



Identity from Rootedness to Becoming: Algeria and the Impact of French Colonialism

Messaoud Benlaib

University of Djelfa, Algeria

messaoud.benlaib@univ-djelfa.dz

Abstract

This article examines the question of Algerian identity as it was shaped, dismantled, and reassembled under the weight of French colonial rule (1830–1962). The central argument is straightforward, even if its implications are not: colonial policies designed to dissolve Algerian identity produced, through their very violence, the conditions for that identity to be reimagined in more deliberate and politically organized forms. The article refuses two familiar positions in the literature. It rejects the essentialist view that Algerian identity is an immutable essence, untouched by colonialism; and it rejects the constructivist reading that treats it as a free-floating signifier assembled from colonial debris. In their place, I propose the concept of “dynamic identity” — a mode of belonging that holds rootedness and becoming in tension without collapsing one into the other. The argument draws on four theorists whose work is rarely brought into sustained conversation in this context: Paul Ricoeur on narrative identity, Pierre Bourdieu on habitus and symbolic violence, Homi Bhabha on the third space, and Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory. Read together, these frameworks illuminate why the French project of cultural engineering failed, and why Algerian identity emerged from colonization not as a scarred remnant but as a rearticulated formation. The article closes by suggesting that the Algerian case offers something larger than itself: a theoretical model for understanding postcolonial identities as ongoing negotiations between inheritance and invention.

Article info

Received

July 14; 2026

Accepted

septembre 08, 2026

Keyword:

- ✓ dynamic identity;
- ✓ French colonialism;
- ✓ Algeria; postcolonial theory;
- ✓ symbolic violence;
- ✓ narrative identity;
- ✓ collective memory.

1. Introduction: From the Dichotomy of Being and Becoming to the Question of Algerian Identity

The question of identity does not belong to the social sciences alone. In its origin it is a properly metaphysical question that recasts one of the oldest problems of philosophy: is the entity fixed in its essence, or mutable in its existence? Ever since Heraclitus collided with Parmenides over the question of permanent flux versus the stability of being, Western philosophy has oscillated between the poles of being and becoming—an oscillation that, in updated form, reappears in the contemporary debate on identity between essentialism, which fixes identity as a pre-historical given, and constructivism, which dissolves it into the continuous stream of social transformation (Hall, 1996). This oscillation, however rich in theoretical possibilities, remains captive to a sharp dichotomy unable to grasp identity phenomena in complex settings such as the post-colonial, where historical rootedness intersects simultaneously with forced becoming and resistant becoming.

This article proceeds from the philosophical conviction that resolving this dichotomy requires not siding with one pole against the other, but rethinking the relation between being and becoming as a non-contradictory dialectical relation. This is the very movement Hegel established when he made of *Aufhebung*—sublation

that preserves the earlier moment within the later one rather than canceling it—a logic of historical transformation (Hegel, 1977). Heidegger drew on the same movement in his analysis of human being (*Dasein*) as a being "thrown" into a history that precedes it (*Geworfenheit*) yet which is, at the same time, a project open to its incoming possibilities (Heidegger, 1962/1927). At the heart of this philosophical horizon, Paul Ricoeur, through his concept of narrative identity, offers the bridge between the relative self-constancy of the self across time (*idem*) and its ongoing openness to reinterpreting itself (*ipse*) (Ricoeur, 1992). This continental philosophical tradition—from Hegel to Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur—provides the theoretical horizon from which this article approaches a concrete historical question: the question of Algerian identity in its dialectical relation to the French colonial experience.

The study of Algerian identity acquires exceptional importance as a limiting case in which this philosophical thesis is subjected to a rigorous historical test, given the specificity of the French colonial experience that extended for a century and three decades (1830–1962). The French colonial project, unlike certain other colonial experiments, went beyond the usual political and economic domination to target what may be called "comprehensive cultural engineering"—that is, an attempt to reshape the very being

of the Algerian person, not merely to subject them politically. Gustave Eichthal gave expression to this orientation in his early correspondence with Isidore Auguste Comte, where he envisioned colonialism as a project of "re-civilizing" peoples through their integration into the French cultural model (Lorcin, 1995). The aim, then, was not simply to subjugate Algeria politically, but to reshape the Algerian person in their symbolic, linguistic, and religious being—which makes the Algerian case a philosophically fertile laboratory for testing the relation between an externally imposed being and one historically rooted.

What one observes in the literature on Algerian identity, however, is the dominance of two opposing approaches that fail to overcome this divide, reproducing the same philosophical dichotomy in historical guise. The first approach, traditionally represented by Malek Bennabi and Abdallah Chareet, holds that Algerian identity is a deep historical and civilizational given that preceded colonialism, and that the latter failed to undermine it because it was an accidental episode in an authentic structure (Bennabi, 1991); this position is thus closer to Parmenides than to Heraclitus. The second approach, crystallized in the work of certain post-colonial scholars, foregrounds the fragmentation and hybridity wrought by colonialism and treats contemporary Algerian identity as a product of that hybridity rather than as an

extension of an antecedent essence (McDougall, 2017)—a position closer to a pure processualism that dissolves all rootedness. Both positions, in our view, lack a dialectical-hermeneutic vision capable of accommodating becoming and change without abandoning the dimension of rootedness. Establishing such a vision philosophically is the aspiration of this article.

Building on this theoretical gap, the article proposes a different philosophical reading organized around a central claim: Algerian identity exemplifies what we call "Dynamic Identity"—an ontology of rooted becoming that holds together the dimensions of rootedness and becoming in a dialectical relation on the model of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in which neither cancels the other in favor of its counterpart. Within this framework, rootedness does not negate becoming, nor does becoming cancel rootedness; the two cooperate in producing an identity capable of preserving its foundational anchors through their ongoing reinterpretation in light of contextual shifts, in the manner Gadamer described as the "fusion of horizons" between an inherited tradition and a present horizon (Gadamer, 2004/1960). This reading draws on a philosophical synthesis that integrates four central concepts: Ricoeur's narrative identity, Hegel's dialectic and *Aufhebung*, Heidegger's historical being, and Gadamer's fusion of horizons—supplemented by analytical

tools drawn from outside strict philosophy: Bourdieu's habitus and symbolic violence, Bhabha's third space, and Halbwachs's collective memory, all mobilized in the service of the central philosophical question rather than in place of it.

The article proceeds from the hypothesis that French colonial policies, despite their vigor and organization, produced an outcome contrary to their stated aims: rather than dismantling Algerian identity, they reinforced awareness of it and reproduced it in more organized and resistant forms—a movement that can be read philosophically as an *Aufhebung* rather than a mere reaction. The article ultimately seeks to make an original theoretical contribution that overcomes the essentialism–constructivism dichotomy and opens a new philosophical horizon for understanding identity in post-colonial settings more broadly. The article is organized into interrelated sections: the first establishes the philosophical problematic and constructs the composite theoretical framework; the article then moves to a three-dimensional analysis taking the form of a dialectical movement—the existential rootedness of Algerian identity (the thesis), the mechanisms of the colonial project as an attempt to impose an alien being (the antithesis), and the paths of cultural resistance and the war of liberation as a dialectical synthesis (the synthesis). The work culminates in a discussion that

presents the "Dynamic Identity" model, followed by the theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, avenues for future research, and the conclusion.

2. The Problematic of Identity between Being and Becoming: A Philosophical Dilemma

Despite the abundance of literature addressing Algerian identity in relation to French colonialism, the philosophically reflective observer will note that the greater part of it falls into two opposing ontological positions without advancing beyond them toward a deeper dialectical vision. The first takes the form of an essentialism that fixes Algeria's authentic identity as a given insulated against colonial action by virtue of its civilizational depth and historical rootedness—a position that, often without explicit philosophical awareness, revives the Parmenidean ontology of stasis. The second takes the form of a constructivist or deconstructive stance holding that colonialism inflicted a fundamental rupture in Algeria's identity structure whose effects persist to this day—a position closer to an extreme Heracliteanism that dissolves all stability into the stream of becoming. This ontological contestation leaves a clear philosophical gap: the absence of an explanatory model that accommodates both being and becoming without denying either dimension. It is this gap that the present article aims to close using tools drawn from the Hegelian dialectic,

Heidegger's existential analysis, Gadamer's hermeneutics, and Ricoeur's narrative identity.

This article proceeds from the conviction that a precise philosophical understanding of the relation between colonialism and Algerian identity requires transcending this sharp dichotomy by reformulating the question itself. The question is not "did Algerian identity remain as it was, or was it entirely transformed?" but rather "how do the historical movement of rootedness and the renewed movement of becoming dialectically interact, such that together they produce an identity that is, at once, continuity and transformation?" French colonialism was neither a force of total erasure nor a force of total hybridization; it was, from a dialectical perspective, a moment of negation that sought to cancel the original being of the colonized, yet through its multiple mechanisms (linguistic, religious, institutional) produced a movement of "negation of the negation" that rebuilt identity on new and more self-aware foundations. This triadic dialectical dynamic (thesis–antithesis–synthesis) is what this article aims to analyze and interpret philosophically rather than describe historically.

The problematic of this study revolves around the following central philosophical question: how do the processes of existential-historical rootedness of Algerian identity

dialectically interact with the processes of forced becoming and resistant becoming in the context of French colonialism and its aftermath, and what ontology can account for this interaction without sliding into pure essentialism or pure constructivism? Three sub-questions branch off from this central question. First, how can "rootedness" be understood philosophically not as a fixed metaphysical essence but as a historical and civilizational "thrownness" (Geworfenheit) in the Heideggerian sense? Second, can the failure of the colonial project to erase Algerian identity be read as a failure of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) before a resistant collective habitus, or—more profoundly and philosophically—as an ontological impossibility of canceling a narrative being rooted in a collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992)? Third, how can a philosophical-hermeneutic model be constructed that accommodates the dialectic between stability and change in a post-colonial identity such as Algeria's, thereby surpassing the essentialism–constructivism dichotomy prevailing in the literature?

This question acquires doubled philosophical importance, for resolving this problematic serves not only the understanding of the Algerian case in itself but also contributes to the development of an ontology of identity more generally. Many post-colonial societies face a parallel problematic: how to preserve cultural identity in the face of globalizing

hegemony without sliding into a closed essentialism that mummifies the self in an imagined past, and without surrendering to a cultural dissolution that empties identity of its historical content. Answering this question in light of the Algerian experience, within a continental philosophical horizon that draws on Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, constitutes a theoretical contribution that extends beyond the local Algerian context to the philosophy of culture and post-colonial philosophy at large. The study accordingly pursues four interrelated objectives: to offer a critical reading of the essentialism–constructivism dichotomy as an extension of the classical philosophical dichotomy of being and becoming; to analyze the mechanisms of the French colonial project as an ontological attempt to impose an alien being on the colonized; to trace the paths of cultural resistance as a movement of *Aufhebung* rather than a mere defensive reaction; and to propose the "Dynamic Identity" model as an original philosophical contribution to the theory of identity.

3. The Composite Philosophical Framework: Toward a Hermeneutic-Dialectical Ontology of Identity

This article relies on a composite philosophical framework organized around four concepts drawn from the continental philosophical tradition: Ricoeur's narrative identity, Hegel's dialectic and *Aufhebung*, Heidegger's historical being, and

Gadamer's fusion of horizons. These four concepts form the philosophical backbone of the analysis, while the notions of habitus and symbolic violence (Bourdieu), third space (Bhabha), and collective memory (Halbwachs) are invoked as auxiliary analytical tools from outside strict philosophy, mobilized only insofar as they serve the central philosophical question without displacing it from its founding position. The article does not aim at an eclectic gathering of these concepts, but at the construction of a coherent philosophical scheme in which each concept fulfills a specific analytical function within a single ontology of identity as rooted becoming.

3.1 Ricoeur: Narrative Identity between *idem* and *ipse*

In his major work *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur, 1992), Paul Ricoeur introduces the concept of "narrative identity," which serves as the cornerstone of this philosophical framework. Ricoeur proceeds from a foundational distinction between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood): the former refers to what remains constant across time (identity as the same), while the latter refers to the one who says "I" and bears responsibility for their words and actions across their transformations (identity as self). For Ricoeur, the real identity of an individual or a group lies not in a substantial fixed *idem*, but in a narrative *ipse*—in the story the individual or group tells about itself

over time, a story that is constantly rewritten without losing its unifying thread. This concept is of paramount importance for analyzing the Algerian case: Algerian identity is not a fixed essence prior to colonialism (a pure *idem*), but a narrative that evolves over time (*ipse*), retold and reinterpreted at each historical stage without breaking from its earlier narratives.

3.2 Hegel: Dialectic and Aufhebung (Sublation)

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977/1807), G. W. F. Hegel offers an indispensable logical tool for understanding how the dichotomy of stability and change can be overcome: the concept of the dialectic and *Aufhebung*—the movement that cancels, preserves, and elevates the earlier moment simultaneously. Self-consciousness in Hegel is constituted only through a moment of mutual recognition between self and other, a relation that may take the form of the "master–slave dialectic" when one party attempts to subordinate the other's consciousness and negate its independence. This concept enables a profound philosophical reading of the colonial relation as an attempt by the colonial "master" to impose unilateral recognition without granting the colonized the status of recognized consciousness. Yet Hegel's dialectic shows that this subordination carries within itself the seeds of its own overcoming: the consciousness of the "slave," through labor and resistance,

reproduces its independence more deeply than before the moment of subordination. This is precisely what allows us to read the failure of the French colonial project to erase Algerian identity not as a mere negative "resistance" but as a genuine movement of *Aufhebung*: the naive older image of identity is canceled, its deep core preserved, and identity elevated to a more organized awareness of itself.

3.3 Heidegger: Historical Thrownness (Geworfenheit) and Becoming toward Possibility

In *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962/1927), Martin Heidegger offers an existential analysis of human being (*Dasein*) as a being that always finds itself "thrown" (*geworfen*) into a historical, cultural, and linguistic situation it did not choose—a condition of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) that defines the horizons of its existential possibilities. Yet Heidegger simultaneously shows that human being is not merely a passive product of this thrownness; by virtue of its temporal finitude it is a project always open to incoming possibilities (*Sein-zum-Tode* and the connected "being-toward-possibility"), and historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) is the way in which *Dasein* reinterprets its inherited legacy in light of the horizon of its own future. This analysis permits a philosophical reading of the historical rootedness of Algerian identity as a historical-civilizational thrownness that is not chosen (language, religion, land,

inherited collective memory), while the concept of historicity allows us to understand how this thrownness is not held captive by a static past but is constantly reappropriated and reinterpreted in every encounter with new challenges—as occurred in the encounter with the colonial project and subsequently in the war of liberation.

3.4 Gadamer: The Horizon of Tradition and the Fusion of Horizons

In *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 2004/1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer develops a philosophical hermeneutics holding that all human understanding proceeds from inherited "prejudices" issuing from a horizon of tradition (tradition) from which the individual cannot entirely detach themselves, and that genuine understanding is achieved not by canceling this traditional horizon but through a "fusion of horizons"—the meeting of the inherited horizon of tradition with the present horizon that receives it, in an ongoing movement of reinterpretation. This concept provides a precise tool for understanding how the Algerian community, at each historical stage, reinterprets its Amazigh-Islamic-Arab heritage in light of its shifting present horizon (colonialism, revolution, independence, globalization), without this renewed interpretation amounting to a break with inherited tradition—rather, a living continuation of it. For Gadamer, tradition is not a burden to be discarded but

the horizon that makes understanding and new becoming possible in the first place; this philosophically accounts for why the encounter with colonialism did not produce a complete rupture with the inherited legacy but a creative reinterpretation of it.

3.5 Auxiliary Tools from outside Philosophy: Bourdieu, Bhabha, Halbwachs

Alongside this primary philosophical pillar, the article draws on three concepts from sociology and cultural studies, deployed as auxiliary analytical tools within the philosophical horizon outlined above rather than in place of it. Bourdieu's notions of habitus and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) allow a precise description of the mechanism by which the colonizer attempts to reshape the Heideggerian thrownness of the colonized—that is, their pre-reflective mental and bodily structures—through institutions that impose a false, "natural" logic. Bhabha's concept of the third space (Bhabha, 1994) provides a tool for describing the hybridity phenomena produced by the colonial encounter, phenomena that can be read philosophically—in light of the Gadamerian fusion of horizons—as moments of reinterpretation of the self rather than mere passive fragmentation. Halbwachs's concept of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992) provides the sociological foundation that establishes, empirically, how identity narrative (in

Ricoeur's sense) is preserved across generations within social frameworks, lending the philosophical thesis a real-world anchor that prevents it from remaining captive to abstraction.

3.6 Synthesis: Toward a Preliminary Definition of "Dynamic Identity"

The four central philosophical concepts, reinforced by the three auxiliary tools, integrate into a single coherent framework. Narrative identity (Ricoeur) provides the general formulation for understanding identity as a renewed narrative process rather than a fixed essence; the dialectic and *Aufhebung* (Hegel) provide the logic of the relation between the moment of rootedness, the moment of forced becoming, and the moment of resistant synthesis; historical being (Heidegger) explains rootedness as a thrownness that is not chosen yet is open to historical reinterpretation; and the fusion of horizons (Gadamer) explains how tradition remains alive through its renewed interpretation without rupture. This philosophical integration is what enables the article to formulate a preliminary definition of "Dynamic Identity" as an ontology of rooted becoming, to which we return in greater detail in the discussion, after testing it against the concrete Algerian experience across its three historical stages: rootedness, forced becoming, and dialectical synthesis through resistance.

4. Methodological Note: A Hermeneutic-Dialectical Reading of History

This article does not seek to present new empirical or ethnographic data; it adopts a philosophical hermeneutic-dialectical method that rereads well-known historical and cultural events in light of the philosophical framework set out above, with the aim of attaining a deeper ontological understanding of identity dynamics rather than a merely factual narration of them. The method unfolds in three integrated movements that mirror the dialectical structure itself: a first movement analyzing "rootedness" as the thesis (the symbolic and civilizational structures preceding colonialism); a second analyzing "forced becoming" as the antithesis (the mechanisms of the colonial project seeking to impose an alien being); and a third analyzing "cultural resistance" as the synthesis that overcomes and preserves both. Complementing this dialectical movement are two analytical tools: conceptual analysis, which returns to the original texts of the philosophers and theorists mobilized and determines their precise meanings in the Algerian context; and historical-hermeneutic comparison, which traces the evolution of the Algerian identity narrative across four historical stages (pre-colonial, colonial, war of liberation, post-independence). The article acknowledges that the philosophical-hermeneutic character of this method limits the testability of its claims through direct

empirical testing—a limitation detailed later in the study's limitations.

5. Existential Rootedness: Algerian Identity as Historical Thrownness and Woven Heritage

If rootedness, in the Heideggerian sense, is the "thrownness" in which the being finds itself from the outset within a historical and cultural horizon it did not choose, then Algerian identity provides a paradigmatic example of a woven heritage of multiple historical layers that succeed one another without canceling their predecessors, in the manner Gadamer described as the intermingling of successive horizons of tradition. This structure cannot be understood in a one-dimensional frame but only through the convergence of four principal dimensions: the Amazigh, the Islamic, the Arab, and the Mediterranean-African—which together form what may be called the "collective habitus" of Algerians before colonialism, that shared hermeneutic horizon that makes Algerian belonging a coherent belonging despite the multiplicity of its sources.

5.1 The Amazigh Dimension: The Pre-Islamic Root

The Amazigh component is one of the oldest sources of Algerian identity, dating back thousands of years BCE. The Amazigh were not passing inhabitants of the region but the bearers of a deep-rooted civilization, manifested in the Numidian kingdoms (202 BCE – 46 BCE) that united

east and west of the Maghreb under King Massinissa. This civilization contributed to producing a distinct social, political, and cultural structure organized around the tribe as a unit of governance, around a deep respect for land and geography, around oral values as a mode of transmitting knowledge, and around Amazigh cultural symbols as an independent semiotic system (Brett & Fentress, 1996). In the Heideggerian sense, this dimension constitutes the first layer of historical thrownness that the Algerian cannot choose but that shapes the horizon of every subsequent self-interpretation. French colonialism recognized the importance of this dimension and sought to instrumentalize it through the "Berber policy" that attempted to separate Amazigh from Arabs and Islam, yet it failed because the Amazigh dimension had become deeply entangled, over the centuries, with the Islamic and Arab dimensions, in a fusion of horizons that could not be undone (Silverstein, 2004).

5.2 The Islamic Dimension: The Foundational Civilizational Reference

From the seventh century CE onward, Islam has constituted the foundational civilizational reference of Algeria and has effected a radical transformation of its cultural and symbolic structure, affecting language, law, education, the arts, and political organization alike (Laroui, 1977). The Islamic dimension in Algerian identity is

manifest at three integrated levels: the doctrinal-devotional, the ethical-axiological, and the civilizational-cultural—levels that mutually overlap to form an integrated symbolic system constituting the core of Algerian identity. For this reason, when French colonialism targeted Islam in Algeria, it was not targeting a mere religion but the entire symbolic system—an attempt to impose an alternative being at the level of existence, not merely at the level of practice. Bennabi (1991) grasped this reality when he held that Islam is the "solidity" that preserves the Algerian personality from disintegration; for this reason, Algerian resistance often took a religious form, as in the Mokrani revolt of 1871 and the Bouamama revolt of 1881, because defending Islam was, by necessity, defending identity in its entirety.

5.3 The Arab Dimension: Language and Culture

The Arabic language contributed to unifying Algeria's intellectual and cultural reference and linking it to its Arab-Islamic civilizational environment, as a civilizational language carrying a rich intellectual, literary, and scientific heritage, and as the language of the Qur'an, which thereby acquired an added religious sanctity. For this reason, the Frenchification that targeted Arabic was a direct assault on the Arab dimension of Algerian identity. A distinction should be drawn here between Classical Arabic as a

written and codified language representing the cultural and civilizational reference, and Algerian vernacular Arabic as a spoken language representing the language of everyday life. Colonialism produced a complex linguistic situation that added French as a third language, generating in the Frenchified elite a linguistic fragmentation that continues to this day; yet this fragmentation, rather than canceling the Arab dimension, produced a third space (in Bhabha's sense) that can also be read, within a Gadamerian horizon, as a new fusion of horizons rather than a merely passive rupture.

5.4 The Mediterranean-African Dimension: Cultural Geography

By virtue of its geographic location, Algeria was influenced by the various Mediterranean and African civilizations, lending its identity a composite and multidimensional character. Throughout history Algeria was a point of intersection between Phoenician, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Islamic, and Ottoman civilizations, and African geography (the Sahara, trans-Saharan trade) linked Algeria to sub-Saharan Africa and shaped an African dimension of its identity. This dimension constitutes what may be called the "cultural geography" of Algeria—the way in which geography interacts with culture in producing an open hermeneutic horizon that does not close itself off around a single dimension but accommodates

multiple dimensions within an integrated whole.

5.5 The Convergence of Dimensions: Toward a Collective Habitus and a Single Hermeneutic Horizon

Although each of the four dimensions makes a distinct contribution to Algerian identity, what must be emphasized philosophically is that these dimensions do not merely stand side by side mechanically but converge, on the model of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, in producing a single hermeneutic horizon and a coherent symbolic system. The Amazigh is not a historical stage that ended with the rise of Islam but a continuing dimension renewed in every generation; the Islamic interweaves organically with the Arab; and the Mediterranean-African is a cultural dimension interacting with the other dimensions rather than a neutral geographic frame. This convergence is what produced the "collective habitus" of Algerians—the ingrained mental and bodily structures (Bourdieu, 1977) that make Algerian belonging a coherent belonging despite the multiplicity of its sources. This analysis reveals that what characterized Algerian identity before colonialism was neither a Parmenidean fixed essence (as the essentialist approach claims) nor a floating Heraclitean social construction (as the pure constructivist approach claims), but a rooted narrative process—a historical thrownness in the Heideggerian sense that accommodates

multiple dimensions within an integrated whole. This is what will form the "thesis" that the colonial project will attempt to negate, as the following section shows.

6. Forcible Becoming: The Colonial Project as an Attempt to Impose an Alien Being

If rootedness represents the thesis in the dialectical movement of Algerian identity, then the French colonial project represents the moment of the "antithesis"—a methodical attempt to negate the original being of the colonized and impose an alternative being modeled on the cultural pattern of the metropole. This was not a classical colonialism confined to political and economic control but a comprehensive project targeting what may be called the "cultural engineering" of the colonized society; it lasted for more than a century and three decades (1830–1962), which gave it sufficient time to develop diverse and sophisticated mechanisms. This section analyzes four principal mechanisms deployed by the French colonial project before concluding with a philosophical reading of why they failed: the philosophy of the civilizing mission, Frenchification as a language policy, the targeting of the religious institution, and the confiscation of collective memory.

6.1 The Civilizing Mission as Colonial Metaphysics

From its beginnings in Algeria, France relied on the idea of the mission civilisatrice, which justified the subjugation and cultural reshaping of colonized peoples on the grounds that France bore a unique civilizing mission whose values and institutions should be spread across the world. Major French thinkers gave expression to this orientation: Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the need for France to carry the "torch of civilization" to North Africa, and Jules Ferry held that "the superior races have a right vis-à-vis the inferior races" (Ageron, 1990). This philosophy was not merely an external ideological justification for colonialism; it represented, in the precise sense of the term, a colonial metaphysics: a comprehensive conception of an inferior ontological rank attributed to the colonized, which justified reshaping their being from without. In light of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, this philosophy acquires particular importance as a mechanism for producing the "naturalization" that leads the dominated to accept the logic of the dominant. Frantz Fanon (1963), as an existential philosopher of the colonial condition rather than a mere psychiatrist, identified this dynamic when he held that colonialism seeks to convince the colonized that they possess no civilization and must summon their being from without; yet this colonial metaphysics

failed to achieve its aim in Algeria, because the Algerian community grasped early on the danger of this discourse and confronted it with a counter-discourse affirming the authenticity of its own civilizational being.

6.2 Fructification and the Targeting of Linguistic Habitus

Colonialism adopted a language policy aimed at replacing Arabic with French in education and administration, known as the policy of "Frenchification" (Francisation). It comprised several measures: the law of 1883 imposing French as the official language of administration; the Crémieux Decree of 1870 granting French citizenship to Algerian Jews while excluding Muslims; the closure of Qur'anic schools; and the prohibition of Arabic education outside colonial institutions (Ageron, 1990). In light of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Frenchification acquires an importance that exceeds its being a mere language policy. Language, in the Heideggerian sense as well, is the "house of being"—the structure in which human beings dwell in their understanding of themselves and of the world; Frenchification was therefore an attempt to reshape the very house of Algerian being by replacing ingrained linguistic structures with new ones carrying the values of the colonial center (Bourdieu, 1991). Frenchification produced intended outcomes, such as the decline of Arabic education and the emergence of a Frenchified elite (the évolués); but it also

produced an unintended counter-outcome: rather than leading to the dissolution of Algerian identity, it generated a dialectical reaction in the form of a reinforced awareness of Arab-Islamic identity, as the Algerian community developed, at the pre-reflective level of the *habitus* itself, multiple mechanisms of resistance that preserved its language and religion.

6.3 Targeting the Religious Institution: Dismantling the Institutional Structure of Islam

Colonialism worked to monitor religious education and curtail the role of Islamic institutions: confiscating Islamic endowments (*Habous*) by the law of 1843; converting mosques into churches or military headquarters; monitoring religious education through the "Bureaux Arabes"; and reducing the number of Qur'anic schools. The aim of these policies was to dismantle the institutional structure of Islam in Algeria, so that it would be transformed from an institutionally active religion into an individually monitored one—that is, to strip away the social framework that allows the religious narrative to be told collectively (Halbwachs, 1992). These policies met fierce resistance from the *zawiyas* and independent religious institutions, which preserved religious education and continued to spread religious awareness despite colonial surveillance (Clancy-Smith, 1994).

6.4 Confiscating Collective Memory and Rewriting History

The colonial administration attempted to rewrite Algerian history in the service of the colonial narrative, propagating the idea that Algeria was "a land without a people" before the arrival of the French, treating the Islamic conquest as a foreign invasion, foregrounding pre-Islamic civilizations as the true roots of Algeria, and portraying popular resistance as "tribal revolts" rather than a national liberation movement—as embodied in the work of colonial historians such as Louis René and Gabriel Esquer (Lorcin, 1995). In light of Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, the confiscation of memory is of paramount importance, for collective memory is the social framework within which identity narrative is told and preserved across generations; when this memory is officially confiscated, the group, in principle, loses its narrative reference. What one observes in the Algerian case, however, is that the confiscation of official memory did not eliminate living collective memory, because the latter was preserved in social frameworks different from the framework of the colonial administration: the *zawiyas* preserved religious memory, popular poets preserved historical memory, and oral narratives preserved the memory of resistance.

6.5 Why Did Cultural Engineering Fail? A Philosophical Reading of the Failure

This analysis reveals that the mechanisms of the French colonial project were comprehensive and sophisticated, targeting the reshaping of Algerian identity across multiple levels: the ideological, the linguistic, the institutional, and the memorial. Yet these mechanisms, despite their vigor, failed to achieve their stated aim—and the philosophical explanation for this failure goes beyond the usual descriptive account (that Algerians simply "resisted") to a deeper ontological explanation. The attempt to impose an entirely alternative being on another consciousness collides, from a Hegelian perspective, with the truth that the recognition sought by the colonial "master" cannot be extracted by force: recognition extracted through symbolic and material violence undermines itself and produces, in place of submission, a doubled awareness that grasps the mechanism of its subjugation and through it reproduces its own independence. The identity narrative, moreover, in the Ricoeurian sense, cannot be erased by administrative decree because it is not a "thing" that can be confiscated but an ongoing act of narration reproduced in every social moment that allows it, however narrow. Algerian identity, then, was neither a fixed essence that could be erased by administrative decree nor a fragile construction that could be

dismantled by symbolic violence, but a renewed narrative process that derives its strength from the convergence of its four historical dimensions and from its existential vitality in reshaping itself at every stage—as will become clearer in the following section, which analyzes the paths of cultural resistance as the moment of dialectical "synthesis."

7. Dialectic and Aufhebung: Cultural Resistance as the Recomposition of Identity

If the moment of rootedness represents the thesis, and the moment of the colonial project represents the antithesis, then the paths of cultural resistance and the war of liberation represent the moment of "synthesis" in the dialectical movement of Algerian identity: a synthesis that neither cancels historical rootedness nor ignores the impact of the colonial encounter, but elevates both, on the model of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, to a more organized and mature identity awareness. Algerian resistance to French colonialism was not confined to armed resistance but took varied forms encompassing cultural, intellectual, and institutional resistance. This section analyzes four paths of resistance: the *zawiyas* as institutional carriers, the reformist movement as an intellectual project, the national press as a discursive instrument, and the war of liberation as the founding moment of modern national identity.

7.1 The Zawiyas: The Institutional Carrier of Memory and Resistance

The zawiyas contributed to preserving religious education and the Arabic language and played a pivotal role in safeguarding Algerian identity in the face of colonial policies. The zawiyas in Algeria belong to multiple Sufi orders (Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, Rahmanyia, Alawiyya) and spread across various regions of the country, founding an institutional network that ensured religious education and social shelter. The colonial administration recognized the danger of these institutions and attempted to monitor them, but it failed to control them entirely (Clancy-Smith, 1994). In light of Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, the zawiya was a dual-function institution—religious and resistant at once—as clearly manifested in the Mokrani revolt of 1871, when Sheikh el-Mokrani, head of the Rahmaniyya zawiya, led the largest popular uprising against colonialism in the nineteenth century.

7.2 The Reformist Movement: A New Interpretation of Heritage in the Horizon of the Present

The reformist movement was one of the most important projects of cultural and intellectual resistance to colonialism, emerging in the 1930s under the leadership of Abdelhamid Ben Badis (1889–1940), who founded the Association of Algerian

Muslim Ulema in 1931. Its project centered on reviving the Arabic language, reforming religious education, and strengthening national belonging (Merad, 1967). In light of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, this project acquires special importance: Ben Badis was not calling for a return to a fossilized past but for an interpretation of heritage in light of the horizon of the present and its demands, rejecting at once the blind traditionalism that freezes heritage and the dissolution into the colonial model that would cancel it. In light of Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, Ben Badis's project can be read as a re-narration of the Algerian community's identity, gathering together Islam, Arabness, and nationhood, and introducing new elements (such as modern nationalism) without relinquishing the classical ones—a miniature model of Hegelian *Aufhebung* at the intellectual level.

7.3 The National Press: The Third Space as a Tool of Resistance

The national press contributed to spreading political awareness and resisting the colonial discourse, from *El Iqdam*, founded by Emir Khaled in 1920, to the newspapers *Echihab*, *El Djazaïr*, *El Ouma*, *El Djazaïria*, and *El Moudjahid*. What is striking is that many of these newspapers were published in French—the very language of the colonial center—which represents a clear application of Bhabha's concept of the third space. The national

press did not use Arabic only (because it was barred from the administration), nor French only (because it was the language of the center); it used French itself to say what could not be said in Arabic within the colonial framework. This resistant use of French is an example of *Aufhebung* applied at the level of language itself: the status of French as a tool of domination is canceled, preserved as a tool of expression, and elevated into an instrument for resisting that very domination. Fanon (1963) grasped this dynamic when he wrote of the importance of mobilizing the colonizer's language in the liberation struggle.

7.4 The War of Liberation: The Founding Narrative Moment of Modern National Identity

The November 1954 revolution was not merely a military action; in the precise Ricoeurian sense, it represented a founding narrative moment in which the Algerian community retold the story of itself as a nation struggling for its freedom and independence. The revolution combined armed, political, and diplomatic resistance, producing a new national discourse that encompassed various currents. Identity in it is manifest through the unity of the people despite diversity, the centrality of Islam in the national discourse, the presence of the Arabic language as a symbol of resistance, and the mobilization of collective history in national mobilization. This identity project was crystallized in the Soummam Platform

(1956), which offered a coherent vision of the revolution and of post-independence Algeria—representing, dialectically, the moment in which "synthesis" is achieved on the broadest historical scale: an *Aufhebung* that preserves the four-dimensional historical rootedness, accommodates the impact of the colonial encounter, and elevates identity to a modern national awareness.

7.5 From Resistance to Dialectical Synthesis

This analysis reveals that the paths of Algerian resistance were diverse and integrated: the *zawiyas* preserved religious and linguistic identity; the reformist movement offered a renewed interpretation of heritage; the national press turned the instruments of the center against it; and the war of liberation provided a founding narrative moment for modern national identity. From a dialectical-hermeneutic perspective, these paths were not separate but integrated in producing an identity synthesis that accommodates plurality and reproduces unity at a level of awareness deeper than existed before the colonial encounter. This is what makes Algerian resistance a paradigmatic philosophical example of "Dynamic Identity" joining rootedness and becoming, drawing its strength from its capacity for renewal without abandoning its roots—as will be formulated in greater theoretical detail in the following section.

8. Discussion: The "Dynamic Identity" Model as an Ontology of Rooted Becoming

In light of the triadic dialectical movement analyzed in this article (rootedness, then forced becoming, then synthesis through resistance), the article proposes an original philosophical model termed "Dynamic Identity," conceived as an ontology of rooted becoming that holds together the dimensions of rootedness and becoming in an ongoing dialectical-hermeneutic relation. This model does not negate either dimension in favor of the other but treats them as conjoined dimensions that interact in the production of identity on the model of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. This section seeks to define the model philosophically, identify its five characteristics, distinguish it from earlier theoretical models, and clarify its position within contemporary continental philosophy and post-colonial theory, as well as its explanatory value for the Algerian case and for post-colonial identities more broadly.

8.1 The Philosophical Definition of the Model

Dynamic Identity is defined philosophically as a renewed ontological-narrative process joining the dimensions of rootedness (historical thrownness in the Heideggerian sense) and becoming (openness to possibility and reinterpretation), in which rootedness

provides historical legitimacy and civilizational depth as an indispensable horizon of tradition (in the Gadamerian sense) for any self-understanding, while becoming allows the fusion of this horizon with the shifting horizons of the present, in a continuous production of identity that neither closes itself off in a static past nor dissolves into a rootless present. This definition proceeds from the ontological conviction that identity is not a "substance" in the classical metaphysical sense but a "process," and that this process joins two conjoined rather than contradictory dimensions, as established by the synthesis of Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur detailed in section three.

8.2 The Five Characteristics of Dynamic Identity

The Dynamic Identity model is distinguished by five integrated characteristics. The first is the dialectic of rootedness and becoming: rootedness does not negate becoming, nor does becoming cancel rootedness; the two cooperate on the model of *Aufhebung*—a dialectic that distinguishes the model from both Parmenidean essentialism (which affirms rootedness and cancels becoming) and pure Heraclitean constructivism (which affirms becoming and cancels rootedness). The second is the narrative character: Dynamic Identity is not a fixed structure but a renewed narrative (in the Ricoeurian sense) told and retold at every stage, not starting from scratch but absorbing its earlier

narratives and reinterpreting them in light of the new context. The third is harmonious plurality: Dynamic Identity does not close itself around a single dimension but accommodates multiple dimensions (Amazigh, Islamic, Arab, Mediterranean-African) within an integrated whole, on the model of Gadamer's fusion of horizons. The fourth is ontological resistance: Dynamic Identity is not a passive object shaped from without but a being that resists attempts to impose an alien being upon it, by virtue of the impossibility of extracting genuine recognition by force (in the Hegelian sense). The fifth is historicity and openness to possibility: Dynamic Identity is not a completed given but an ongoing existential project (in the Heideggerian sense)—not in the sense of abandoning roots but of reinterpreting them in light of the demands of the present and the challenges of the future.

8.3 The Model's Position relative to Continental Philosophy and Post-Colonial Theory

The Dynamic Identity model differs from earlier models in several fundamental respects. On one hand, it differs from essentialist readings of the philosophical tradition (which might be wrongly reduced to a rigid Parmenidean reading) in that it mobilizes the dialectical and historical dimensions in Hegel and Heidegger themselves rather than a mere abstract metaphysical stasis; Hegel himself, despite the centrality of the dialectic in his

philosophy, and Heidegger despite his focus on thrownness and finitude, both offer dynamic rather than static-essentialist tools. On the other hand, it differs from Bhabha's third-space approach (Bhabha, 1994) in that it does not content itself with describing cultural hybridity but provides an ontology explaining why hybridity does not cancel rootedness, drawing on the Gadamerian hermeneutics according to which the fusion of horizons means not the dissolution of one horizon into the other but their productive interaction. The model also differs from the readings of Edward Said (Said, 1978) and Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 1988) in that it is not confined to deconstructing the colonial discourse and exposing its mechanisms of silencing, but adds an affirmative dimension that establishes the agency of the colonized identity and its capacity for *Aufhebung* rather than treating it solely as an object of the dominant discourse. In this sense, the model is positioned at the intersection of continental philosophy (Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur) and post-colonial theory (Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak), offering a synthesis between them that the prior literature has not provided with the same clarity.

8.4 The Explanatory Value of the Model

The explanatory value of the Dynamic Identity model is manifest in its capacity to account for two major observations that earlier theoretical models

cannot. The first is the failure of the French colonial project to erase Algerian identity despite its vigor and organization. The dynamic model explains this failure by showing that Algerian identity was neither a fixed essence that could be erased by administrative decree (a rigid essence is not so easily erased to begin with) nor a fragile construction that could be dismantled by symbolic violence (a fragile construction would collapse under violence), but a rooted narrative process drawing its strength from its capacity for *Aufhebung* without abandoning its roots. The second observation is the capacity of Algerian identity to endure and renew itself across the four historical stages. The model explains this by holding that identity joins the two dimensions of rootedness (which provides historical legitimacy and civilizational depth) and becoming (which allows adaptation to shifting circumstances)—a dialectic that makes identity capable of withstanding major challenges, whether colonial or globalizing. On a broader level, the dynamic model offers a philosophical explanatory framework for post-colonial identities in general, answering the question of how to preserve cultural identity in the face of globalizing hegemony without sliding into a closed essentialism or a cultural dissolution, through the dialectic of rootedness (which protects against dissolution) and becoming (which protects against closure).

9. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

9.1 Theoretical Contributions

This article makes three original theoretical contributions. The first is overcoming the essentialism–constructivism dichotomy by tracing it back to its deeper philosophical origin—the dichotomy of being and becoming—and then resolving it philosophically through the tools of the Hegelian dialectic, Heideggerian existential analysis, and Gadamerian hermeneutics, rather than through a superficial syncretic reconciliation between the two positions. The second is the construction of a composite philosophical framework that mobilizes an entire continental tradition (Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur) in analyzing a concrete post-colonial case—a synthesis rarely presented with this degree of coherence in the post-colonial identity literature, which tends to content itself with sociological or critical-literary tools. The third is the presentation of an explanatory model for post-colonial identities that surpasses earlier models (Said, Fanon, Bhabha, Spivak) without abandoning their contributions. The dynamic model absorbs these thinkers' analyses of hegemony, hybridity, and the silenced voice, but adds to them a dialectical-ontological dimension that accommodates the identity agency of colonized societies as a resistant being rather than merely the effectivity of colonial hegemony.

9.2 Practical Contributions

At the practical level, the article offers a new reading of the French colonial experience in Algeria that moves beyond prevailing descriptive accounts and uncovers a deep ontological structure of colonial policies and the mechanisms of resistance to them. It also provides a framework for understanding contemporary identity issues in Algeria—linguistic issues (the Arabic–French duality), cultural issues (the Amazigh dimension), and the issues of globalization—not as threats to identity but as moments in its dynamic process that require ongoing renewal without abandoning roots. Finally, the article offers an explanatory model applicable to other post-colonial cases in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East that face analogous identity issues, where the dynamic model can help develop more mature identity policies that transcend both fundamentalist essentialism and globalizing dissolution.

10. Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research

Although the article has offered a theoretical and practical philosophical contribution, the author acknowledges four limitations. The first is the philosophical-hermeneutic character of the research: the article did not rely on empirical or ethnographic data but on a hermeneutic reading of philosophical texts and historical events, which limits the

testability of its claims through direct empirical testing and calls for subsequent field studies that would test the model in contemporary social reality. The second is the focus on the colonial dimension at the expense of other important dimensions in the formation of Algerian identity, such as the economic, the gender (the role of women in shaping and narrating identity), and the regional. The third is the limitation of ethnographic sources: the article relied primarily on written philosophical, historical, and sociological sources and omitted direct ethnographic sources, which makes the analysis more connected to intellectual elites and less connected to the everyday practice of identity among the population at large. The fourth is the absence of systematic comparison with other post-colonial cases: the article focused on the Algerian case without testing the model against other contexts, which would have strengthened its explanatory power.

These limitations open the door to five avenues of future research. The first is deepening the philosophical foundation of the dynamic model by mobilizing additional concepts from contemporary continental philosophy, such as Michel Foucault's critique of the relation between knowledge and power, Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, or Charles Taylor's concept of multiculturalism and recognition (Taylor, 1989, 1994), thereby strengthening the philosophical basis for

the dialogue between identity and modernity. The second is testing the model empirically in contemporary Algeria through ethnographic studies and interviews analyzing how dynamic identity is formed in the everyday practice of young generations. The third is applying the model to other post-colonial cases (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, India, Vietnam) to test its explanatory value comparatively. The fourth is expanding the analysis to include the gender, class, and regional dimensions the article omitted. The fifth is the development of cultural and educational policies grounded in the dynamic model, addressing issues of education, language, and media, and aimed at strengthening the capacity of society to preserve its identity in the face of contemporary challenges without closing in on itself.

11. Conclusion

This article has sought to offer a philosophical reading of the problematic of Algerian identity in its dialectical relation to the French colonial experience, by tracing the essentialism–constructivism dichotomy back to its metaphysical origin in the dichotomy of being and becoming, then transcending this dichotomy through tools drawn from the Hegelian dialectic, Heideggerian existential analysis, Gadamerian hermeneutics, and Ricoeurian narrative identity. The article proceeded from the hypothesis that French colonial policies, despite their vigor and

organization, produced an outcome contrary to their stated aims: rather than dismantling Algerian identity, they reinforced awareness of it and reproduced it in more organized and resistant forms, in a triadic dialectical movement: the existential rootedness of Algerian identity (the thesis); the mechanisms of the colonial project as an attempt to impose an alien being (the antithesis); and the paths of cultural resistance and the war of liberation as a dialectical synthesis that preserves and elevates both (the synthesis).

The article concluded that Algerian identity was neither a fixed essence that could be erased by administrative decree nor a fragile construction that could be dismantled by symbolic violence, but a renewed narrative process drawing its strength from the convergence of its four historical dimensions (Amazigh, Islamic, Arab, Mediterranean-African) and from its existential vitality in reshaping itself at every stage. The original theoretical contribution of the article consists in proposing the "Dynamic Identity" model as a philosophical ontology of rooted becoming that holds together the dimensions of rootedness and becoming in an ongoing dialectical relation, distinguished by five characteristics: the dialectic of rootedness and becoming, the narrative character, harmonious plurality, ontological resistance, and historicity and openness to possibility.

In light of this model, the Algerian experience reveals that identity is not merely a historical heritage passively received but an ongoing existential process of construction and reconstruction in which memory, history, and culture interact with the demands of the present and the challenges of the future, in the manner of a "fusion of horizons" that does not stop at any given stage but continues in every generation that reinterprets its heritage in light of its own experience. On a broader level, the dynamic model of identity offers a philosophical framework for post-colonial identities in general and opens a new horizon for understanding contemporary identity issues in the age of globalization. The challenge facing societies today is not a choice between authenticity and modernity but the development of a dynamic capacity for dialectical union between roots and becoming. Within this framework, the Algerian experience offers a powerful philosophical-explanatory model, not merely a local historical case but a contribution to an ontology of identity in a changing world.

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