi Unity

The principal elements that laid the foundations of the idea of the Arab Maghreb in the consciousness of its peoples at the beginning of the twentieth century may be summarised as follows: the concept of the Islamic nation, the national reaction against French colonialism and its attempts to efface the Islamic identity of the region, and the aspirations of the peoples of the Maghreb towards renaissance and progress.^{ix}

1.2.1. Geographical Foundation

The Arab Maghreb constitutes a vast geographical area whose parts are contiguous, homogeneous in climatic and natural characteristics, comparable in resources and economic assets, similar in patterns of urban distribution, and close in demographic composition. Owing to its location as a gateway to Africa, an extension of the Arab and Islamic world, and its proximity to Europe, this region experienced cultural homogeneity and social convergence, which reinforced the idea of unity.^x

1.2.2. Linguistic Foundation

Since the Marinid period, Arabic has been the predominant language among the inhabitants of North Africa, including Berbers, who spoke it and conducted their affairs in it. Although the indigenous populations of the region retained their own languages, they learned Arabic, which became their principal means of communication. Thus, the Arabic language constitutes the fundamental unifying pillar of Maghrebi society. In the Maghreb, there is a marked similarity and near identity in customs and traditions to such an extent that if a Tunisian were taken to Algeria or Morocco, he would not feel estranged; the same applies across the other Maghrebi countries, owing to the similarity of customs and traditions relating to food, dress, and social formation.^{xi}

1.2.3. History and Shared Destiny

One of the distinguishing features of the Arab Maghreb is that its constituent countries underwent historical experiences and challenges that often verged on complete congruence as events and eras succeeded one another, demonstrating that the destiny of its regions was the same. Whenever part of the region fell under foreign domination, the others followed suit, beginning with the Phoenicians, Romans, and Vandals, then the Byzantines, and even during the Islamic conquests. When the Romans occupied Carthage, they imposed their authority over the entire neighbouring Maghrebi region, namely, Numidia and Mauretania. From this, it becomes evident that the project of achieving unity among Maghrebi countries and people is an objective supported by numerous facilitating factors that render its realisation plausible. History and geography, society, language, and religion, the unity of destiny in confronting colonialism, and the convergent aspirations of the region's peoples all serve as factors that pave the way towards this orientation.

1.3. Third: The Impact of French Colonial Policies on the Crystallisation of the Idea of Maghrebi Unity:

French, and more broadly Western, perceptions of the Maghreb sought to realise a long-term strategy that served the premises and motivations of the colonial movement towards Arabs and Islam. Beyond its economic dimensions, this policy aimed at dismantling and fragmenting the general social, cultural, religious, and civilisational structure, as well as at historical containment and the achievement of complete dependency.^{xii}

Following France's occupation of Algeria in 1830, it turned its attention to Tunisia and Morocco and began its assault on the Arab-Islamic identity. Churchmen hoped that occupation would eradicate Islam and convert the population to Christianity. In this regard, the Minister of War, Clermont-Tonnerre, stated in 1830, "Divine providence granted him (Charles X) this victory in Algeria in order to make the inhabitants Christians." Consequently, the commander of the French expedition, General de Bourmont, was accompanied by sixteen priests.^{xiii}

From the outset of occupation, an attack was launched against the Arabic language and its cultural and religious institutions to eradicate Islam because understanding Islam is inseparable from understanding the Arabic language, which was treated as a foreign language.

French colonial policy in the Maghrebi countries did not confine itself to combating Islam and the Arabic language; it went further by sowing division among the inhabitants of the same homeland through the practice of racial segregation between Arabs and Berbers. This policy began in Algeria, reached maturity in Morocco, and was implemented in Mauritania.

Beginning in 1849, the French authorities sought to separate the Kabylia region from the rest of the country. In 1853, General Bugeaud established an independent administration in the area and subjected it to a distinct administrative and judicial system, removing it from the sphere of Islamic jurisdiction. This paved the way for missionary activities.^{xiv} to operate there and to disseminate spurious ideas alleging the European Christian origins of the Berbers. All of this was intended to prepare for the policy of assimilation that the French envisaged for Algeria, an attempt to link it to the so-called French family and to regard it as French property. This was enacted through the well-known *Sénatus Consulté*, which stipulated that Algerians be granted French

citizenship on the condition that they renounce Islamic personal status law. This decree failed to attract Algerians, who remained attached to their religion, patriotism, and cultural affiliation; more than ninety years later, by 1919,^{xv} the number of those who had obtained French citizenship did not exceed 2,500.

A similar process occurred in Tunisia through decrees issued in 1887, 1897, and 1914, which provided facilities for Tunisians seeking French citizenship, culminating in the promulgation of the Naturalisation Law in Tunisia in 1923. This law stipulated the granting of French citizenship to Tunisians and the enjoyment of the same privileges accorded to French citizens.

1.3.1. The Berber Policy in Morocco

Since the imposition of the French Protectorate over Morocco in 1912, through the reinforcement of educational and missionary efforts and a focus on the Berbers for immediate and long-term purposes^{xvi} serving colonial objectives, French policy has relied on the following foundations:

- Isolating the Berbers from their social environment and administering them through a special system, removed from Islamic law and the Arabic language.
- Endeavouring eradicating the Arabic language by reviving the Berber dialects and encouraging their writing but using the Latin script.
- Establishing churches and missionary religious centres in Berber regions.
- According to the Moroccan historian Aḥmad Maliki,^{xvii} the Colonial Berber policy was based on three conclusions:
- The assertion of an alleged contradiction between Arabs and Berbers.
- The preference for the Berber race over its Arab counterpart, because it was deemed by colonialism to be more receptive to civil and cultural development.
- The presumed readiness of the Berbers and their capacity for integration into French society.

Numerous decrees addressed the Berber question, such as the decree of 11 September 1914, which stipulated respect for and observance of the customary system in force among Berber tribes, and the decree of 15 June 1922, which provided for the expropriation of property in favour of foreigners.^{xviii} Among the most prominent manifestations of French Berber policy were the promulgation of the Berber Decree in 1930. The text of this decree was drafted on 17 Dhū al-Hijja 1348 AH, corresponding to 16 May 1930, registered in the Grand Vizierate on the same day, examined and authorised for publication in Rabat on 23 May 1930 by the Resident-General Saint-Lucien.^{xix} A total of eight articles affirmed the removal of Berbers from the authority of the Moroccan government (*makhzen*) and from the jurisdiction of Islamic law.

ʿallal al-Fasi encapsulated the Berber Decree by stating: "This policy represents the latest outcome of French thought aimed at eliminating the foundations of the Arab Maghreb and integrating it into the fold of the French family ...".^{xx}

From the moment this decree was promulgated, the number of missionaries in Morocco began to increase. They moved throughout the country, built churches, and targeted foundlings, orphans, and the poor. At the same time, the authorities prevented Muslim jurists and preachers from engaging with the Berbers and punished all those who violated these restrictions. A repressive policy was adopted through the closure of schools and Qurʾanic schools, the shutdown of *sharʿa* courts, and the expulsion of judges. The recitation of the Qurʾan, the performance of prayer, and the use of the Arabic language became prohibited practices in the country.^{xxi}

The Moroccan people's response, however, was forceful. Large gatherings were organised in major cities such as Rabat and Fez, and mosques were filled with worshippers who concluded their prayers with the recitation of *al-Laṭīf*,^{xxii} thereby affirming their steadfast adherence to religion and Islamic belief.^{xxiii}

1.3.2. The Eucharistic Congress (Policy of Religious Erasure)

Within the framework of the French protectorate policy in Tunisia, which did not confine itself to the Christianization of the Tunisian environment alone, particularly after the erection in January 1925^{xxiv} of a monument at the gate of the Islamic city of Tunis to Cardinal Lavigerie, commemorating the centenary of his birth but went so far as to strike at the Islamic faith of Tunisians by organising a Christian sacramental congress known as the Eucharistic Congress,^{xxv} held in Carthage from 7--11 May 1930.

The Eucharistic Congress was held five days before the issuance of the Berber Decree and in the same month that the centenary celebrations marking the French occupation of Algeria commenced. This synchronisation provoked the indignation of Tunisians, given the simultaneous implementation of these policies across the three Maghrebi countries, as well as the honorary membership granted at the congress to the Shaykhs of Islam Aḥmīda Bayram and the Grand Mufti al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿāshūr, as reported by certain French newspapers.^{xxvi}

The city of Carthage was chosen as the venue for this congress because it was the burial place of the spirit of Saint Louis (*Saint Louis*), as an attempt to revive the Church of Africa once again in Carthage. This was expressed by Bishop Lemaître of Carthage, who stated, "We are in our homeland; Carthage is the burial place of the spirit of Saint Louis, where his spirit hovers, and we fear no sensitivities ...", an expression that evoked and recalled the Christian past of Africa, accompanied by the most virulent expressions of hostility towards Islam and Muslims, such as Cardinal Lavigerie's description of the Arab presence in the region as "fourteen centuries of sorrow."^{xxvii}

The congress programme included a pair of youths dressed in Crusader's attire. The official programme of the congress was widely distributed to endow it with a more pronounced religious dimension and to attract as many attendees as possible. The event also contained offensive expressions directed at Tunisians,^{xxviii} which consequently provoked their resentment and indignation, as they regarded the event as an affront to their religion and creed.

Perhaps what explains the insistence of the protectorate authorities on organising this congress in such a form and with such content was the desire to affirm a deep-seated Crusader animosity towards Islam and Muslims. Consequently, the Congress exposed France's intentions more than it served its interests.^{xxix}

This congress was a calamity for the country, as the streets of Tunis were crowded with monks who had come from every direction, accompanied by youths wearing garments resembling those of the members of the Eighth Crusade against Tunis, which had halted in Carthage in 1270. France regarded this as a commemoration and a Ninth Crusade.^{xxx}

1.3.3. Centenary Celebrations in Algeria

The French occupation authorities in Algeria celebrated the completion of a full century since the occupation of Algeria, with festivities that lasted for six months. Through these celebrations, France sought to demonstrate that it had vanquished Arabness and Islam, leaving nothing but France and the Cross.

In 1930, French colonial rule in Algeria reached its hundredth year, prompting France to seize the opportunity to organise grand celebrations, to which, as some expressed it, the entire world was invited. As early as 1922, one French journal in Algeria wrote: "We the French are in our homeland, Algeria. We have become the masters of the country by force, and this necessarily means that there are victors and vanquished. Since our subjugation of the people, we have been able to organise the country, and this organisation itself once again confirms the notion of the victor's privilege over the vanquished, and the superiority of the civilised man over the deficient ... We are the legitimate owners of the country."^{xxxii}

The commemoration of the centenary of the occupation of Algeria cost the treasury no less than 132 million francs. Through all of this, France aimed to celebrate an occupation that had undermined the foundations of a state that, over three centuries, had been a source of embarrassment to many countries of the Mediterranean basin.^{xxxiii}

The programme of the celebrations was diverse and meticulously prepared. Financial committees were engaged in preparing the various projects adopted, such as the Law of 25 March 1928, the High Council for the Centenary, and the General Commissariat for the Centenary.

Publicity for the centenary reached the pinnacle of organisation and attained the intensity of wartime propaganda. This was reflected by the Havas Agency, which later became the Agence France-Presse through 352 articles, more than 14,000 press announcements, and 1,200,000 centenary commemorative notebooks distributed to libraries and educational institutions, with 63 million francs allocated specifically to propaganda.

Accordingly, the French displayed religious animosity, or a desire to return to crusading zeal. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of this is found in the words of one of their leaders, who stated, "Our celebration today is not a celebration of the passage of a century since our occupation of Algeria; rather, it is a celebration of the burial of Islam," as well as in the statement of the governor of Tébessa: "We came to Algeria to bury the Qur'an, not to give it life."^{xxxiii}

The celebrations included desert rallies (races) from the capital, Algiers, to Gao in Senegal and back, from February to April; the organisation of fifty-six national conferences to present assessments of the situation in Algeria; the staging of dozens of exhibitions of various kinds; and parades, lectures, games, films, publications, and tourist tours, in addition to theatrical performances evoking images of the landing at Sidi-Fredj.^{xxxiv}

Numerous monuments were also erected, such as the monument to Marshal Bugeaud, the Sidi-Fredj monument, and the Pottin monument. New facilities, including the radio station at Kouba, were inaugurated, and schools, such as the School of Textiles and Carpets in Tlemcen, the School in Béjaïa, and the Pottery School in Tizi Ouzou, were established. Furthermore, numerous studies have been produced addressing French achievements in Algeria, foremost the series of *Algerian Institutions*, which examined the development of administration in Algeria, including legislative achievements, alongside the *geography series* and the *history and archaeology series*.^{xxxv}

It can therefore be said that the convergence of colonial policies in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, particularly those aimed at undermining the Arab-Islamic identity of Maghrebi societies, contributed to the crystallisation, reinforcement, and strengthening of the idea of Maghrebi unity to confront this pernicious policy.

1.4. Fourth, Aspects of the Contributions of Leading Figures of the Algerian National Movement to Supporting the Maghrebi Unitary Struggle

1.4.1. Al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī and his Unifying Efforts

Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī is regarded as one of the most prominent figures of the Association of Muslims 'Ulamā', who called for Maghrebi unity within an Arab-Islamic framework. He never abandoned the dream of establishing an Islamic university. Whenever he spoke of North Africa, he invariably emphasised Arabness and Islam as the two fundamental factors underpinning the region's unity.^{xxxvi} His call for Maghrebi unity was fuelled by French colonial policies and by attempts to isolate the Maghreb from the Arab and Islamic worlds. This explains why al-Ibrāhīmī's writings in the newspapers *al-Shihāb* and *al-Baṣā'ir* on the countries of the Maghreb were so numerous. He demonstrated keen interest in all Maghrebi countries, their issues, the demands of their people, and the colonial policies imposed upon them. This profound concern was embodied in his writings and articles. The following highlights some of Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī's positions and activities aimed at achieving Maghrebi unity.

- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī devoted particular attention to the Tunisian cause, expressing regret that the Association's newspaper had failed to accompany a significant event in Tunisia. He stated, "*Al-Baṣā'ir* missed, owing to the printing press's holiday during the last two weeks of Ramaḍān, the opportunity to share with the dear Tunisian nation in declaring mourning for what befell it in the recent period of colonial calamities, represented by the incident of Jabal al-Julūd and the incident of Ṣafāqis ... one limb of the body cannot suffer pain without the rest of the limbs also suffering."^{xxxvii}
- Like his predecessor Ibn Bādīs, he protested against the issuance of the Berber Decree, considering it a denial of the Arabness of North Africa, an attempt to erase it, and a measure aimed at annexing and integrating Morocco into the French family and implementing a policy of divide and rule.^{xxxviii}
- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī also denounced colonial policy in Morocco, stating: "There is no form of mockery of Islam more repugnant than these absurd acts performed by French policy in North Africa ... What was tried here and failed is doomed to failure there."^{xxxix}
- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī openly proclaimed Maghrebi unity at the Fifth Congress of the Association of North African Muslim Students (AENAM), held from 6 to 10 September 1935 in Tlemcen at the Sa'āda Club and the Islamic Club affiliated with the Association of Algerian Muslim 'Ulamā', bearing the slogan of the unity of the Arab Maghreb.^{xl} He delivered a speech that impressed all those present, in which he spoke about the history of Tlemcen and the unity of the Maghreb in the past, present, and future, encouraging students to engage in sustained action in the service of the nation in accordance with the values of Arabness and Islam.^{xli}
- Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī attacked figures loyal to French colonialism, such as 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī, in a well-known article entitled "Is Every Living Being 'Abd al-Ḥayy?" and in another article entitled "'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī: What Is He, and What Is His Significance?" following al-Kattānī's participation in the Zāwiyā Conference in 1939. The figure of al-

Tahāmī al-Glaoui also became the target of his criticism because of his stance towards the 'Alawī throne and his support for the colonial administration at the expense of the Moroccan national movement. Al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī described him in one article as Satan, who forbids good, and in another article as Satan, who commands good. All of this was in defence of and advocacy for the Moroccan cause against the faction loyal to colonialism, which sought to undermine society through alien and toxic ideas.^{xliii}

- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī's activity in the journalistic field expanded significantly after the Second World War, having been preoccupied in the late 1930s with the construction of Dār al-Ḥadīth in Tlemcen and the establishment of branches and sections of the Association in the neighbouring western regions. After the Second World War and the massacres of 8 May 1945, he intensified the tone of his writings and those of the Association, closely following Maghrebi developments in a broad manner. Having assumed the presidency of the Association of Muslims 'Ulamā' after 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Bādīs, he did not abandon its principles but rather sought to strengthen and consolidate them.^{xliiii}
- He sent a telegram of condolence to the son of al-Munṣif Bey following his death on 1 September 1948, in which he stated: "The death of His Majesty Sidi Muḥammad al-Munṣif is a general calamity in whose mourning Muslims in general and the inhabitants of North Africa in particular share."^{xliiv} Following the assassination of the trade union activist Farḥāt Ḥashshād by the French *Main Rouge* organisation, al-Ibrāhīmī sent telegrams to several bodies, urging them and calling upon the United Nations to examine the Tunisian cause with justice.^{xliv}
- Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī was also profoundly concerned with Morocco. One contributing factor was his role as head of the section at Dār al-Ḥadīth in Tlemcen, which is close to the Moroccan border and shares Morocco's cultural characteristics. Many figures from Morocco visited him, and he received numerous letters from Moroccan scholars; therefore, he consistently regarded the Moroccan question as an integral and inseparable part of the Maghrebi cause.^{xlvi}
- Al-Ibrāhīmī considered the cause of Muslim weakness to be their disunity and the dominance of a narrow, territorial outlook among them, especially after their estrangement from Islamic unity, which eventually came under colonial control. In an article entitled "Aḥrām Tata' āṭaf," he wrote: "We have long lamented the condition of Muslims in general, and of Easterners in particular, this rupture that scattered their ranks, fragmented their unity, and rendered them easy prey for colonisers. We called upon them to embrace the broad unity that leaves no room constricted, namely, the unity of Islam."^{xlvii} He was also attentive to Libya, closely following all its developments, stating in this regard: "Our Libyan and Tripolitanian brothers, as we call them, have upon us the right of religion, the right of language, the right of race, the right of neighbourhood, and the right of sharing in pains and afflictions ..."^{xlviii}
- With the establishment of the Arab League and its desire to support Maghrebi people in achieving independence, the convening of the Maghreb Conference in Cairo in 1947 and the founding of the Maghreb Committee in 1948, Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī's Maghrebi unifying demands gained greater force. In the early 1950s, he wrote an article affirming the Arabness of North Africa in all its parts, regardless of the origins of its peoples.^{xlix}
- When unity among the political parties of Morocco was achieved in 1951, Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī offered his congratulations, in the name of *al-Baṣā'ir*, the Association of Muslims 'Ulamā', and the Algerian national parties, stating: "We congratulate our brothers 'alal al-Fasi, al-Wazzānī, al-Ṭarīs, and al-Nāṣirī on this occasion, which has elevated them from the rank of manliness to that of heroism."^l The scholarly, cultural, and political ties between Algeria, Tunisia, and the other Maghrebi countries grew stronger and became further consolidated after the establishment of the Ibn Bādīs Institute affiliated with the Zaytūna Mosque, particularly between al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī and 'ali al-Nayfar, director of the Zaytūna Institute, through the exchange of visits and expertise between the two sides.^{li}
- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī chaired a meeting in Paris on 2 February 1952 to establish the Moroccan Front of Orientation and Action. In its charter, the committee affirmed the unity of action in the Maghreb and the commitment to its liberation.
- Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī visited Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, where he delivered a speech in which he declared: "I greet you in the name of mighty North Africa, formidable against its enemies ... not divided in its parts, nor recognising the boundaries drawn by injustice and aggression." He also stated, months before the outbreak of the War of Liberation: "The Arab Maghreb is an indivisible unity, brought together by Islam in its teachings ... and united by Arabness in its expression and culture ..."^{lii}
- The deposition of King Muḥammad V from the throne on 20 August 1953 provoked profound indignation in Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī, who regarded it as an affront to both the king and the Moroccan people. He stated, "Calamity befell Morocco; France committed a grave wrong by humiliating a king, threatening a throne, and degrading a people ..."^{liiii} From the offices of the Association of Muslim 'Ulamā', al-Ibrāhīmī issued a telegram of protest to the French government regarding its disgraceful action in Morocco, affirming in this telegram that such acts had aroused the anger of the entire Islamic world against France.^{liv}
- He also sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States in Cairo, calling upon him to address the difficult situation confronting the Islamic nation, to thwart French colonial plans in the Maghreb and ensure the success of Maghrebi liberation efforts. He likewise sent a letter to King Mawḥūd Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf, expressing solidarity with him in his ordeal, affirming that all Muslims stood in solidarity with him, and urging him to remain steadfast and to make no concessions until victory was achieved. When the king returned from exile, the Association of Muslims 'Ulamā' dispatched a high-level delegation to congratulate him in the name of the Algerian people; poems were composed, and articles were written on this occasion, and Muḥammad V received extensive praise and acclaim in *al-Baṣā'ir*.
- By virtue of these ties, al-Ibrāhīmī considered himself concerned with all developments in Tunisia, addressing the most significant of them in articles published in *al-Baṣā'ir* and providing space for the publication of news relating to this part of the Maghreb.^{lv}
- Al-Ibrāhīmī consistently defended the Tunisian cause. In an article entitled "Calamities of Colonialism," he expressed his deep resentment and profound sorrow at the injustice practised by French colonialism. Among the issues that particularly concerned al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī was the strike by the Zaytūna students, for which he sent a telegram in support of their demands, affirming their legitimacy and condemning the government's stance towards them. He addressed this telegram to the Shaykh of the Great Mosque and to the two daily newspapers in Tunisia, *al-Nahḍa* and *al-Zahra*, because he regarded this group as the one that would carry the torch of the country's liberation from the clutches of colonialism.^{lvi}
- When the French authorities arrested al-Ḥabīb Būrqība and several leading figures of the Neo-Destour Party during a demonstration in Tunisian cities, al-Ibrāhīmī sent a telegram from the offices of the Association of Muslims 'Ulamā' in Cairo to the French ambassador in Cairo, signed by himself and his colleague al-Faḍīl al-Warḥilānī, stating: "As we add our

voice to yours in protest and denunciation of the torture of this leader, we extend to you our thanks in the name of the Arab Maghreb ...”^{lvii}

For this reason, it may be said that Shaykh al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī stands among the Algerian figures most committed to a Maghrebi unifying vision. This may be attributed to his social background and religious upbringing, which instilled in him a belief in the unity of the Islamic nation, as well as his close association with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, who himself espoused a Maghrebi unifying orientation through his activities within the Association of Muslims ‘Ulamā’. The establishment of the Arab League further strengthened al-Ibrāhīmī’s unifying thought.

1.4.2. Messali Hadj and His Role in Shaping Maghrebi Nationalist Thought

Messali Hadj played a fundamental role in instilling the values of joint Maghrebi action through his central contribution to the founding of the North African Star (*toile Nord-Africaine*), which is regarded as the first labour and political movement of a distinctly Maghrebi character, as well as through his participation in the North Africa Conference of 1927 and his coordination with al-Shādhilī Khayrallāh of Tunisia in pursuit of the Maghrebi objective. These aspects are examined in the first section of the second chapter entitled “Attempts to Achieve Maghrebi Unity before Independence.”

1.4.2.1. Muṣālī Al-Ḥāj at the European Islamic Congress of 1935

The European Islamic Congress opened in the halls of the Victoria Hotel on Thursday morning, 12 September 1935, under the chairmanship of Shakīb Arslān, head of the organising committee. It constituted a major success for Islam in general and for the Muslims of the European continent in particular. Among those attending on behalf of the North African Star were Messali Hadj, who was residing in Geneva in Star’s leadership direction. The congress was also attended by the Secretary-General ‘Ammār ‘Ayyāsh and Bānūn Aklī, and it lasted from 12--17 September 1935.^{lviii}

Messali Hadj, together with the accompanying delegation, presented the dire conditions faced by Maghrebi migrants in France, particularly in the Paris region, where more than 60,000 Maghrebi migrants lived. He also addressed the issues of teaching the Arabic language and religion, the education of children, mixed marriages, civil status, and the Paris Mosque.^{lix}

- At the beginning of 1947, leaders of the Maghrebi national movements became active in Cairo to coordinate efforts to unify the national struggle and exert pressure on colonialism. This activity culminated in the organisation of the Maghreb Conference in Cairo, held from 15--22 February 1947, to coordinate the efforts of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian nationalists in their struggle against colonialism and expand propaganda for the Maghrebi cause by all possible means.^{lx}
- The events witnessed in the Maghrebi region in the aftermath of the Second World War led the leaders of the independence movements to become convinced of the futility of continuing to accommodate French colonialism through traditional methods and that it could be repelled only by armed struggle. This conviction was reinforced, particularly after the events of 8 May 1945 in Algeria, the repression experienced by the villages of Zarmadīn and Banī Ḥassān on the Tunisian coast on 30 June 1946, and the tragedy of Casablanca on 7 April 1947.^{lxi}
- These new developments at the regional, Arab, and international levels prompted the leadership of the Algerian People’s Party to renew its mobilisation and to strengthen the bonds of support and unity with Tunisia and Morocco. The party’s conception thus became the establishment of a united front for struggle at the Maghreb level in pursuit of independence. It emphasises that any initiative for action had to encompass the three Maghrebi countries collectively while excluding any revolutionary activity conducted along strictly territorial lines.^{lxii} From May 1945, the Algerian People’s Party dispatched a delegation to Tunisia composed of Muḥammad al-Amīn Dabbāghīn and ‘Abd Allah Filālī, whom al-Shādhilī al-Makkī later joined. The three sought to ascertain the views of all political currents in Tunisia to consult on the unification of a plan of action in the Maghreb.
- Al-Shādhilī al-Makkī reported that the meeting was held at the home of al-Shādhilī ibn al-Qādī, Shaykh of al-Zaytūna, in June. It was attended by al-Fāḍil ibn ‘Āshūr, Ṣāliḥ ibn Yūsuf, and ‘Allāla al-Bahlawān, representing the Neo-Destour Party; Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qulaybī and Ṣāliḥ Farḥāt, representing the Old Destour; in addition to the delegation of the Algerian People’s Party. The meeting approved an agreement for the unity of struggle in the Maghreb. Al-Amīn Dabbāghīn carried this agreement to Morocco, where he met al-Mahdī ibn Barka and activists of the Istiqlāl Party, who endorsed and signed it.^{lxiii}
- During the years 1945–1946, Dabbāghīn remained in contact with Tunisian and Moroccan activists in an attempt to coordinate militant activity in the Maghreb. However, he did not achieve the level of commitment necessary to encourage the unifying action sought by the Algerian People’s Party, as Tunisians and Moroccans viewed Algeria as a French colony with a special legal status, distinct from Tunisia and Morocco.

Nevertheless, they agreed with a charter providing for coordination among the three Maghrebi parties on the following principles: – the preparation of joint action for independence, including armed struggle; – the rejection of unilateral negotiations with any occupying power without the consent of the other two parties.

This document ultimately lacked practical significance because of the lack of seriousness on the part of the Destourians and the Istiqlāl Party.^{lxiv}

- For its part, the Algerian People’s Party–Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (PPA–MTLD), in reinforcement of its Maghrebi orientation and in support of the activities of the Maghreb Office group during 1947, published several newspapers, including *al-Maghrib al-‘arabi* in Arabic and another bilingual (Arabic–French) publication, whose French section was managed by Ben Yūsuf Ben Khedda. Prior to the launch of its own newspaper, *Alger Libre*, published in French in August 1949, the PPA–MTLD supported several of these newspapers.

1.4.2.2. The Maghreb Conference and the Maghreb Office, Cairo, 1947

The Maghrebi parties represented by the Moroccan Istiqlāl Party, the Algerian People’s Party, and the Tunisian Destour Party agreed to convene a general conference to examine the affairs of the Maghreb and to seek the most effective means of coordinating activities, unifying offices abroad, and demonstrating Maghrebi solidarity in the service of the Maghrebi cause and the achievement of its objectives.^{lxv} The nationalists succeeded in unifying their efforts and persuaded prominent Arab-Islamic nationalist figures to adopt supportive positions toward the Maghrebi cause, foremost among them ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Azzām, Secretary-General of the Arab League.^{lxvi} The emergence of the League in 1945 was one of the most important factors in the

realisation of this project and in its support for liberation causes in the Maghrebi region. Among the most significant achievements of the Maghrebi nationalists was the reactivation of the Maghreb Office on the second day of the conference.

In late 1948 and early 1949, the Zeddine (Chlef) Conference was convened, during which the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties once again took the initiative to propose a unified Maghrebi struggle on the basis of the report presented by Aït Ḥamad. The participants raised the issue of arms procurement. This problem could be resolved only by exploiting the border regions with Tunisia and Morocco through coordination with members of the Neo-Destour Party and the Moroccan Istiqlāl Party at the military level. However, the leaders of the Moroccan Istiqlāl Party, headed by ‘allal al-Fasi, rejected the idea of military action, explaining that they were awaiting the Sultan's presentation of their country's case, given his independence demands.^{lxvii} The delegation sent to Tunisia encountered the exact position when meeting members of the Neo-Destour Party. Šāliḥ ibn Yūsuf,^{lxviii} in his meeting with Ben Bella, he described the initiative as childish and said that any unifying action would hinder Tunisia's independence, unlike Algeria's situation as a French colony. Ben Bella nevertheless continued his efforts to persuade militants but without success.^{lxix}

With the beginning of the 1950s, militants of the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties became convinced of the failure of their unifying endeavour. This prompted the party's leader, Messali Hadj, to travel to Cairo in 1951, carrying with him a document of demands focused on political and military issues, including the provision of arms and funds, coordination with Tunisians and Moroccans, and securing Arab political and diplomatic support. He entered the Arab League as a figure of recognised political standing and, in the presence of members of the League such as ‘allal al-Fasi and ‘ali al-Bahlawān, reaffirmed his party's trajectory and its political and military objectives. He also emphasised the importance of his independence movement in preparing for armed struggle and the efforts to generalise it across the Maghreb. He subsequently travelled to Paris between November 1951 and February 1952, during the United Nations session, at the request of the Secretary-General of the Arab League, to represent the movement before the United Nations.^{lxx}

During his stay, he met with Ben Yūsuf Ben Khedda.^{lxxi} Moreover, he asked that he select militants to be sent to Cairo for military training because Messali Hadj believed that independence could not be achieved without preparation for armed struggle.^{lxxii}

The call for renewed unified Maghrebi action did not re-emerge until late 1951 and early 1952, taking the form of an appeal to establish a Maghrebi front. This was facilitated by the efforts of Messali Hadj, following the signing by the Moroccan (Marrakesh)^{lxxiii} parties at the Tangier Conference of the Charter of 9 April 1951 and the formation of the Moroccan National Front. Within the same framework, calls began to emerge across the Maghrebi countries for the establishment of national fronts in the hope of forming a single, unified Maghrebi front.^{lxxiv}

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that Messali Hadj ranks among the Algerian figures who most consistently advocated and served the Maghrebi unity project. He was the founder of the North African Star, the first political organisation to raise the slogan of independence for the countries of the Maghreb, and he focused his activity on unifying Maghrebi communities in France. He publicly espoused this stance at the Brussels Anti-Colonial Conference of 1927 and the European Islamic Congress of 1935.

He continued to support the idea of Maghrebi unity through the Algerian People's Party and the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, notably through participation in the Maghreb Conference and the Maghreb Office in Cairo.

1.4.2.3. Al-‘arabi Ben M'hīdī and his Vision of Maghrebi Unity Within the Framework of the Algerian Revolution

Al-‘arabi Ben M'hīdī recognised that French colonialism did not target Algeria alone but sought to dominate North Africa as a whole. Therefore, he viewed the unity of the Maghrebi people as the means to confront this colonial project. He believed that unifying revolutionary efforts would strengthen resistance and reduce the coloniser's capacity to manoeuvre. This is evident in the following:

- Ben M'hīdī moved secretly to Cairo in the aftermath of the severe blow suffered by the Wilaya Five in the early days of the revolution, under the overwhelming dominance of colonial arms. What is certain that initial contacts were established in 1955, according to the account of the muḥāhid ‘allal al-‘Allānī, who, from that year, assumed responsibility for coordinating between Ben M'hīdī and Boussouf, with the participation of Rābiḥ Bīṭāṭ, who later revealed these details in his memoirs. He referred to the convening of an important meeting in Cairo on 11 March 1955, attended by ‘allal al-‘Assāmī (leader of the Moroccan Istiqlāl Party), ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Meḥrī, representing the Maghrebi mission, and Aḥmad Ben Bella and Ḥusayn Āit Aḥmad (members of the external delegation of the Algerian Revolution). Sulaymān Miziyān, known as al-Ḥājj (commander of the Wilaya Five), also held meetings with the leadership in Cairo in the presence of a representative of the Algerian Military Institute in Damascus.

Fathī al-Dīb stated the following regarding this meeting: “We perceived the necessity of intensifying the struggle in Algeria and felt the need to support the internal struggle with arms. As there was no means of communication, we undertook a second attempt, namely, the dispatch of an arms shipment to Algeria via Libya on the backs of camels, after obtaining the approval of both Idrīs al-Sanūsī and Muṣṭafā ibn Ḥalīm, on the condition that it be delivered personally to Ben M'hīdī.” Al-Dīb added: “The journey lasted an entire month and was led by Officer al-Baghdādī, and it confirmed the extent of the Algerian fighters' need for arms.”^{lxxv}

This operation subsequently resulted in the arrival of a significant quantity of weapons in support of the Algerian Revolution aboard the yacht *Dina* in March 1955, the same vessel that transported Muḥammad Būkharrūba (Houari Boumediene) from Egypt to Algeria.

Al-‘arabi Ben M'hīdī was highly active across Algeria (Wilaya Five), eastern Morocco (particularly Rif and Nador), Spain (as a transit zone), and Egypt (during trips between January 1955 and 1956) to arm the Wilaya Five and reactivate the region. This activity, however, was pursued within a Maghrebi framework aimed at definitively expelling French colonialism from the Maghreb. A joint Algerian–Moroccan general committee was established to provide political supervision over the direction of the two resistance movements, alongside the creation of the Coordination Committee of the Maghrebi Liberation Army in Nador, tasked with leading military operations. This committee was announced on 15 July 1955 and vested itself with broad powers concerning supervision, organisation, and the adoption of appropriate decisions. Its members also drafted a joint charter outlining the regulations, principles, and objectives guiding the committee's work. The Coordination Committee of the Maghrebi Liberation Army consists of four members: two from Algeria, Muḥammad Boudiaf and al-‘arabi Ben M'hīdī, and two from Morocco, ‘Abbās al-Mas‘adī and ‘Abd Allah al-Šanhājī, alongside other leaders operating inside and outside the region.^{lxxvi}

In sum, al-‘arabi Ben M'hīdī pursued the realisation of Maghrebi unity in practical terms by supporting coordination among liberation movements in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. He participated in meetings that brought together leaders of Maghrebi national movements and contributed to the founding of the Maghrebi Liberation Army in 1955. He worked to organise mutual

support among the Maghrebi revolutions and to facilitate the movement of arms and fighters across borders, particularly through Tunisia and Morocco.

Ben M'hidī regarded the success of the Algerian Revolution as inseparable from the liberation of the other Maghrebi countries. This principle was central to both his military and political strategy.

2. CONCLUSION

Algerian thought was distinguished by its steadfast support for Maghrebi unity, as leading Algerian figures such as 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ben Bādīs and Muḥammad al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī regarded regional integration as a historical, cultural, and economic necessity. The roots of the unifying call may be traced to the reformist renaissance movement of the twentieth century, which linked the liberation of the Maghrebi peoples to their unity as a guarantee of genuine independence. Algerian thinkers affirmed that Maghrebi unity was not merely a political option but also a shared destiny dictated by the bonds of language, religion, and common history. Their visions emphasised transcending border disputes and called for the strengthening of solidarity in confronting colonial and postcolonial challenges.

Although the unifying idea faced political and bureaucratic obstacles, Algerian intellectuals continued to criticise fragmentation and to call for the activation of Maghrebi Union institutions. Thinkers such as Mālik Bennabī advocated an intellectual unity grounded in the shared foundations of Islamic civilisation while remaining attuned to the requirements of the modern age and free from regional isolation. In conclusion, Maghrebi unifying thought in Algeria remains a living legacy, embodying the aspiration of peoples to build a cohesive entity capable of engaging with the transformations of the contemporary world.

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^{xxi} Muhammad Khayr Faris, *Organisation of the French Protectorate in Morocco, 1912–1939* (Damascus, 1972), 462.
^{xxii} *Talāwat al-Laṭīf*: a supplication derived from the Divine Name *al-Laṭīf*, recited in the formula: "O God, O Gentle One, we ask You for gentleness in what destiny has decreed; do not separate us from our Berber brothers."
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^{xxiv} Charles Martial Lavigerie (1825–1892), born in Bayonne, southern France, was the Archbishop of Algiers and founder of the White Fathers missionary order, active in North and Central Africa.
^{xxv} From *Eucharistia*, Greek for thanksgiving and the essence of life in Christ.
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^{xli v} al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, "The Assassination of the Tunisian Leader Farḥāt Ḥaṣhshād," 5 December 1952, cited in *al-Āthār*, vol. 4, 153–54.
^{xli vi} *Ibid.*, 202.
^{xli vii} al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, "Kinship in Solidarity," *al-Baṣā'ir*, no. 148 (26 March 1951), cited in *al-Āthār*, vol. 3, 422–25.
^{xli viii} Ibrahim ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min, *ibid.*, 204.
^{xli ix} al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, "The Arabness of North Africa," *al-Baṣā'ir*, no. 150 (9 April 1951), 428–31.
ⁱ Abd al-Ḥalīm Marjī, *ibid.*, 143.
ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 153.
ⁱⁱⁱ al-Bashir al-Ibrāhīmī, "Shaykh al-Ibrāhīmī Speaks about Union," *Ṣawt al-Jazā'ir*, no. 7 (13 February 1954), vol. 4, 301–3.
ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Muḥammad al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī, *Uyūn al-Baṣā'ir*, 472.
^{lv} Muḥammad al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, 235.
^{lv} Abd al-Ḥalīm Marjī, *ibid.*, 142–43.
^{lvi} Muḥammad al-Bashīr al-Ibrāhīmī, *ibid.*, 346.
^{lvii} Abd al-Ḥalīm Marjī, *ibid.*, 157.
^{lviii} Muḥammad Qannāsh, *The Independence Movement in Algeria between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939*, 67.
^{lix} Maḥfūz Qaddāsh, *Muḥammad Qannāsh: The North African Star*, 93.
^{lx} Aḥmad ibn 'Abbūd, *The Maghreb Office in Cairo: Studies and Documents* (Rabat: 'Ukāz Publications, 1992), 42.
^{lxi} Muḥammad Balqāsīm, *ibid.*, 484–85.
^{lxii} Muḥammad Balqāsīm, *ibid.*, 488.
^{lxiii} Testimony of al-Shādhilī al-Makkī (21 August 1985), cited in Muḥammad Balqāsīm, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 489.
^{lxiv} Muḥammad Balkāsīm, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 490–92.
^{lxv} Allāl al-Fāsī, *Independence Movements in the Arab Maghreb* (Casablanca: 'Allāl al-Fāsī Foundation, al-Najāḥ Press, 1993), 12.

- ^{lxvi} Muḥammad Balqāsīm, *Unity of the Maghreb: Idea and Reality—The Reality of the Idea of Unity (1954–1975)*, vol. 2 (Algiers: Ministry of Culture, 2013), 103.
- ^{lxvii} Muḥammad Ḥarbī, *The National Liberation Front: Myth and Reality (1954–1962)*, trans. Qaysar Dāgher (Beirut, 1983), 57.
- ^{lxviii} Ṣālīḥ ibn Yūsuf (1907–1961), Tunisian nationalist leader, head of the Neo-Destour Party during Bourguiba's absence; opponent of negotiation policies and advocate of complete Tunisian independence and Maghrebi unity.
- ^{lxix} Muḥammad Ḥarbī, *ibid.*, 58–59.
- ^{lxx} Muḥammad Khīshān, *The Tasks of the External Delegation of the National Liberation Front in Cairo (1947–1957)* (MA thesis, University of Algiers, 2002), 39.
- ^{lxxi} Ben Yūsuf Ben Khedda, Algerian nationalist militant; member of the FLN since 1955, member of the Coordination and Execution Committee (1956), head of the Provisional Government (1961–62), died in 1997. See Ṣālīḥ Belḥājjī, *ibid.*, 706.
- ^{lxxii} Muḥammad Ḥarbī, *ibid.*, 83.
- ^{lxxiii} Moroccan parties: Istiqlāl Party, Shūrā and Independence Party, National Reform Party, Moroccan Unity Party. See Muḥammad Balqāsīm, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 497.
- ^{lxxiv} Allal al-Faṣī, *Lectures on the Arab Maghreb since the First World War*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Institute of Higher Arab Studies, Arab League, 1955), 141.
- ^{lxxv} Faṭḥī al-Dīb, *‘Abd al-Nāṣir and the Algerian Revolution*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-‘Arabī, 1990), 73.
- ^{lxxvi} Abd Allah Maqlati, *Algerian–Maghrebi and African Relations during the Algerian Revolution* (2009), 164–69.