Rethinking Society

Modern Narratives of Belonging Faith and Change Through Interdisciplinary Approaches in the Social Sciences

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Şarkiyat

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İÇİNDEKİLER

RETHINKING MUSLIM COMMUNAL LIFE IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT: CENTER DC AS A CONTEMPORARY FAITH-BASED MODEL

Halide Rumeysa Küçüköner[1]

In recent decades, the increase in the Muslim population in the United States, the socio-cultural diversity of the individuals comprising this population, and the evolving religious needs of these individuals have collectively necessitated the development of new-generation Islamic community structures. The traditional mosque model often remains limited to the function of worship and fails to adequately address the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of individuals. In this context, new-generation communities adopt a congregational understanding that is based on a holistic development of the individual, integrates religious and social life, and is grounded in a sense of belonging and sincerity. This study will examine one of the most prominent examples of this new approach: Center DC.

1. The Founding Purpose and Philosophy of Center DC

Center DC was established in 2015 in Washington, D.C. with a vision that diverges significantly from that of traditional mosques. Rather than focusing solely on ritual worship, the center was founded to holistically support the socio-emotional, psychological, cultural, and intellectual development of individuals. Its core mission is defined as "strengthening the individual relationship with God for those who are living or exploring faith, and allowing this to be experienced within a sincere community." This founding philosophy reflects Center DC's broader aim: to provide a safe, inclusive, and spiritually nourishing space, especially for young, urban American Muslims, many of whom are converts. Its approach is grounded in the belief that "every individual is a relationship, and every relationship is a community." Based on this principle, the center seeks to counteract the widespread sense of individual alienation in modern society by rebuilding communal bonds.

A key distinguishing feature of Center DC is its demographic composition. Unlike many immigrant-based Muslim organizations, the community at Center DC is predominantly made up of converts to Islam, many of whom are African American or White American Muslims and second-generation American Muslims. This

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demographic reality profoundly influences the center's religious perspectives, practices, and communal dynamics, setting it apart from more traditional, immigrant-led Muslim institutions.

Built upon the principle that "every individual is a relationship, and every relationship is a community," Center DC strives to counter individual alienation by re-establishing communal bonds. In terms of its vision, Center DC positions itself not merely as a space for worship, but also as a place for learning, healing, sharing, and growth. It seeks to provide a community atmosphere in which individuals feel free to ask questions, express themselves openly, make mistakes, and feel forgiven. This environment, unlike traditional mosque settings, is non-judgmental, welcoming, and supportive of individuals' personal spiritual journeys.[2]

2. Theological Foundations and a Supra-Sectarian Religious Discourse

Center DC's theological approach is grounded in a construct that claims to be based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, emphasizing core Islamic values and a deep sense of *ummah* consciousness. While it asserts fidelity to these foundational sources, its interpretation is shaped by an inclusive, balanced, and tolerant lens, eschewing narrow sectarianism. The center's religious discourse is characterized by a pluralistic and moderate Islamist orientation, aiming to reconcile traditional Islamic teachings with the realities of contemporary multicultural societies. As a result, Center DC provides a safe and welcoming environment not only for individuals from the Sunni tradition but also for Shi'a Muslims, converts to Islam, and people of various cultural backgrounds.[3]

While the center is attentive to preserving traditional religious practices, it also supports individuals in developing personal connections to these traditions. It offers a structure in which individual differences in areas such as worship, learning, prayer, and service are acknowledged and respected. In this context, Center DC's approach is not one of post-sectarianism but rather embraces sectarian diversity and theological richness as a resource for the spiritual growth of the community. The institution provides educational programs in Hanbali jurisprudence while also offering classes in Ja'fari jurisprudence, thereby encouraging both the acquisition of knowledge and the active participation of Shi'a members in the community.[4]

At Center DC, inclusion is not limited to sectarian lines; it is also a core value in ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and gender contexts. The center actively supports the participation of women in leadership roles, provides specialized programs for new Muslims, and encourages the full religious and social engagement of historically

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[2] "Who We Are", *Center DC* (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025); "For New Muslims", *Center DC* (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025); "Center DC" (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025).

[3] "Who We Are"; "For New Muslims".

[4] "Who We Are".

marginalized groups. Practical examples of this inclusive vision include spiritual guidance services for women, inclusive curricula, and dedicated support groups. Unlike more traditional Muslim communities, Center DC's approach to gender dynamics and worship settings is notably progressive. There is no rigid gender segregation; women and men often share the same spaces and perform prayers in proximity, with women standing behind men, but without physical barriers. This egalitarian structure reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity and challenges conventional norms found in more conservative Muslim spaces.[5]

Furthermore, Center DC's theological inclusivity reflects a conscious effort to align with the principles of diversity and pluralism that characterize contemporary societies. Within this framework, the universal values of Islam are interpreted through individual experiences, considering not only the ritual aspects of faith but also its ethical, social, and psychological dimensions. This approach fosters an environment where participants can freely pursue their personal faith journeys and grow without fear of judgment.

In this respect, Center DC functions not merely as an institution that teaches religious doctrine, but as a dynamic communal space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can understand one another, learn together, and cultivate a shared atmosphere of faith. It offers an innovative theological foundation that views differences not as divisive, but as unifying, serving as a model for contemporary Muslim communities.[6]

3. A Constructivist Approach Inspired by Early Islam

The foundational inspiration behind Center DC's vision is the community model established by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Often referred to as the "Prophetic community model", this framework was characterized by the coexistence of individuals from diverse tribal affiliations, levels of faith, and socio-economic backgrounds, united around principles of compassion, solidarity, justice, and wisdom. By adapting this model to the context of contemporary urban Muslims, Center DC brings together individuals of various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds under a shared community umbrella.[7]

Much like the spirit of brotherhood cultivated in Medina, Center DC offers an environment where individuals are supported in their personal journeys, where questions are met with understanding, where spiritual guidance is available, and

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5 U.S. Muslims Concerns About Their Place In Society, But Continue to Believe in the American Dream (Pew Research Center, 26 Temmuz 2017), 35; Halide Rumeysa Küçüköner, "Diasporada Sünni ve Şii Kimliklerin Silikleştiği Mezheplerüstü Yaklaşıma Bir Örnek Olarak Amerikan 'Make Space' Topluluğu", Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies 6/1 (30 Haziran 2024), 53.

6 "Who We Are".

7 "Who We Are".

where authentic relationships can flourish. This approach provides a strong alternative to the challenges of modernity, including individualism, social isolation, and the loss of meaning. Especially in a society like the United States, where individualistic values are deeply embedded, Muslim individuals often find themselves feeling isolated within traditional religious structures. Center DC addresses this issue by introducing a new model of community life that is adapted to the dynamics of modern urban living, supporting both spiritual development and opportunities for meaningful social connection.

The center's practices are grounded in a discourse that emphasizes values such as hospitality, selfless service, honesty, empathy, trust, tolerance, patience, and humility. Community members are encouraged to engage with one another in empathetic, supportive, and constructive ways. Within this framework, every individual is embraced as an integral part of the community, and self-respect is upheld as a core value regardless of one's level of religious knowledge, practice, or socio-cultural background.[8]

4. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of Center DC is designed in alignment with modern models of religious communities, characterized by a horizontal and participatory framework. Rather than adopting a vertical and hierarchical system, the center employs a volunteer-based model in which responsibilities are distributed equitably. The structure is composed of two main bodies: the *Core Team* and the *Leadership Unit*.

The *Core Team* is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the community, including organizing events, maintaining communication, and fostering the continuity of the spiritual atmosphere. This unit typically consists of individuals who take on time-limited roles, such as organizing Ramadan activities, planning holiday programs, or hosting small groups. The term of service usually ranges from three to twelve months.

The *Leadership Unit*, on the other hand, is tasked with strategic decision-making, vision-setting, and overseeing the fundamental governance functions of the community. Participation in this unit requires a twelve-month commitment and is updated biannually, with new members joining in June and December. The Leadership Unit coordinates the community's long-term objectives, budget planning, expansion of service areas, and volunteer management.[9]

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[8] "Who We Are".

[9] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC" (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025); "Home - Center DC" (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025).

4.1. The Role of Participants, the Volunteer System, and Forms of Communication

In the organizational structure of Center DC, individuals are not merely recipients of services but are regarded as active agents who contribute to service delivery, idea generation, and decision-making processes. Accordingly, participants engage in various projects on a voluntary basis, assuming responsibilities such as event organization, communication, educational content creation, welcoming newcomers, and facilitating support groups.[10]

A core principle of Center DC is the notion of collective ownership. Being part of the community extends beyond simply attending events, it also involves contributing to their preparation, generating content, and encouraging fellow members. This participatory approach strengthens individuals' sense of belonging and reinforces communal bonds.[11]

Volunteering is a fundamental component of both the structural sustainability and the spiritual coherence of Center DC. Volunteers are not merely providers of logistical support; they are also key actors in cultivating the community's spiritual atmosphere. The center conceptualizes volunteering not as a service, but as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. In this regard, volunteers are offered spiritual and skill-development opportunities, including certificates of appreciation, specialized training sessions, leadership workshops, and motivational feedback. Expressing gratitude to volunteers is considered essential for making their spiritual contributions visible and valued within the community.[12]

Center DC fosters open communication, transparent information sharing, and broad participation in decision-making processes within the community. A structure has been established in which every individual is encouraged to express opinions, assume responsibilities, and provide feedback. Decisions are made through communal forums and periodic meetings, enabling members of the congregation to perceive themselves as active participants in the process.

The horizontal communication model prevents the formation of hierarchical divisions among community members and contributes to the cultivation of a trust-based environment. Moreover, this approach facilitates the rapid integration of new participants and enhances their sense of belonging.[13]

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[10] "Home - Center DC"; "Who We Are".

[11] "Events - Center DC".

[12] "Who We Are".

[13] "Who We Are".

4.2. Qur'an, Dhikr, and Prayer Circles

Among the core spiritual and devotional offerings at Center DC, the integrated practice of Qur'an recitation, dhikr (remembrance), and communal prayer occupies a central role in shaping both individual religiosity and collective spiritual consciousness. These practices are not confined to ritual performance but are embedded within a framework that seeks to harmonize personal reflection with communal solidarity. Weekly gatherings, held in intimate and inclusive settings, are designed to facilitate not only deeper individual orientation toward the Divine but also to cultivate values such as sincerity, empathy, and shared emotional presence within the community. Qur'an study circles, for instance, incorporate both *tilāwah* (recitation) and *tafakkur* (contemplation), in which verses are recited in Arabic and subsequently contextualized through translation and interpretive discussion. Participants are encouraged to engage with the text beyond linguistic comprehension, connecting scriptural meanings to their own lived experiences. This method reflects a pedagogical commitment to nurturing a reflective and affective relationship with the sacred text.[14]

Complementing these sessions are dhikr gatherings that blend silent (*khafī*) and vocal (*jahrī*) remembrance rituals, offering a more embodied and experiential form of spiritual engagement. Rather than serving as mere devotional exercises, these practices provide participants with a sanctuary from the pressures of modern life, functioning as psychosocial spaces for emotional catharsis, communal bonding, and inner stillness. Similarly, prayer circles organized around specific personal or social concerns, such as illness, grief, injustice, or natural disasters, reconfigure prayer as a performative act of collective empathy and ethical responsiveness. Participants do not simply voice supplications; they engage in a mutual process of emotional witnessing and spiritual support, thereby enacting Center DC's foundational principle that "every person is valued and accepted".[15]

Importantly, these gatherings are not led by formal clerical authorities such as imams or religious scholars, but are facilitated by trained volunteers and spiritually engaged community members. This intentional decentralization underscores the Center's commitment to non-hierarchical spiritual leadership and peer-based knowledge exchange. By privileging voluntary participation and spiritual sincerity over formal religious credentials, Center DC democratizes access to religious expression and fosters a more relational and inclusive spiritual culture. Collectively, these practices transform worship from a private obligation into a communal, soul-enriching experience marked by vulnerability, mutual care, and a profound sense of belonging. In doing so, the Center advances a Sufi-leaning, modernist religious

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[14] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC".

[15] "Who We Are".

paradigm, one that resonates strongly with the pluralistic and introspective orientations increasingly prevalent in American Islam today. This model not only responds to the existential needs of urban Muslims but also reimagines sacred rituals as dialogical and therapeutic spaces that mediate between tradition and contemporary spiritual longing.[16]

5. An Integrated Faith-Based Model for Muslim Community Empowerment

Center DC represents an innovative model of Muslim communal life that transcends the traditional role of religious spaces as mere loci for worship. Functioning as a comprehensive institution for spiritual, intellectual, and psychosocial development, the Center addresses the evolving needs of Muslim communities residing in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area (DMV). Its integrated programming bridges religious education, cultural expression, and interpersonal care, positioning the Center as a dynamic engine for identity formation, civic belonging, and collective empowerment in a pluralistic society. This holistic approach reflects a vision of Islamic community life that is not only theologically grounded but also socially responsive and emotionally attuned to the complexities of modern existence.[17]

At the heart of Center DC's educational framework lies a commitment to foundational Islamic literacy, articulated through systematic instruction in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), which equips participants with the knowledge necessary for informed religious practice in contemporary contexts. This is complemented by a robust Arabic language curriculum that progresses from beginner to advanced levels and includes instruction in tajwīd (proper Qur'anic recitation). These offerings are not limited to linguistic acquisition; rather, they facilitate a more intimate engagement with Islamic textual traditions, allowing participants to access the Qur'an and classical sources in their original spiritual and intellectual form. The educational model thus promotes not only doctrinal understanding but also cultural rootedness and devotional refinement, cultivating a generation of Muslims capable of navigating tradition and modernity with confidence and nuance.[18]

Beyond formal instruction, Center DC prioritizes the development of micro-communities as vehicles for peer mentorship and emotional support. Small group networks and leadership initiatives, structured around 8–12 week cycles, facilitate intentional pairings among participants who collaborate on spiritual, academic, or personal goals. These settings provide a space for relational depth, trust-building, and mutual growth, particularly critical in urban environments where alienation and transience are common. By fostering consistent interaction and co-learning, these

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[16] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC".

[17] "Center DC"; "Who We Are"; "Home - Center DC".

[18] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC".

programs reinforce a culture of accountability, empathy, and interpersonal resilience, thereby transforming communal participation into a transformative spiritual practice.

Social programming at the Center further reflects this emphasis on integrated well-being. Recreational initiatives, such as film clubs, outdoor activities, sports leagues, and parent discussion circles, offer culturally relevant and intergenerational spaces for self-expression and community bonding. Far from being peripheral, these activities function as essential avenues for identity affirmation and relational continuity, particularly among younger generations who often seek alternative modes of cultural engagement outside traditional religious institutions. By designing leisure as a space of intentional gathering, the Center reinforces the Islamic ideal of holistic well-being that encompasses body, mind, and soul.[19]

Recognizing the psychological pressures and emotional wounds prevalent within diasporic communities, Center DC has also institutionalized mental health support as a core component of its mission. Monthly healing circles and workshops, led by licensed mental health professionals, offer participants practical tools for emotional regulation, stress management, and self-awareness. These therapeutic interventions are further supplemented by one-on-one chaplaincy services, in which trained spiritual advisors provide confidential support tailored to individuals' existential questions, spiritual struggles, or personal crises. By integrating pastoral care with mental health literacy, the Center not only destigmatizes psychological vulnerability but repositions emotional healing as a legitimate dimension of religious life.[20]

Center DC's commitment to civic responsibility and public service further illustrates its vision of Islam as an ethically engaged tradition. The Center facilitates regular visits to over 400 incarcerated Muslims in the D.C. Department of Corrections, reaffirming its solidarity with society's most marginalized and enacting a prophetic ethic of justice and compassion. Initiatives such as the "Friends Give Back" program, which distributes meals to underserved populations, highlight the Center's efforts to translate devotional values into actionable social care. These engagements serve not merely as acts of charity but as platforms for ethical formation, communal accountability, and embodied faith.[21]

Intellectual inquiry forms another pillar of the Center's holistic model. Through monthly lectures and roundtable discussions, Center DC convenes leading scholars, activists, and community thinkers to examine the intersections of Islam with contemporary issues such as race, gender, ecology, and geopolitics. These forums not only enrich the intellectual life of the community but also cultivate critical

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[19] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC".

[20] "Chaplaincy", *Center DC* (Erişim 12 Aralık 2025).

[21] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC"; "Chaplaincy".

consciousness and epistemological humility, enabling participants to navigate the ideological complexities of modern public discourse from an informed and principled Islamic perspective.

Lastly, the Center's Entertainment Council curates a wide range of culturally enriching events, arts showcases, storytelling nights, seasonal celebrations, that provide much-needed respite from the pressures of urban life. These gatherings are not only celebratory but deeply restorative, offering joy, creativity, and communal rejuvenation as integral components of spiritual practice. They exemplify the Center's recognition that human flourishing requires not only intellectual engagement and spiritual depth but also aesthetic nourishment and emotional fulfillment.

In sum, Center DC advances a comprehensive model of Muslim communal infrastructure that synthesizes religious education, psychosocial support, cultural creativity, and civic responsibility. By addressing the full spectrum of human needs, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social, it offers a blueprint for how Muslim communities in the West might thrive without compromising their ethical integrity or cultural authenticity. It is not simply a space for gathering, but a living ecosystem of care, transformation, and belonging.[22]

6. The Significance of the Center DC Model: A Critical Evaluation of a New-Generation Muslim Communal Framework

Center DC represents a paradigmatic shift from traditional mosque-centered communal structures to a more holistic, inclusive, and individualized model of Muslim community life. Situated within the complex sociocultural and religious realities of contemporary Muslim populations in the United States, this model is designed around core principles such as belonging, inclusivity, personal growth, spiritual maturity, community service, and flexible participation. Together, these dimensions formulate a faith-based space that transcends conventional religious frameworks, offering an empathetic, participatory, and transformative communal experience.

At the heart of the Center DC model lies the principle of *belonging*. Unlike traditional mosque environments where individuals may participate passively in collective rituals without significant personal engagement, Center DC fosters an ecosystem in which each participant is not only spiritually nourished but also structurally empowered. Community members are not seen merely as attendees but as contributors, teachers, learners, supporters, and collaborators. This reciprocal model of engagement allows individuals to feel seen, valued, and integral to the life of the community. Participation becomes multidimensional, encompassing learning, sharing, emotional support, and spiritual growth.

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[22] "Who We Are".

A foundational value underpinning Center DC's structure is *inclusivity*. The Center intentionally cultivates an environment where sectarian, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences are not only tolerated but embraced as sources of collective strength. This inclusivity is especially critical in welcoming converts to Islam, women, youth, and members of historically marginalized groups. These individuals often experience alienation in more rigidly defined religious spaces. Center DC, by contrast, enables them to practice their faith openly and without judgment, fostering a community in which diverse identities are affirmed and celebrated.[23]

Personal development stands as a central axis of the Center's operational ethos. Recognizing that every individual is engaged in a unique spiritual and existential journey, the Center resists imposing a monolithic or prescriptive model of religious practice. Instead, it offers a flexible infrastructure of support, ranging from educational workshops and spiritual study circles to one-on-one mentorship and pastoral care, tailored to the evolving needs and aspirations of each member. This personalization encourages sustained engagement and nurtures autonomous, reflective faith development.

Spiritual maturity is not conceived as the mere accumulation of religious knowledge but is cultivated through the embodiment of ethical virtues such as patience, compassion, humility, forgiveness, and emotional self-awareness. The communal ethos of Center DC encourages the practice of these values through both formal programming and informal interactions. By fostering a climate of empathy, the community becomes a site for character formation, where disagreements are navigated not as threats to cohesion but as opportunities for dialogical growth and moral refinement.

Community service is another cornerstone of the Center DC model, embodying the translation of faith into tangible social action. Spirituality here is not confined to ritual observance; rather, it extends into a commitment to justice, mercy, and solidarity with the vulnerable. Initiatives such as prison outreach, food distribution for the unhoused, and localized social justice campaigns are integral components of the Center's religious practice. These efforts not only respond to immediate societal needs but also reinforce a lived theology in which piety and service are inseparable.

In acknowledging the diverse, fast-paced, and often unpredictable lifestyles of modern individuals, particularly young professionals and students, Center DC adopts a model of *flexible participation*. Rather than imposing rigid schedules or demanding absolute commitment, the Center offers an open-ended, invitational model of involvement. Participants are encouraged to contribute in ways and at times that align with their personal capacity, thereby enhancing the sustainability and authenticity of

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[23] "Who We Are"; "Events - Center DC"; "For New Muslims".

their engagement. This approach mitigates alienation often caused by more inflexible religious institutions and reimagines commitment as voluntary, meaningful, and life-enhancing.

Collectively, these features position Center DC as a pioneering model of a new-generation Muslim communal space, one that is not only centered on individual flourishing but also rooted in collective care, social responsibility, and spiritual depth. Its success lies in addressing many of the existential and structural challenges faced by modern Muslim communities, particularly in diasporic and minority contexts. As a case study in religious innovation and community psychology, the Center DC model offers significant insight into the evolving nature of Islamic communal life in the 21st century.[24]

7. Limitations and Risks

While the Center DC model aspires to address the religious, social, and psychological needs of modern Muslim communities through a holistic framework, it nonetheless presents several structural limitations and potential vulnerabilities that warrant careful consideration. Foremost among these is the inherent instability associated with a volunteerbased organizational structure. Although such a model offers flexibility and dynamism, it may also result in the weakening of institutional memory, ambiguities in the distribution of responsibilities, and inconsistent implementation of core programs. The frequent turnover of volunteers can hinder longterm strategic planning and obstruct efforts toward institutionalization. This issue extends into areas of resource management and budgetary oversight; reliance on a donationdriven financial model requires a heightened commitment to transparency and accountability, without which organizational trust may be compromised.

Furthermore, the Center's emphasis on cultivating a sense of belonging across diverse sectarian, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, while aligned with its mission of inclusivity, also introduces the possibility of internal tensions that may undermine theological coherence. Encouraging a multiplicity of interpretive approaches within a single communal space may inhibit the establishment of epistemological consistency in religious knowledge production, at times generating ambiguity in matters of creed and ritual practice. Although the presence of religiously trained scholars and instructors within the community offers a moderating influence, the fact that theological consultation mechanisms are not uniformly integrated across all programs creates the potential for blurred boundaries between sound religious knowledge and individual or popularized interpretations. This risk is particularly pronounced for new Muslims, who may encounter methodological inconsistencies or

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[24] "Who We Are".

conflicting perspectives while attempting to construct their foundational understanding of Islam.[25]

Additionally, Center DC's individualcentered ethos and its emphasis on spiritual experience provide a fertile environment for personal growth, yet simultaneously risk fostering an excessive individualization of religiosity. When participants come to prioritize subjective emotional states as the primary indicator of religious meaning, the sense of collective worship and communal sacredness may gradually erode. Parallels between the Center's discourse and broader Western spiritual or therapeutic trends have also led to concerns that such spaces may, over time, drift away from traditional Islamic reference frameworks, evolving instead into an "Islamicized spiritual wellness" model. Consequently, the Center must navigate a delicate balance between authenticity and adaptation, tradition and innovation, and the spiritual needs of the individual and the cohesion of the collective.

8. Comparison with Traditional Mosques

The communal model presented by Center DC constitutes an alternative structure that diverges from conventional mosque-centered institutions by prioritizing individual spiritual journeys, emphasizing horizontal communication, and cultivating an inclusive social architecture. In contrast to the hierarchical dynamics, sect-specific pedagogical approaches, and often passive forms of participation observed in traditional mosques, Center DC promotes a model grounded in volunteerism, active engagement, and reciprocal learning. This transformation has proven particularly beneficial for young adults, recent converts to Islam, and women, offering a more accessible, safe, and affirming space for religious involvement. However, the model's emphasis on flexibility and individual agency also presents certain limitations, particularly in relation to the institutional clarity, authoritative religious guidance, and pedagogical coherence traditionally associated with mosque structures.[26]

Unlike traditional mosques, which typically maintain fixed curricula, rigorous study circles, and instruction led by formally trained scholars, Center DC frequently adopts a more experiential, introspective, and informal approach to religious learning. While this approach is conducive to personalization and emotional resonance, it may prove insufficient for individuals seeking long-term theological depth or methodological rigor. Furthermore, whereas religious authority in traditional mosque settings is often centralized in the figures of imams, preachers, or muftis, the dissemination of religious knowledge at Center DC tends to occur through more decentralized and dialogical interactions. Although the Center does benefit from the guidance of theologically trained individuals, and some programs are indeed facilitated by such experts, the

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[25] "Who We Are".

[26] "Who We Are"; "For New Muslims".

integration of religious authority is not uniform across all domains. As a result, questions arise concerning the consistency and scholarly soundness of some of the theological discussions and practices carried out within the Center's programming.

Moreover, the differentiation between Center DC and traditional mosque models frequently manifests at the formal rather than the substantive level. In terms of content, activities such as sermons, study sessions, dhikr (remembrance), and collective prayer continue to play central roles in both contexts. However, the tone, discourse, and pedagogical methodology of these practices undergo notable transformation within the Center. Critics argue that while Center DC may appear structurally distinct from traditional institutions, it often reproduces similar religious frameworks under a rebranded, more contemporary aesthetic. This process, they suggest, risks creating an ambiguous "hybrid identity" that may generate confusion among participants regarding their spiritual and communal affiliations.

In sum, while Center DC succeeds in transcending several of the limitations commonly associated with conventional mosque environments, such as rigidity, exclusion, or hierarchical distance, it also retains certain structural and functional similarities. These similarities, repackaged through modern language and participatory frameworks, reveal that the Center may, at times, replicate traditional religious forms rather than fully reimagining them. This ambivalence invites further reflection on the extent to which innovative models can authentically transform inherited paradigms without inadvertently reproducing their underlying assumptions.[27]

Conclusion

Center DC represents a significant intervention in the landscape of American Muslim communal life by offering a multidimensional, inclusive, and participatory model that challenges many of the limitations associated with traditional mosque-based structures. By emphasizing spiritual autonomy, horizontal leadership, theological inclusivity, and psychosocial support, the Center aligns itself with the evolving needs of contemporary Muslim individuals, particularly young professionals, converts, women, and those navigating hybrid cultural identities. Its flexible, volunteer-driven framework encourages both individual and collective flourishing, while its commitment to social justice and intellectual engagement reaffirms the integrative ethos of Islam in modern pluralistic societies.

However, this model is not without its tensions and ambiguities. While Center DC has succeeded in creating a more emotionally resonant and socially responsive community, it must also contend with the structural risks inherent in non-hierarchical, informally governed spaces. These include epistemological fragmentation, the dilution

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[27] "Who We Are".

of traditional religious authority, and the potential drift toward individualized spirituality at the expense of doctrinal coherence and communal sacredness. Moreover, its partial replication of traditional mosque functions, albeit with updated language and methods, raises important questions about the transformative depth of the model and its long-term theological trajectory.

Ultimately, Center DC serves as a dynamic case study in the reconfiguration of Islamic communal life within a diasporic, late-modern context. It offers a compelling vision of what a spiritually grounded yet culturally adaptive Muslim community can look like. At the same time, it invites critical reflection on the limits of innovation, the boundaries of tradition, and the necessary equilibrium between personal experience and collective identity. As such, Center DC is not only a space of belonging and belief but also a laboratory for the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be Muslim in the 21st century.

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THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES IN COPING WITH TRAUMATIC LIFE EVENTS (THE ITALIAN EXAMPLE)

Muharem CUFTA[1]

Introduction

Traumatic events, such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks, violence, war, accidents, or personal losses, create intense psychological pressure and challenge an individual's capacity to adapt. They are associated with outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and impaired social functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Religious beliefs and spiritual practices, as well as factors such as social support, therapeutic interventions, and cognitive restructuring, play a crucial role in coping with trauma (Pargament, 2011).

Italy is a society where Catholic culture is deeply ingrained historically, and religious institutions have a significant influence on social life. The Vatican's location in Rome and the centrality of Catholic rituals in social memory make Italian society a unique context from a religious and cultural perspective. Therefore, the Italian case offers a suitable field of study for analyzing the role of religion in the aftermath of traumatic events.

Method

Participants consisted of ten individuals between the ages of 20 and 56 from northern Italian cities most affected by COVID-19 (see Table 1). A convenience sample was recruited in 2025. Interviews were conducted with participants who had lost loved ones. Thus, the number of participants participating in the study was appropriate for qualitative research and met the standards required for qualitative methodology.

Demographic Characteristics Table (N = 10)

Variable	Categori	n	%
Gender	Female	6	60
	Male	4	40
Age	18–25	3	30
	26–35	4	40

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Variable	Categori	n	%
	36–45	2	20
	46+	1	10
Religious Faith	Believer	4	40
	Partially Believer	3	30
	No Believer	3	3S0

Data Collection and Analysis

Study participants were interviewed online, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview method was explained to participants in advance, and they were asked to choose the platform most convenient for them. The purpose of the interview was to explore the resources participants use to cope with traumatic events and the role of religious beliefs and attitudes in coping with the trauma of not being able to be physically present with loved ones or say goodbye to them. They were also asked what strategies they employed to cope with the traumatic event and how important spirituality and religious belief were to them during this process. The interview method was explained to participants in advance. Conversations were recorded and transcribed in preparation for analysis. All transcripts were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying key meanings and concepts to understand the thoughts, experiences, perceptions, and emotions of participants and to extract meaning from highly complex social events.

All research objectives and the analytical methodology used were explained in detail to participants. Given the emotional complexity of the topic, participants were reiterated that they were free to terminate the interviews at any time and without explanation. Permission was sought to record the interviews, transcribe their responses, and analyze their content. We also undertook to anonymize the content of the transcripts.

Theoretical Framework: Religious Coping

Religious coping refers to individuals' efforts to maintain psychological adjustment in the face of stress and trauma by using religious beliefs, practices, and symbols (Pargament, 1997). In the literature, religious coping is examined under two main categories:

Positive religious coping: Prayer, surrender, hope, congregational support, the search for divine meaning, spiritual empowerment.

Negative religious coping: Perception of divine punishment, anger at God, religious doubt, guilt, and spiritual conflict.

Positive religious coping generally promotes psychological healing, while negative religious coping has been associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety (Smith et al., 2020).

The Social and Cultural Position of Religion in Italy

Catholicism is a fundamental component of the collective identity of Italian society. Churches are not only places of worship but also centers of social solidarity networks. In Italy, religious ceremonies, saint festivals, and Easter rituals are important cultural events that contribute to strengthening social unity (Ferrari, 2018). Furthermore, organizations such as Caritas play a critical role in both social assistance and psychosocial support.

This cultural structure facilitates religion's role as a social buffer during post-traumatic recovery processes.

Trauma Experience and Religious Responses in Italy

Italy has been subjected to multifaceted traumatic events, particularly in recent years, such as various earthquake disasters, economic crises, the Covid-19 pandemic, and migrant tragedies. Following these events, religious symbols and rituals have become frequently used coping tools by society.

Below, the primary functions of religion in relation to traumatic experiences are examined in the Italian example.

The Meaning-Making Process

The search for meaning after trauma involves mentally situating and re-evaluating the event. In the Catholic tradition, pain can often be interpreted as a "spiritual test," a "sign of human fragility," or a "process integrated into the divine plan" (Mancini, 2019). Such theological frameworks can alleviate psychological burden by increasing an individual's sense of control and level of acceptance.

It has been observed that prayers and religious texts are frequently used as tools for creating meaning in society, especially during earthquakes and epidemics.

Social Support Mechanisms

The church's congregational structure plays a significant role in reducing post-traumatic social isolation. It is known that churches provided temporary shelter, food support, and psychosocial support after the L'Aquila (2009) and Amatrice (2016) earthquakes (Bianchi & Di Nardo, 2020). Social connections established with the

congregation accelerate the recovery process by reducing individuals' feelings of loneliness.

The Therapeutic Effect of Rituals

Religious rituals provide a certain structure and rhythm that facilitates emotional regulation. Activities such as prayer, chanting, participation in services, and lighting candles can create a sense of calm, hope, and control in the individual. Literature shows that ritual participation reduces post-traumatic stress symptoms and promotes spiritual healing (Giordano, 2021).

In Italy, Easter ceremonies and saints' parades, in particular, have become symbols of mourning and solidarity following social traumas.

Spiritual Counseling and Clergy Support

Individuals in modern societies, despite technological advances and rising living standards, experience existential challenges such as a search for meaning, identity issues, alienation, loneliness, and spiritual exhaustion (Frankl, 2006; Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Spiritual counseling and clergy support is a holistic assistance model that emerged at the intersection of both traditional and modern psychosocial services to address these gaps. It is widely practiced, particularly in healthcare institutions, prisons, nursing homes, and disaster areas.

Historically, religious leaders and clergy have assumed the role of spiritual guidance and counseling. Pastoral care in Christianity, guidance and Sufism in Islam, rabbinic guidance in Judaism, and meditation guidance in Buddhism form the historical foundations of this field (Frankl, 2006). The clergy is the spiritual and moral guide of the religious community, and this role is important for providing psychological support as well as religious rituals (Nolan, 2012).

In Italy, the social role of priests encompasses not only religious leadership but also spiritual counseling. Following traumatic events, many individuals consult with priests to express feelings of guilt, loss, and anger. These meetings are the first source of support that some individuals seek before seeking psychological counseling (Rossi, 2020).

Spiritual counseling (spirituality) can contribute to therapeutic processes by offering elements that support cognitive restructuring. Spiritual counseling in hospitals aims to support patients in processes such as facing death, chronic illness, trauma, and pre- and post-operative anxiety. The World Health Organization's "holistic health" approach also encompasses the spiritual dimension.

Negative Religious Coping and Risks

Although religion is often a protective factor, in some cases it can negatively impact trauma. For example:

• Belief in "punishment from God" can increase feelings of guilt and hopelessness.

• Conflict between religious norms and personal life can lead to spiritual distress and depression.

• Loss of trust in church leaders can reduce support-seeking behavior after trauma.

The literature highlights that negative religious coping can increase PTSD symptoms (Smith et al., 2020).

Discussion

In Italy, the role of religion in coping with traumatic events is multilayered. The semantic maps, rituals, and community structures offered by the Catholic tradition support individuals' post-traumatic adaptation processes. However, the effectiveness of religious coping varies depending on factors such as an individual's personal level of faith, religious affiliation, the type of trauma, and their social environment.

Modern psychology literature emphasizes that the religious and spiritual dimension should not be overlooked in post-traumatic support programs. The Italian example demonstrates that holistic interventions combining psychotherapy and religious support systems can accelerate recovery.

Factors affecting post-traumatic growth include demographic characteristics such as age and gender; trauma-related factors such as the type and severity of trauma; post-traumatic social factors such as social support and socioeconomic status; and individual characteristics such as personality, resilience, and coping strategies. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and level of education can play a significant role in determining the impact of traumatic events on spiritual development. Park, C. L. (2010).

Many studies show that religious people are healthier than others, both physically and spiritually. Furthermore, religious people have been found to fare better after trauma. (Hayward et al., 2016)

Research participants who had lost a loved one were found to have experienced significant anguish and pain due to the inability to accompany their loved ones through their illness and suffering, as well as the lack of traditional funeral ceremonies. Thirty-nine-year-old Erica, who lost her mother, said, "I can't believe my mother is dead. It doesn't seem real to me. There's a huge void inside me. I can't believe my mother is dead." The absence of being present during the illness, the lack of funeral ceremonies, and the inability to say a final goodbye, along with the inability to see the deceased's body with their own eyes, severely impacted their ability to cope peacefully with the loss.

The inability to attend a funeral was one of the factors that hindered the grieving process, forcing mourners into a state of denial. Alessandra, 40, described her father's death as follows: "I was so sad not to see my father one last time. I can't believe my father is dead. Everything feels unreal to me."

Unable to accept his father's death, 25-year-old Antonio expresses his feelings as follows: "I lost my father suddenly. This affected me deeply. I'm especially sad that I couldn't go and hug him during his illness in recent days."

The pandemic has resulted in sudden deaths for many people, without any opportunity to prepare. Sudden losses are a more severe trauma for the brain and complicate the grieving process.

Daniel, who lost his 46-year-old wife, describes the situation as follows: "I can't go to my wife when she gets sick. When she passed away so quickly, only a few people were able to attend her funeral. But not seeing my wife one last time seems unreal to me. I can't believe she's gone. I pray constantly for her. This gives me a sense of relief." His words suggest that he uses religion as a coping mechanism because of hospital visitation bans, preventing people from being with their loved ones in their final moments. Thirty-five-year-old Antonio described similar feelings with similar words: "I am deeply saddened by the fact that I can't be there for my brother in his most difficult and critical moments of need. On the one hand, I feel the pain of this, while on the other, I am gripped by the fear of contracting the virus. I hope God will save us from this situation." People experienced double stress, both from losing a loved one and from the fear of getting sick themselves. This made the grieving process much more difficult than usual. While a major grief like the loss of close family is

normally overcome with great support, people were left alone when they needed it most.

33-year-old Federica described the sudden loss of her mother: "I prayed a lot when my mother was hospitalized. I can't understand not being able to visit my mother in the hospital, and especially not having a funeral. I don't believe these things are real." She described the pain of not being able to accompany her mother in the final days of her life. Prayer was also the first refuge she turned to when she felt helpless.

Religions have always played a central role in the treatment of death. Religion gives meaning to a painful experience by offering perspectives that allow people to make sense of death. Healthcare's mismanagement of care has also led to anger and a loss of faith in some people due to their inability to accompany their loved ones toward the end of their lives. Nicola, 40, who experienced an existential crisis, explains: "I'm so angry because of my mother's sudden, desperate death. Why didn't God help us?" Her expressions suggest that anger led to a crisis of questioning her faith.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that religious beliefs and attitudes play a significant role in coping with traumatic events in Italy. Positive religious coping strategies contribute to the recovery process through meaning-making, hope, resilience, and social support. Rituals and spiritual counseling facilitate post-trauma emotional regulation. However, negative religious coping styles should be evaluated with caution, as they can negatively impact psychological recovery. Consequently, it is suggested that post-traumatic intervention programs would be more effective if they incorporated a holistic approach encompassing both scientific and spiritual dimensions.

In the study, "spirituality" was revealed as an important coping resource: Participants were able to process the mourning process by making sense of the belief that the person they lost "exists in an afterlife dimension" within a religious/spiritual framework.

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NATIONAL IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN AFRICAN ARABIC POETRY: AN EXAMINATION OF IBRAHIM AL-MALI'S POETRY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL CRITIQUE

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Introduction

Arab African poetry is considered one of the most important cultural fields that has contributed to building collective consciousness and cementing national identity in African societies. This is due to the historical memory, civilizational symbols, and religious references it holds, all of which intersect in shaping the African person's image of themselves and their belonging. In this context, the poetry of the Malian writer Ibrahim al-Malī stands out as a text that carries intellectual and aesthetic visions transcending the limits of emotional expression. It offers a re-reading of African identity from a comprehensive cultural perspective that links land and human, religion and history, and memory and shared destiny. Hence, this study is an attempt to analyze the manifestations of identity and national belonging in his poetry and to reveal the mechanisms he employs to construct a cultural discourse that reflects a critical awareness of the continent's reality and challenges.

The significance of this research lies in its shedding light on a cognitive area that has not received adequate attention in Arab studies: the representations of identity in African poetry written in Arabic, from the perspective of contemporary cultural criticism. Its importance is further highlighted by uncovering the role of Islamic poetry in West Africa as a tool for cultural education and social enlightenment, and for reconstructing the collective self within the post-colonial context. An additional significance emerges from the fact that Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry is an advanced model that combines national sensibility with a reformist vision, making it a text open to study from multiple aspects: linguistic, symbolic, cultural, and historical.

This study fills a research gap represented by the scarcity of works linking Arab African poetry with issues of identity and national belonging using the Cultural Criticism methodology. This poetry has often been studied from a linguistic, historical, or rhythmic perspective, without attention to its social depth and intellectual representations. It also fills another gap concerning the absence of a systematic

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treatment of the relationship between national consciousness and religious and cultural references in the poetic text.

The research problem stems from the following main question: How does Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry contribute to the formation of a discourse on identity and national belonging in Africa from the perspective of Cultural Criticism? Two pivotal questions branch out from this: What are the symbolic and semantic mechanisms employed by the poet in constructing the image of the homeland and the African self? And what is the relationship between the poetic discourse and the social and historical contexts that produced it?

The study adopted the Cultural Criticism methodology as an analytical framework that allows reading the text considering its social and intellectual contexts, going beyond the limits of linguistic or aesthetic analysis to uncover the patterns of power, identity, and cultural representation latent in poetry. The tools of this methodology were relied upon to analyze the symbols, language, major themes, and the relationships connecting the textual structure with the African national discourse.

The research plan is divided into several sections: The first section is dedicated to studying the theoretical framework of identity and national belonging within the context of Cultural Criticism. The second section addresses the concept of national poetry in West Africa, its pioneers, and the motivation for its writing. The third section presents an analysis of the manifestations of identity and belonging in Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry through language, symbols, and poetic imagery. Thus, the study seeks to present a new reading that highlights the status of Arab African poetry in formulating national consciousness, while simultaneously revealing the critical value of Ibrahim al-Malī's discourse as one of the prominent cultural voices in contemporary Africa.

1. Identity and National Belonging in Cultural Criticism

Identity is considered one of the most widely circulated concepts in modern humanities due to its overlap with religion, history, politics, culture, and language, and its direct link to the production of individual and collective consciousness in societies. The study of identity—especially in Africa and the Arab world—gained additional importance with the major transformations witnessed by the continent during the stages of colonialism and post-colonialism. This era highlighted the need to reconstruct the self and restore the consciousness of national belonging in the face of cultural disintegration and attempts at forced assimilation and hybridity.[2]

With the emergence of Cultural Criticism as an intellectual methodology that studies literary phenomena as expressions of social, authoritative, and cognitive

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[2] Jābir 'Uṣfūr, *al-Hawiyya ath-Thaqāfiyya wa an-Naqd al-Adabī* (Cairo: Dār ash-Shurūq, 2010), 85; Mbembe, Joseph-Achille, *Mā ba'da al-Isti'mār; Afrīqiyā wa al-Baḥth 'an al-Hawiyya al-Maslūba*, tr. Amīn al-Ayyūbī (Beirut: Dār ar-Rawāfid ath-Thaqāfiyya, 2022), 47

structures, the discussion of identity and national belonging has become a key part of the cultural analysis of texts, foremost among them poetry, due to its capacity to express memory, form symbols, and produce collective discourse.[3]

1.1. The Concept of Identity: Between Multiplicity and Cultural Debate

The concept of identity has undergone profound transformations in modern studies. It is no longer merely defined as collective affiliation or fixed attributes specific to a people or group. Instead, it is viewed as a changeable cognitive and cultural construct that is shaped throughout history and interacts with social, political, and religious contexts. Identity is not a fixed given, but rather a project that is constantly subject to reshaping, where the subjective intersects with the collective, the local with the global, and memory with reality.[4] In Africa, in particular, the concept of identity emerges as an existential question linked to colonialism and its aftermath, where cultural contact, alienation, displacement, and ethnic and linguistic divisions led to the central question: Who are we? How is our collective self-formed? What is the role of heritage, religion, and poetry in reconstructing this self? Hence, the importance of poetry as a cultural bearer capable of unifying perceptions, establishing symbols, and repairing shared memory.[5]

Identity researchers observe that identity has multiple levels, including individual identity, collective identity, cultural identity, and national identity. However, Cultural Criticism is primarily concerned with identity as a "discourse" produced within symbolic and artistic texts, where it is manifested in language, imagery, meanings, intertextuality, and the stance towards the past and the Other. Consequently, poetry becomes a space for formulating or reshaping identity, which is clear in Arab African poetry that reflects a struggle between local, Islamic, African, and national affiliations, and the effects of colonial hegemony.[6]

1.2. The Concept of National Belonging and the Formation of Collective Consciousness

National belonging is not merely an emotional feeling towards the homeland; rather, as theorists of nationalism confirm, it is a state of collective consciousness that links the individual with their land, history, and cultural symbols. This consciousness is based on three fundamental dimensions: shared memory, a sense of common destiny, and the desire to build a collective project for the future. Thus, national belonging is a

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[3] Arthur, Asa Berger, *Cultural Criticism: A Primer of Key Concepts* (New York: SAGE Publications, 1995), 11.

[4] Izz ad-Dīn al-Manāṣira, *al-Hawiyyāt wa at-Taʿaddudiyya al-Lughawiyya (qirāʾa fī ḍawʾ an-Naqd ath-Thaqāfī al-Muqāran* (Ammān: aṣ-Ṣāʾil lin-Nashr wa at-Tawzīʿ, 2013), 7.

[5] Rizq Bāsim Rizq ʿAdlī, *al-Hawiyya al-Ifriqiyya fī al-Fikr as-Siyāsī al-Ifriqī: dirāsa muqārana* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-ʿArabī lil-Maʿārif, 2015), 39

[6] Alī Aḥmad Madkūr, *al-Hawiyya ath-Thaqāfiyya; al-Mafāhīm wa al-Abʿād wa al-Qiyam* (Lebanon: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshirūn as-Silsila: Asāsiyyāt, 2014), 29.

cultural phenomenon par excellence, arising only within the context of the interaction of symbols, discourses, language, and historical experiences.[7]

Benedict Anderson, in his famous book *Imagined Communities*, argues that the nation is a mental conception that individuals construct around the idea of belonging, and that literature—especially poetry—plays a crucial role in shaping these imagined communities. Through its condensed language and deep symbols, poetry creates a space where memory meets the future, where the land transforms into a symbol, and the individual becomes the bearer of a message that transcends their individual limits.[8]

In Africa, where ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations overlap, Arab African poetry stands out as a central tool for reinforcing national belonging. This is because it connects Islamic affiliation with African cultural belonging, evokes the continent's history and resistance, and addresses the African person in their spiritual and cultural language. Therefore, studying national belonging in the poetry of Ibrahim al-Malī is not just a historical analysis, but a reading of a cultural project that seeks to build a shared consciousness that transcends the tribe, region, and race into the broad space of the African nation.[9]

1.3. Cultural Criticism and the Re-reading of the Literary Text

Cultural Criticism represents one of the modern approaches to studying literary texts. It does not confine itself to analyzing language, rhythm, or aesthetics but goes beyond that to study the text's relationship with power, identity, society, and culture. It is based on the premise that literature is not isolated from its environment, but rather a discourse that reflects structures of power, conflict, history, and memory. Therefore, the poetic text in Africa, such as the poetry of Ibrahim al-Malī, cannot be analyzed in isolation from its contexts: the colonial experience, the Islamic religion, local culture, the conflict between modernity and tradition, and the challenges of nation-building.[10]

Considering the premises of Cultural Criticism, Arab African poetry assumes a character that transcends its traditional aesthetic function to become a space where identity and representations of belonging are reformulated. This critical approach views the poetic text as a complex cultural system where language interacts with memory, symbol, and history. Thus, the analysis of cultural symbols constitutes one of its most important methodological entry points; the symbols used in the poetry—such

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[7] Alī al-Bakkālī, *Min Waḥy aḍ-Ḍamīr, mafāhīm fī al-Intimā' wa al-Muwaṭana* (Morocco: Wizārat al-I'lām wath-Thaqāfa wa as-Siyāḥa, 2021), 78.

[8] Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 37.

[9] Alā' ad-Dīn Farḥāt, "al-Mujtama' at-Ta'addudī fī ad-Dawla al-Ifriqiyya min Manẓūr al-Fi'l al-Hawiyyātī bayna al-Istiqrār wa at-Tafakkuk ad-Dawlatī", *Majallat ad-Dirāsāt al-Ifriqiyya wa Ḥawḍ an-Nīl* 2/ 5 (March 2019), 34-53.

[10] Samīr Khalīl, *an-Naqd ath-Thaqāfī min an-Naṣṣ al-Adabī ilā al-Khiṭāb* (Bagdad: Dār al-Jawāhirī, 2012), 11-17

as the land, the mother, the palm tree, the river, the bird, and the soil—reveal a profound presence of collective memory and mechanisms for building identity in both individual and collective consciousness. These symbols are not employed merely as pictorial enhancements, but as cultural codes that open the text to the spheres of belonging, origin, and roots.[11]

Cultural Criticism also extends to include the deconstruction of poetic discourse and the analysis of its mechanisms in representing the homeland, the self, and the other. This methodology does not stop at reading the structure of language but goes beyond it to question the discourses that are formed through the text: How is the conception of the homeland constructed? How does the poet define his relationship with the Arab African self in a turbulent historical context? And how is the image of the Other portrayed, whether as an adversary or a partner in memory? Cultural Criticism is also concerned with revealing the text's relationship with power: Does it tend to justify it or resist it? Does it contribute to the reproduction of narratives of dominance, or does it deconstruct them and rewrite history from a new perspective? Thus, the poetic text transforms into an intellectual map that defines the self's position within social and political processes.[12]

The third dimension lies in the necessity of connecting the text to its social and historical context, a fundamental principle of Cultural Criticism. Poetry, according to this perspective, is not a self-contained linguistic entity but a cultural document produced by specific social conditions and expressing profound shifts in society's cultural structure. Hence, reading Arab African poetry—such as that of Ibrahim al-Malī—becomes an entry point for understanding the trajectory of the formation of African identity in its Arabized form, and the associated struggles with colonialism, interactions with local heritage, and attempts to rebuild national consciousness. This reading thus allows for a deeper understanding of how poetry transforms into a record of collective memory and a medium for reproducing belonging within changing social contexts.[13]

1.4. Identity and Nationalism in the Post-Colonial African Context

Contemporary African identity was formed in the context of a series of complex struggles that the continent has faced since the beginning of violent contact with the outside world. This starts with the struggle against European colonialism and its resulting attempts to obliterate historical memory and reshape consciousness, moving

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[11] Rāniya Qadrī, *an-Naqd al-Maʿrifī lish-Shiʿr: namdhaja min ash-Shiʿr al-ʾArabī wa al-Ifrīqī* (al-Jazāʾir: Dār al-Mawj al-Akhḍar lin-Nashr, 2023), 2

[12] Bakr ʾAmmār Aḥmad, "Madkhal ilā an-Naqd ath-Thaqāfī", *Majallat al-Lugha al-ʾArabiyya wa al-ʾUlūm al-Islāmiyya*, 3,/10 (Jume 2024), 217-262.

[13] Vincent B., Leitch. *Cultural Criticism: Literary Theory and Post-Prophecy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 10.

through internal conflicts related to tribal divisions and the resulting social tensions, and culminating in resistance to the stereotypes entrenched by Orientalism, in addition to challenges related to development and modernization projects.[14] In this framework, poetry becomes a pivotal tool for resisting the "colonized consciousness," as the poem transforms into a means for reconstructing the collective self, restoring confidence in history and memory, and reviving civilizational dignity. For this reason, African poets —including Ibrahim al-Malī—reformulate identity by linking religion with emotion, land with history, and language with heritage, making African identity in Arab poetry an emotional, spiritual, and cultural identity that transcends geographical boundaries. The importance of this literature is evident in its ability to offer a new national consciousness that bypasses the European model of nationalism linked to the modern state, instead establishing, in the African context, the idea of a cultural nationalism based on religious memory and shared heritage. Thus, Arab African texts form part of the continental renaissance project and the discourse of liberation from forms of symbolic and cognitive colonialism, affirming the role of poetry in formulating a resistant and active identity in history.[15]

1.5. Poetry as a Tool for Constructing African Identity

Arab African poetry is distinguished by an artistic and cultural specificity that stems from its ability to combine the Arabic language, with its ancient civilizational extension, with the African experience, with its cultural richness, ethnic and spiritual diversity. This overlap between the Arab and African spheres has produced poetic texts with a unique tone, where the symbols of the desert and the savanna coexist with the rivers of the Nile and the Niger, and where images of forests and mountains embrace Islamic symbols related to spiritual and scholarly *jihad* and Sufism. Thus, poetry becomes a broad field for embodying African identity in its multiple layers, and an artistic laboratory where collective memory interacts with aesthetic vision to produce a poetic discourse that expresses the African self in its historical and civilizational extension.[16]

In this context, poetry plays a pivotal role in recovering history and memory as two essential pillars in the construction of national identity. Poetry re-reads African history from a perspective that elevates the values of resistance, construction, and faith, and presents a narrative that differs from the colonial narratives that attempted to reduce the continent to images of backwardness and stagnation. By restoring importance to

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[14] Mu'na, 'Abd Allāh Basharīf, "Ishkāliyyat al-Hawiyya ath-Thaqāfiyya fī Ifrīqiyā janūb aṣ-Ṣaḥrā' bayna at-Taghyīr wa ath-Thabāt", *Majallat Alif* 10/1 (January 2023), 65- 77

[15] Khaddīja Ibrāhīmī, "Talaqqī an-Naṣṣ ash-Shi'rī min Manẓūr an-Naqd ath-Thaqāfī", *Majallat Kulliyyat al-Ādāb wa al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya wa al-Ijtimā'iyya*, 2/13 (Jaune 2020), 69-96.

[16] Yūsif Minkayla, "Ḥuḍūr ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī fī al-Ḥayāt al-Ifrīqiyya", *Majallat Dafātir Thaqāfiyya*, 1/1 (2011), 57-82.

historical symbols and the heritage of struggle of African peoples, poetry works to repair historical consciousness and redirect it towards a vision that does justice to the past and evokes its elements of strength. It also contributes to building a collective consciousness that transcends the boundaries of tribal divisions, formulating a conception of Africa as a unified entity aspiring to liberation, development, and renaissance. [17]

The third role is manifested in strengthening spiritual and cultural belonging. Arab African poetry reconciles the Islamic values rooted in popular consciousness with the rich African heritage of local customs, beliefs, and cultures. From this interaction, a national identity with a moral and spiritual dimension is formed, established on a balance between the religious and cultural dimensions, and presenting a model of belonging that transcends the boundaries of race, tribe, and geography. These three roles are clear in the poetry of Ibrahim al-Malī, who was able to formulate an African national vision in an enlightened poetic language, and to present a model of literary discourse that resists cultural hegemony and calls for a more rooted consciousness of the self and its African and Arab extension.[18]

It is clear from this presentation that identity and national belonging in Cultural Criticism are not just theoretical subjects but represent a basis for understanding Arab African poetry as a cultural discourse that reconstructs the continental self, resists alienation, and strengthens collective consciousness. The theoretical framework also reveals that poetry—in the African context—is not merely an aesthetic art, but a civilizational project that contributes to shaping consciousness, formulating symbols, constructing history, and cementing national belonging.[19]

Thus, analyzing the poetry of Ibrahim al-Malī through this framework becomes a key to understanding the role of literature in shaping African identity, and to realizing the value of poetry as an active cultural force in a society striving for renaissance, unity, and liberation.

2. African National Poetry: Its Leading Figures and Motivations for Writing

African National Poetry is considered one of the most important literary fields that has contributed to the formation of collective consciousness in West Africa and the Sahel countries since the late centuries up to the modern era. Its features crystallized within social, political, and cultural contexts deeply connected to the continent's history, whether during the stage of Islamic kingdoms, the era of European

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[17] Abaṣ-Ṣamad 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad, *Aḍwā' 'alā ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī fī Gharb Ifrīqiyā, as-Sinighāl wa Nījīriyā* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 2001), 40.

[18] Yusif Minkayla, "Dawr ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī fī al-Ḥifāẓ 'alā Islāmiyyat al-Hawiyya al-Ifrīqiyya", *Majallat Qirā'āt Ifriqiyya*, 16/ 1 (2013), 90-102.

[19] Mohamadou Aboubacar Maiga, "Qaḍāyā Ijtimā'iyya fī ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī min al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī", *al-Majalla ad-Duwaliyya li Buḥūth al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya wa Ādābihā*, 3/ 1 (January 2022), 105-136

colonialism, or the time of national liberation and the building of modern states. This poetry acquires special importance because it represents the cultural memory of African peoples and expresses feelings of belonging, identity, steadfastness, and adherence to roots, utilizing the Arabic language as a civilizational, spiritual, and cultural language that was able to carry the experience of the African person and embody their vision of the world.

2.1. The Nature of African National Poetry and its Cultural Specificity

National poetry in Africa is not merely an emotional discourse celebrating the homeland, land, or history; rather, it is a deep symbolic structure where the individual self-intertwines with collective consciousness, embodying the pains and dreams of the peoples, and manifesting the cultural bonds that unite the components of the continent. This poem is based on a specific conception of nationalism founded upon shared history, a unifying language, and a common destiny. It derives its legitimacy from resisting colonialism, confronting tribal fragmentation, and striving to build a continental identity that transcends narrow geographical boundaries.[20]

This poetry is also characterized by its openness to Islamic symbols, as most of its pioneers were jurists, scholars, mystics, or intellectuals connected to Arab-Islamic schools. They fused religious belonging with national consciousness, presenting a unique model of cultural nationalism that relies on ethics, knowledge, and historical memory. This specificity has made African national poetry a rich field for analysis from the perspective of Cultural Criticism, which is concerned with examining the relationship of the text to society, power, and identity.[21]

2.2. Pioneers of African National Poetry and the Manifestations of Identity in Their Works

A few poets emerged in West Africa who played a pivotal role in cementing national consciousness, strengthening national belonging, and resisting colonial hegemony. Foremost among them is the great Malian poet Aḥmad Bābā at-Timbuktī (d. 1036/1627), whose poem "Ilā Waṭan al-Aḥbāb" (*To the Homeland of the Beloved*) is considered one of the oldest texts expressing longing for the land and the recovery of cultural identity. At-Timbuktī depicted his homeland as a center of knowledge and dignity, linking land with learning, and establishing the nucleus of national poetry in the West African environment.[22]

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[20] Ḥasan Ṭalab, *ash-Shiʿr al-Ifrīqī al-Muʿāṣir mukhtārāt wa dirāsāt* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā lith-Thaqāfa, 2003), 123, 124.

[21] Yūsuf Sumana, *al-Adab al-ʿArabī fī Gharb Ifrīqiyā wa Dawruhu fī Muqāwamat al-Istiʿmār* (Ankara: Dār Kitāba, 2023), 281.

[22] Muḥammad bin aṣ-Ṣaghīr al-Wifrānī, *Nuzhat al-Ḥādī bi Akhbār Mulūk al-Qarn al-Ḥādī* (Ninji: Maṭbaʿat Burdīn, 1888), 98.

He is followed by the Nigerian poet Muḥammad Aḥmad Shafī' (d. 1347/1928), who presented in his poem "Ayā Waṭan al-Fakhr" (*O Homeland of Pride*) an early model of national poetry with a reformist tendency. He called for adherence to local values and the construction of a balanced African identity amidst colonial transformations, making his poetry an important reference in national literature in Niger.[23]

In the 14th century AH, the Senegalese poet 'Āmir Ṣamb (d. 1408 /1987) stands out, whose poem "al-Ḥanīn ilā al-Waṭan" (*Nostalgia for the Homeland*) carried a profound emotional vision regarding identity and alienation, combining Sufi feeling with national belonging, thereby offering a unique poetic experience within the trajectory of Senegalese national poetry.[24]

Next comes the Senegalese poet Muḥammad al-Amīn 'Āj (d. 1415 /1994), who documented the feelings of the Guinean people during the stage of national liberation in his poem "Dhikrā al-Istiqlāl" (*The Memory of Independence*). He provided an accurate poetic reading of the struggle's path, mixed with an emotional depiction of the hopes for renaissance and the building of the modern state.[25]

As for the Senegalese poet Shaykh Tījān Ghāy (d. 1433/2011), he represented a clear national voice through poems such as "Ān al-Awān" (*The Time Has Come*) and "Waṭanī wa 'Īd al-Istiqlāl" (*My Homeland and Independence Day*), linking the values of freedom with state-building and strengthening post-independence unity. His style was distinguished by a high rhetorical tone that earned him a strong presence in the readers' consciousness.[26]

The Guinean poet Muḥammad al-Amīn Jābī (d. 1438/2016) is considered one of the most prominent contemporary voices addressing identity issues in West Africa. In his poems "al-Hawiyya al-Mafqūda" (*The Lost Identity*), "Banū as-Sūdān" (*Children of Sudan*), and "al-Jazīra al-Majhūla" (*The Unknown Island*), he offered a critical reading of attempts to obliterate the Arab-African personality, calling for the recovery of cultural self-awareness and resistance to the effects of psychological and cognitive colonialism.[27]

Following these are a number of living poets who form a vibrant extension of the African national discourse, including: the Nigerian poet Jamīl 'Abd Allāh al-Kanawī, author of the poem "Yā Qawmī" (*O My People*), which fused religious sentiment with

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[23] Yusif Minkayla, *ash-Shi'r al-ʿArabī fī an-Nījar mundhu ʿām 1951 ḥattā ʿām 2000* (Tripoli: Jāmi'at al-Fātiḥ Kulliyyat al-Ādāb, Risālat Mājistīr, 2001), 107.

[24]   Āmir Ṣamb, *al-Adab as-Sinighālī al-ʿArabī* (Algeria: ash-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya lin-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 1978), 1/233.

[25] Muḥammad al-Amīn 'Āj, *Min Waḥy al-Mujtama'* (Dakar: Maktabat ash-Shā'ir, Manuscrit), 16.

[26] Shaykh Tījān Gay, *Min Waḥy al-Wāqi'* (Louga: Maṭba'a Maḥalliyya, d.t), 79.

[27] Muḥammad al-Amīn Jābī, *Qaṣīdat al-Hawiyya al-Mafqūda* (Guinea: Maktabat ash-Shā'ir, Manuscrit), 7.

national consciousness, calling for unity and the rejection of division;[28] the Malian poet Ya'qūb Dūkūrī in poems such as "Yā Bilādī" (*O My Country*), "Isht Yā Waṭanī" (*Long Live My Homeland*), and "Yā Waṭan" (*O Homeland*), which expressed the aspirations and concerns of the Malian people;[29] as well as the Gambian poet Muḥammad al-Imām Ghassāma, who presented in "Taḥiyya Yā Waṭanī" (*Greetings, O My Homeland*) a text celebrating national memory and its symbols;[30] in addition to the Nigerian poet Shu'ayb al-Kinkāwī, author of the poem "Waṭanī al-'Azīz" (*My Dear Homeland*), which reflects a strong attachment to the land, language, and heritage.[31]

2.3. The Intellectual and Social Motivations for Writing African National Poetry

The motivations for writing African national poetry stem from a set of intertwined factors, some historical, and others religious, social, or political. The most prominent of these motivations can be summarized as follows:

- Resistance to Colonialism and the Construction of National Consciousness European colonialism was one of the most influential factors in shaping African national poetry, as it created a state of awareness regarding the necessity of protecting the land, language, and heritage. Poetry thus became a means of defending identity and encouraging the populace to resist. This is clearly manifested in the poems of Muḥammad al-Amīn Jābī, Muḥammad al-Amīn 'Āj, and Shaykh Tījān Gay.

- Recovery of the Threatened Cultural Identity Many poets sought to combat attempts to obliterate the Arab African identity, whether by external forces or because of internal conflicts. Poems emerged depicting identity as an entity that must be recovered, as seen in the works of Jābī and Dūkūrī.

- Reinforcing Unity in the Face of Tribal Fragmentation African societies witnessed ethnic and racial divisions, making poetry a discourse that unites peoples under one national umbrella, as was done by Jamīl al-Kanawī and Shu'ayb al-Kankāwī.

- The Religious and Sufi Role in Shaping Consciousness Many poets had religious backgrounds, which made their poems carry a moral and spiritual dimension that enhanced national belonging. This is clearly prominent in the works of 'Āmir Ṣamba, Imām Ghassāma, and Ibrahim al-Malī.

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[28] Jamīl 'Abd Allāh al-Kanawī, *Nījīriyā Tunādī Alā Hal Min Mujīb* (Kano: Maktabat ash-Shā'ir, Manuscrit), 4.

[29] Ya'qūb Dūkūrī, *Dīwān al-Bustān* (Bamako: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, d.t), 37, 39.

[30] Muḥammad al-Imām Sāmbū Ghassāma, *Banāt al-Qarīḥa* (Gambia: Maktabat ash-Shā'ir, Manuscrit), 24.

[31] Nukhba min ash-Shu'arā', *al-Banīniyyāt* (Ïlorin: Dār Kiyūdāmīlūlā, 2005), 41, 42.

- Expression of Nostalgia and Emotional Attachment to the Land Many poems carried a clear tendency to glorify the land and the local environment, linking it to dignity and identity, as seen in the works of Aḥmad Bābā at-Timbuktī, who is considered an early pioneer of this direction.

- Building the Modern State Post-Independence National poetry contributed to cementing the new values of the independent state, such as freedom, sovereignty, and development, which is echoed in the poems "Dhikrā al-Istiqlāl" (*The Memory of Independence*) and "Waṭanī wa 'Īd al-Istiqlāl" (*My Homeland and Independence Day*).[32]

It is evident from this presentation that African national poetry is not merely a literary genre, but a cultural and civilizational phenomenon that contributed to shaping the continent's identity and building its collective consciousness. Its pioneers from Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, and Gambia presented rich poetic models that embody the interaction between history, religion, and national belonging. Furthermore, the motivations for its writing reflect the depth of the African experience in its struggle against colonialism and its pursuit of modernization, unity, and self-affirmation. Thus, the study of this poetry remains an essential entry point for understanding the cultural transformations in West Africa, and a window for comprehending the relationship between literature and identity in a contemporary context facing renewed challenges.

3. Manifestations of Identity and Belonging in the Poetry of the Ibrahim al-Malī

3.1. Biography of the Poet Ibrahim al-Malī

Shaykh Ibrahim Aḥmad 'Umar al-Fūlānī, also known by his scholarly title "Abū Mu'ādh 'Umar ibn Muḥammad Ṣah al-Ifrīqī al-Fūlānī", is considered one of the prominent figures in the religious and cultural scene in West Africa and the Arab world. He gained wide academic renown under the widely used name "Shaykh Ibrahim al-Malī" due to his solid scholarly and educational contributions in multiple fields, from Mālikī jurisprudence to Arabic language sciences and literature.

The Shaykh grew up in an authentic Islamic environment, within a tribe with deep cultural and civilizational roots in the Republic of Mali. This environment was characterized by its keenness to educate the youth and raise them according to Islamic values and traditional knowledge. From a young age, he showed a clear inclination toward seeking knowledge, starting his academic journey at an early age, not

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[32] Kaba 'Imrān, *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī khilāla al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn al-Mīlādī* (Morocco: Manshūrāt al-Munaẓẓama al-Islāmiyya lit-Tarbiyya wa al-'Ulūm wath-Thaqāfa, 2011), 2/554.

exceeding four years old, under the guidance of his father,[33] reflecting an innate readiness and an urgent internal desire to acquire Sharia and linguistic sciences.

After completing the memorization of the Holy Qur'an in the city of Futa, Senegal, he studied under the scholars of his village. He then traveled to the city of Shinqīṭ (Chinguetti) to complete his remaining lessons under Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Fāl in 2001 CE, where he stayed for a brief period before being forced to return to his country due to illness.

In his continuous pursuit of knowledge, Shaykh Ibrahim traveled to the Arab Republic of Egypt in 2004 CE, where he joined Al-Azhar Ash-Sharif, the most ancient religious institution in the Islamic world. When he entered Egypt, he found an atmosphere different from his homeland, which inspired him to write a poem of approximately ninety verses encompassing everything about Egypt. Its opening lines are:

<div dir="rtl">

فقد سئمت نفسي وضاق بي الأمر	مهيجة رفقا بي يطيب لك العمر
يضيق به صدرا على صبره الصخر	لكن الله كم كلفتني الدهر حمل ما
وآذن في ظلماء ليلتي الفجر	إلى أن زوى غصني وطار غرابه
وسبعين مليونا غوانيهم الشطر	يعيشون في جوّ المودة خمسة

</div>

English Translation:

O agitated one, gently, may life be good to you, for my soul has grown weary, and my matter has become narrow

But, by God, how much has time burdened me with carrying that which, the chest finds confining, though the rock endures it patiently

Until my branch withered and its crow flew away and the dawn heralded in the darkness of my night

They live in an atmosphere of affection, seventy, five million, and their beauties are half.

He continued his studies in the fields of Islamic Law and Mālikī jurisprudence under an elite group of senior scholars who combined depth in knowledge with openness to contemporary issues. He achieved notable excellence in the Arabic language, mastering its pronunciation, eloquence, and style in a manner that placed him among the skillful writers and linguists.

The Shaykh conducted his scholarly activities in the heart of Cairo, where he taught Mālikī jurisprudence in the Imam al-Dardīr Mosque, located behind Al-Azhar Mosque

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[33] Ibrāhīm Aḥmad 'Umar Ṣow, *aṭ-Ṭarīf wa at-Tālid fī Thulāthiyyāt al-Wālid ma'a al-Ḥāwī li-Tārīkh Ghāwī* (Bamako: Maktabat ash-Shā'ir, 2025), 21.

—a site that carries symbolic significance for his direct connection with Al-Azhar's intellectual and educational heritage. The Shaykh is considered an encyclopedic scholar who combined writing and teaching, having authored forty books before reaching the age of forty, an achievement that reflects the abundance of his scholarly output and the diversity of his intellectual interests. Among his most prominent known works are:

- *Ghāyat al-Arab fī Riḥlat aṭ-Ṭalab*: A book detailing his experience in seeking knowledge and traveling between academic centers.

- *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb fī Sharḥ Lāmiyyat aṭ-Ṭullāb*: Concerned with conduct and spiritual education.

- *Kitāb al-Wadā'*: Displaying his deep emotional and spiritual reflections.

- *Manẓūmat Nayl al-'Ulūm fī Shāttā al-'Ulūm* (A poem on acquiring knowledge in various sciences).

- *Manẓūmat Madd Yad al-'Awn li-Ḥall Mushkilat al-Lawn* (A poem on extending aid to solve the problem of color) (Philosophy of Literature), which is a book of great importance in deconstructing the mysteries of color and linking them to philosophical aspects. It allows the reader to delve into the world of ideas and concepts in a magnificent way. Its opening lines are:

ومالي إلا عونه حيث أعمِد	بدأت ببسم الله والخير أقصد
محمد الهادي إلى الحق يرشد	وصليت تسليمًا على خير خلقه
عن اللون مع تبيين ما هو أفيد	وإني لمضطرٌ لوضع عُجالةٍ
لما قد أرى من ظلم من هو أسود	وذلك في جوف الفرى داحض الفرى
إلى حل إشكال من اللون) ىُوجد	و(مدًا ليد العون سميت دُرَتي

English Translation:

I begin with the Name of God, and goodness I intend, and I have none but His aid, to where I aim

I prayed for peace upon the best of His creation, Muḥammad, the guide who leads to the truth

And I am compelled to set down a brief work about color, along with clarifying what is most beneficial

And that is in the hollow of the false, refuting the false, for what I may see of the injustice of the one who is Black,

and extending a helping hand I named my gem Towards solving a dilemma of color) that exists,

- *Manẓūmat az-Zīnah wa al-Jamāl (fī al-Adab)* (Poetic System of Adornment and Beauty in Literature)

This literary work represents a significant model of the Shaykh's brilliance in the arts of poetry and versification. He composed it as a poetic system presented as a gift to his wife, Asmā', an Egyptian woman who agreed to marry him despite his being a stranger to her homeland. This work transcends the purely emotional dimension to offer an intellectual and aesthetic treatment of the concepts of beauty and adornment from an authentic Islamic perspective. It constitutes a comprehensive guide that explores the essence of beauty as a multidimensional phenomenon, considering the various aspects of the human entity: from the soul and the heart to the body and the external appearance. The text is distinguished by its ability to harmonize religious knowledge and spiritual visions on the one hand, with aesthetic and intellectual conceptions on the other, to present an integrated vision of beauty that aligns with Islamic values and is based on a holistic understanding of the human being. We quote the following verses from it:

أيّ أرض جادت عليها السماءُ	آذنتني بوصلها أسماءُ
هر فيها غدوّنا والمساءُ	بعد عهد لنا بأروقة الأز
ب وعشقٍ أبان عنه اللقاء	رب حب أضاعه عدم القر
أم بوصف الجمال يا أسماءُ	أ بذكر الخصال أوفيك مدحاً

English Translation:

Asmā' granted me permission to connect with her, What land has the sky been generous to her upon?

After a time, we spent on the cloisters of Al-Azhar, where our mornings and evenings were spent

Perhaps love that the lack of closeness destroyed and a passion that the meeting revealed, or by describing beauty, O Asmā'?

In addition to his scholarly and writing activities, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Malī established the 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān Center for Islamic Studies in the Republic of Mali, which serves as a scholarly beacon aimed at guiding the youth and training researchers in various fields of Islamic studies. This center has contributed to enhancing religious and cultural awareness and connecting the new generations to their civilizational and religious roots.

Shaykh Ibrahim al-Malī enjoys wide popularity and great respect in academic and cultural circles, both in Africa and the Arab world, where he is viewed as a symbol of scholarly renewal and commitment, and as a civilizational bridge between the traditional Islamic centers in Africa and the institutions of learning in the Arab world.

3.2. Analysis of the Poem "*Ilā Arḍ Ifrīqiyā Aḥinnu wa Antamī*" (To the Land of Africa I Long and Belong) from the Perspective of Cultural Criticism

3.2.1. The Text of the Poem

1	إلى أرض أفريقيا أحنّ وأنتمي	كما أنّ كل الحوت للماء ينتمي
2	بلاد بها نيطت عليّ تمائمي	وأول أرض ذاق طيّبها فمي
3	رضيتك أمّا ثمّ جوّك فطنتي	رياحك أنفاسي بحارك من دمي
4	أيا خير أرض الله، لبّك طينتي	نباتك من شعري، جبالك أعظمي
5	هي القارة الأولى تضمّ ثلاثة	وخمسين قطرا من حديث وأقدم
6	يعيش بها شتى الشعوب محاطة	بأربع قارات وأبحر علقم
7	مزارع غابات، وحوش معادن	وكل الذي يهواه أبناء آدم
8	أحبّكم قومي، فلاني ونمبرا	وهوسا وسوننكي مننغا وبوردم
9	حمى الله أفريقيا بلادي كلّ ما	يضرّ ويؤذي ثم من سافكي الدم
10	من الحاقدين البيض ممن تآمروا	علينا قديما تحت أسماء أوهم
11	دهونا غزاة فترة وتسلّطوا	على أهلنا سلبا ونهبا لمغنم
12	على غرة جاؤوا وخانوا عهودهم	وعاثوا فسادا ثم ولّوا كقشعم
13	متى ما رأيت الفأر يرقص جهرة	على جلد قطّ، فاندب الموت، تسلم
14	رفضنا خطاهم ثم خضناه ضدهم	قتالا عنيفا يخضب البيض بالدم
15	من الشرق حتّى الغرب يا أهل قارتي	تعالوا لنسعى سعية المتحزّم
16	حقيق علينا أن نطهّر أرضنا	من الجهل والأمراض، بل كل مأثم
17	من الفقر والأمراض واسعوا بجهدكم	لنلحق أفريقيا بركب التقدّم
18	دعوا الحرب واسعوا للسلام وأقبلوا	لندرك ما نبغى بحسن التعلم
19	صلاة من الرحمن يتلو سلامه	على من هدانا بين عرب وأعجم
20	هو السيد المبعوث للخلق رحمة	فبارك عليه يا إلهي وسلّمِ

English Translation:

To the land of Africa, I long and belong, just as every whale belongs to the sea.

A country where my amulets were tied upon me, And the first land whose goodness tasted my mouth.

I accepted you as mother; the sun of your sky is my intelligence, your winds are my breaths, your seas are from my blood.

O best land of God, your core is my clay, your plants are from my hair, your mountains are my bones.

It is the First Continent, encompassing fifty-three nations, both modern and ancient.

Diverse people live within it, surrounded by four continents and bitter (salty) seas.

Farmlands, forests, wild beasts, minerals, And everything that the sons of Adam desire.

I love you, my people: Fūlānī, Bambara, Hausa, Soninke, Maninka, and Burdama.

May God protect Africa, my country, from all that harms and hurts, and from all who shed blood.

From the hateful white people who conspired against us long ago under illusory names.

They attacked us as invaders for a period and dominated our people, looting and plundering for gain.

They came unexpectedly and betrayed their covenants, spread corruption, and then vanished like a vulture.

Whenever you see a mouse dancing openly on the skin of a cat, mourn for death, and you will be safe.

We rejected their paths, and then we engaged in fierce fighting against them, staining the white with blood.

From the East to the West, O people of my continent, Come, let us strive with the effort of the resolute.

It is our duty to purify our land from ignorance, diseases, and indeed every sin.

(Purify it) from poverty and diseases and strive with your effort so that we may join Africa to the procession of progress.

Abandon war, strive for peace, and come forward so that we may achieve what we seek through excellent learning.

A prayer from the Merciful, followed by His peace, upon the one who guided us, among Arabs and non-Arabs.

He is the Master sent as a mercy to creation, so bless him, O my God, and grant him peace.

3.2.2. Occasion of the Poem

This poem was written in an emotional and cultural context characterized by a deep longing for African roots. Through it, the poet expressed his organic belonging to the continent of Africa, as the land where his consciousness was formed and his awareness unfolded. The poem is not merely a recollection of place, but a celebration of African identity in its cultural, spiritual, and historical dimensions, coming to affirm that Africa is not just a geographical location, but a living civilizational entity worthy of pride and celebration. The occasion of the poem appears to be related to the poet's subjective reflections on the position of the African continent among the nations of the world, and the status of the African person in global narratives, resulting in a refined poetic response that restores the dignity of this great continent.[34]

The poem also came as a sincere and conscious response to the political, economic, and social challenges facing the African continent in the post-colonial phase. The poet does not confine himself to pride in the continent's history, geography, and resources, but moves on to critique the current situation and calls upon the people to overcome the effects of colonialism, division, and ignorance. From this, it can be said that the occasion of the poem carries a contemporary, realistic dimension, represented by the poet's desire to stimulate the collective feeling of the necessity for reform, construction, and African solidarity, making the text a kind of "Cultural Manifesto" that seeks to create a renaissance consciousness that transcends artificial divisions and establishes a better future.[35]

Given that Shaykh Mu'ādh Aḥmad 'Umar Sow al-Fūlānī is one of the luminaries of Islamic culture in West Africa, with a solid Azharite background, his poem also came within the context of a comprehensive reformist call inspired by the Islamic spirit in the face of division and weakness. He relies on the shared Islamic reference point for the continent's peoples as a unifying force, and he concludes the poem with a prayer upon the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) as a symbol of mercy and guidance, suggesting that the project of African resurgence cannot be separated from the spiritual and ethical framework. From this perspective, the poem represents a reformist voice stemming from within the African Islamic cultural system, combining authenticity with modernity, longing with insight, and criticism with construction.

3.2.3. The Content of the Poem from the Perspective of Cultural Criticism

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[34] Abaṣ-Ṣamad 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī Gharbī Ifrīqiyā mundhu al-Istiʿmār as-Sinighāl wa Nījīriyā* (Makka: Umm al-Qurā University, Faculty of Arabic Language, 1989), 51-68.

[35] Maiga, *Qaḍāyā Ijtimāʿiyya fī ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī min al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī*, 117.

This poem is considered a distinctive example of "Literature of Identity and Resistance," where it transcends its aesthetic and emotional nature to present a poetic discourse that intertwines with cultural, political, and existential issues related to belonging, liberation, and the construction of civilizational consciousness. The poem is not satisfied with being merely an artistic expression but transforms into an act of cultural resistance that opposes colonialism in its symbolic and cognitive representations and reproduces the image of Africa from within, after it had been distorted by Western colonial discourse through centuries of falsification and marginalization.

- **Existential, Not Accidental, Belonging: Africa as a Cultural Root**

In this context, the identity dimension in the poem emerges as the fundamental axis upon which the poetic vision is built. Africa is not merely a subject or a geographical backdrop, but a deep cultural and spiritual root that shapes the poet's consciousness and emotion. This is clear from the opening of the poem, where he says:

<div dir="rtl">

إلى أرض أفريقيا أحنّ وأنتمي / كما أنّ كل الحوت للماء ينتمي

</div>

To the land of Africa, I long and belong | Just as every whale belongs to the sea.

In this foundational couplet, the poet does not present his belonging to Africa as a sudden stance or merely emotional longing but portrays it as an **existential necessity** from which there is no escape, like the whale's need for water. This is a simile of profound semantic depth. Just as water constitutes the whale's natural environment and the source of its life, Africa, for the poet, constitutes the cultural and spiritual environment without which the self cannot live or exist independently. This conception of belonging transcends superficial notions of identity and expresses a deep critical stance against the discourse of cultural alienation, which the colonizer promoted to uproot African societies and portray them as marginalized entities in need of civilizational tutelage. However, the poet here restores the dignity of Africa, viewing it as a complete civilization center with its own history, culture, and people, and, through his poetic language, performs an act of cultural resistance based on exposing colonial discourses and reshaping self from within.[36]

- **The Land as an Extension of the Body: Reshaping the Relationship Between Man and Place**

A deep poetic consciousness is manifested in the poem that reconstructs the relationship between man and the land, not as a relationship of material exploitation or merely geographical affiliation, but as an organic, existential bond that resembles the

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[36] Kaba, *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī khilāla al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn al-Mīlādī*, 1 / 589

relationship between the body and its organs.[37] In this context, the poet presents a set of eloquent poetic images that embody this intimate intertwining with the place, as in his saying:

"بلاد بها نيطت عليّ تمائمي / وأول أرض ذاق طيّبها فمي"

"رضيتك أمّا شمس جوّك فطنتي / رياحك أنفاسي بحارك من دمي"

"أيا خير أرض الله، لبّك طينتي / نباتك من شعري، جبالك أعظمي"

A country where my amulets were tied upon me / And the first land whose goodness tasted my mouth.

I accepted you as mother; the sun of your sky is my intelligence / Your winds are my breaths; your seas are from my blood.

O best land of God, your core is my clay / Your plants are from my hair, your mountains are my bones.

These verses establish a poetic vision that sees the land as a living, interactive entity, indeed an organic extension of the human being itself. The poet does not speak about his homeland from outside the body but sees it penetrating the details of his being: it is his "أنـــفاســـه/breaths," his "دَمُـــه/blood," his "فِـــطنته/ intelligence," and his "أعـــظمه/bones," even his very self in the clay, hair, and plant life. This vision is based on interpreting the land as a living identity, not just a place of dwelling or a site for exploitation, as the colonizer portrayed it.

The tendency toward the personification of the land is manifested in these images, where it transforms from a mere external space into a "mother" who embraces the poet since childhood, as indicated by the mention of "amulets" (الـــتمائـــم/*tamā'im*) which are hung around the necks of children in the early stages of their lives, adding a ritualistic and cultural dimension that suggests roots and memory. Here, the land is not merely evoked as a source, but as an integrated identity with physical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions.

Furthermore, the terms used, such as "clay" (الطين/*aṭ-ṭīn*), "amulets" (التمائـم/ *at-tamā'im*), "sun" (الـشمس/*ash-shams*), and "winds" (الـريـاح/*ar-riyāḥ*), carry rich references to African cultural symbols rooted in the collective unconscious, thereby reinforcing the connotations of local cultural belonging. These symbols

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37 Munji al-Qulfāẓ, *al-Insān wa al-Makān fī ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Qadīm* (Tunisia: ad-Dār at-Tūnisiyya lil-Kitāb, 2016), 47.

are not employed randomly but establish a poetic vision that opposes the colonial conception that separated man from his land and made the place merely a container for wealth, instead of a field for the formation of consciousness and identity. Through these images, the poet re-formulates the relationship between man and place within a specific civilizational framework that sees the land as a living being in which consciousness and existence are shaped together. It is an existential poetic stance that restores dignity to the place in its deep identity dimension, making it an axis of belonging, a space for dignity, and a source for the self-liberated from alienation.[38]

- **Africa as the Unifying Continent: Unity in Diversity**

In this section of the poem, a comprehensive vision of the continent of Africa is manifested as a unifying entity where ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralities coexist without negating unity.[39] The poet says:

"هي القارة الأولى تضمّ ثلاثة / وخمسين قطرا من حديث وأَقدم"

"يعيش بها شتى الشعوب محاطة / بأَربع قارات وأَبحر علقم"

It is the First Continent, encompassing fifty-three / nations, both modern and ancient)

Diverse people live within it, surrounded / by four continents and bitter [salty] seas.

These verses point to the rich geographical and political structure of the African continent. Africa is presented not as a fragmented space, as in Orientalist and colonial literature, but as the **"First"** continent in terms of antiquity and status, containing more than fifty nations. This implies that diversity is not a factor of weakness or division, but an aspect of civilization and human wealth.

In this context, the poet presents a unifying continental vision that clearly challenges the colonial narratives that entrenched the image of Africa as self-divided and incapable of achieving internal unity or producing a coherent civilizational project. Colonialism long worked to impose readings that divided the continent along ethnic, linguistic, or religious lines, following the "divide and rule" strategy, to weaken internal cohesion and justify its intervention under the pretext of organization and modernization.

However, the poetic discourse here moves in an opposing direction, emphasizing that the diversity characterizing the continent does not negate its geographical unity nor its ambition for historical cohesion. In the reference that Africa is "surrounded by four continents," the poet alludes to its strategic location and its geocultural centrality.

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[38] Kaba, *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī khilāla al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn al-Mīlādī*, 1/387.

[39] Abaṣ-Ṣamad *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī Gharbī Ifrīqiyā*, 51-68.

Moreover, the simile comparing the surrounding seas to "bitter" (الـــعلقـم/*'alqam*) is understood as a symbol of the dangers and challenges encircling the continent, whether colonial, economic, or political.

Within this perspective, a cultural critical approach is revealed that deconstructs the narratives produced by colonial discourse and reconstructs the image of the continent from within, as a space where people, traditions, and languages interact without sacrificing the dream of unity and renaissance. Thus, the poem transforms into a tool for deconstruction and re-composition of the African collective imagination, by evoking an alternative narrative based on the consciousness of diversity within unity, not division within fragmentation.[40]

- **The Continent's Wealth and Resources: Self-Pride and a Prelude to the Discourse of Resistance**

In this section, the poet continues to shape his African national vision by emphasizing the natural wealth and diverse economic resources with which the continent abounds, saying:

مزارع غابات، وحوش معادن / وكل الذي يهواه أبناء آدم"

Farmlands, forests, wild beasts, minerals / And everything that the sons of Adam desire.

With this verse, the poet paints a positive and abundant picture of Africa, highlighting it as a land full of bounties and giving. This description directly contradicts the stereotype entrenched by colonial discourse, which portrayed the continent as an arid, resource-empty space lagging behind the procession of civilization. The phrases used by the poet, such as "مـــزارع/farmlands," "غـــابـات/forests," "وحـــوش/wild beasts," and "مـــعـادن/minerals," represent multiple references to the ecological diversity and rich natural resources the continent possesses, indicating that Africa is not just a geographical margin, but a vital center for nature, economy, and life.

From a post-colonial critical perspective, this poetic depiction carries a deconstructive dimension against the European centrism that long belittled Africa's value to justify its colonial projects. The celebration of the continent's wealth in the text is not just part of identity pride but also transforms into an entry point for the discourse of resistance. Here, the poetic consciousness of the organized looting practiced by colonial powers over centuries—by exploiting and smuggling these resources, which caused the impoverishment of local societies despite the richness of the land—becomes apparent.[41]

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[40] Aḥmad Fāris- Saʿdī Ibrāhīm, "al-Mujtamaʿāt al-Mutaʿaddida Dirāsa fī al-Mafhūm wa al-*Anwāʾ*," *Majallat Dirāsāt Iqlīmiyya* 19/64 (April 2025), 251-290.

[41] Rodney Walṭar, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018.), 119.

The poet draws the recipient's attention to the fundamental contradiction between the continent's reality as a land overflowing with "everything that the sons of Adam desire" and the social and economic situation experienced by its peoples—a contradiction that cannot be understood without reverting to the history of colonialism and global economic hegemony. Thus, the poet prepares for an advanced struggle discourse through which he restores the dignity of the African self and its ability to rise from within, not through external aid, but by reclaiming sovereignty over its resources and controlling its destiny. From another perspective, the depiction of Africa as the home of "everything that the sons of Adam desire" is not limited to the economic aspect but extends to the anthropological and existential dimension. The continent is presented here as a primordial space for humanity, which can be read as an allusion to Africa being the origin of humanity (as confirmed by modern scientific theories). This grants it a universal symbolism and transforms the discourse of belonging to it into an act of defense of a common human essence, rather than an isolated geography.

- **The Discourse of African Gathering and Brotherhood: Diversity in Service of Unity**

The following verse in the poem represents a moment of climax in expressing African collective consciousness, where the poet says:

"أحبّكم قومي، فلاني وبمبرا / وهوسا وسوننكي مننغا وبوردم

I love you, my people: Fūlānī, Bambara / Hausa, Soninke, Maninka, and Burdama.

In this verse, the poet expresses his love and belonging to multiple ethnic groups belonging to the West African region, such as the Fūlānī, Bambara, Hausa, Soninke, Maninka, Burdama, and others. This enumeration is not merely a statistical process but carries a deep symbolic dimension, representing a poetic declaration of the unity of diverse African identities within a shared value framework. In this context, diversity is not viewed as a threat to unity but as an element of enrichment for the collective identity.

The discourse presented by the poet here intersects with the critical cultural perspective that re-reads ethnic and cultural diversity, not as an obstacle to national or continental belonging, but as a source of symbolic and political strength. Instead of being drawn into exclusionary tendencies or narrow identities, the poet presents a model of a purposeful poet who celebrates multiplicity and relies on it in building a new continental civilizational project. Thus, this verse embodies a vision that transcends the boundaries of poetry into what can be called "The Cultural Discourse of

Liberation," where the relationship between ethnic groups is reformulated based on mutual respect and collective belonging.[42]

On the other hand, this conception serves as a critical response to colonial discourses that constantly sought to dismantle the African social fabric by focusing on ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences, and exaggerating them to fuel internal conflicts and strike at the possibilities of continental unity. In this verse, the poet completely overturns this equation, where multiplicity transforms into a call for brotherhood, and the names that divided—in the colonial perspective—become tools for building bonds of love and shared belonging.

- **Colonialism as Cultural Hegemony and Material Plunder: The Wounded Memory and the Resistant Consciousness**

The verses in which the poet directs his discourse towards colonialism represent moments of intense poetic confrontation with the colonial memory. He says:

"حمى الله أفريقيا بلادي كلّ ما / يضرّ ويؤذي ثم من سافكي الدم"

"من الحاقدين البيض ممن تآمروا / علينا قديما تحت أسماء أوهم"

"دهونا غزاة فترة وتسلّطوا / على أهلنا سلبا ونهبا لمغنم"

"على غرة جاؤوا وخانوا عهودهم / وعاثوا فسادا ثم ولّوا كقشعم"

May God protect Africa, my country, from all / that harms and hurts, and from all who shed blood.

From the hateful white people who conspired / against us long ago under illusory names.

They attacked us as invaders for a period and dominated / our people, looting and plundering for gain.

They came unexpectedly and betrayed their covenants / spread corruption and then vanished like a vulture.

In these passages, the poet does not limit himself to describing colonialism as a fleeting geographical occupation but goes beyond it to present it as a system of deep-seated cultural and economic hegemony. The poetic discourse here is based on a critical historical awareness that makes colonialism a multidimensional experience: material, cultural, symbolic, and racist. The colonizer is not only depicted as an invader who violated the land and plundered its resources, but also as a deceiver, slyly disguising himself under "illusory names," which is a reference to the false slogans that accompanied the colonial project, such as "civilization," "enlightenment," and "modernization."

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[42]Mohamadou Aboubacar Maiga, "The Poetry of Struggle and Resistance in West Africa During The 17-19th", *Uluslararası FSMVÜ Arap Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Kongresi*, İstanbul, Türkiye, (May 2021), 687-706.

This diagnosis aligns with what prominent thinkers in the field of post-colonialism have presented, such as Edward Said in his critique of Orientalism,[43] and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his analysis of linguistic and cultural hegemony. For these thinkers, colonial discourse was not just a tool of invasion, but a symbolic structure that worked to penetrate the colonized self from within, obliterating culture, confusing identity, and alienating consciousness.[44]

The poet evokes this through vocabulary such as دهـــونـــا/*dahūnā* (they attacked us), تسـلطوا/*tasaṭṭalū* (they dominated), سـلبًا ونهبًا/*salban wa nahban* (looting and plundering), خـانـوا/*khānū* (they betrayed), and عـاثـوا فـسادًا/*ʾāthū fasādan* (they spread corruption), to form a counter-poetic lexicon that re-describes that experience from within the African consciousness.

It is notable that the poet does not use emotional language exclusively but mixes it with a tone that refers to an enlightened critical awareness, internalizing historical experiences and re-reading them from the perspective of the conscious victim, not the passive object. In his saying "الحاقدين البيض" (the hateful white people), we find a direct reference to the racist dimension that accompanied colonialism, which reinforces the ideological nature of that hegemony, where the white people were not merely foreigners, but "hateful" people who carried a racist project of their racial superiority and right to control.

The final phrase "ثـــم ولّـــوا كـــقشعم" (and then vanished like a vulture) also carries significant symbolic meaning. قـــشعم/*Qash'am* in Arabic is a metaphor for destruction and devastation, which makes the departure of the colonizers after their plunder akin to fleeing a crime they refuse to acknowledge. This is a poetic depiction that condemns the colonial legacy, which left behind an economic vacuum, psychological wounds, and cultural fissures.

- **Resistance and Revolution: Self-Recovery and the Construction of Historical Agency**

In an advanced stage of the poem, the tone of the poetic discourse escalates, transforming from lamentation and diagnosis to the act of explicit resistance and confrontation, as manifested in the poet's saying:

رفضنا خطاهم ثم خضناه ضدهم / قتالا عنيفا يخضب البيض بالدم"

We rejected their paths, and then we engaged in / fierce fighting against them, staining the white with blood.

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[43]Edward Said, *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2016), 197.

[44] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Publishing Hous, 1995), 37.

This verse is a turning point in the semantic path of the text, as the poet moves from describing pain and condemning colonialism to a position of action and revolutionary initiative. The speaker is no longer merely a witness to wounds but becomes an active participant in creating the event, sharing in the moment of resistance, with all its risk and defiance, and striving to regain sovereignty over both the self and the land.

Resistance here is understood in its broader context; it is not merely a military reaction, but a cultural and civilizational act that reflects a historical consciousness rooted in dignity and freedom. The confrontation that *"stain[s] the white with blood"* does not only refer to a material clash but also symbolizes the breaking of the symbolic hegemony that has long been associated with the image of the "White Man" as a savior or an invincible force. This "whiteness" here is immersed in the blood of resistance, in an inverted metaphor that re-arranges the symbols of strength and weakness.

From the perspective of Cultural Criticism, the poet transcends the superficial concept of resistance as a circumstantial rebellion, placing it in the context of reclaiming being and reviving identity. Revolution, in this sense, is not just a violent reaction, but an essential condition for free existence, and an act of recovery, whether of material rights or symbolic meanings the colonizer attempted to erase. Here, an implicit agreement emerges with the theses of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon (d. 1961), who views revolutionary violence in the colonial context not just as bloody conflict, but as a process of psychological cleansing and existential transformation.[45]

It can be said that this verse establishes the discourse of collective dignity, where revolution becomes a collective, not individual, project, in which everyone participates to make history instead of being its victims. The rejection of "their paths" is not just a rejection of a physical presence, but of a comprehensive colonial approach and a condescending vision that turned the African person into a follower without agency.[46]

• **A Call for Unity and Building the Future: From Criticizing the Other to Criticizing the Self**

These verses constitute a qualitative turning point in the rhetorical structure of the text, as the poet shifts from focusing on colonialism and its effects to addressing contemporary African reality. He emphasizes that the project of liberation is not completed merely by salvation from political colonialism, but must extend to liberation from manifestations of internal colonialism, such such as ignorance, poverty, division, and disease:

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[45] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 125.

[46] Mohamadou Aboubacar Maiga, "Tandīd al-Isti'mār fī ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī min al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī", *Academic Knowledge*, 4/2 (2021), 153-163.

"من الشرق حتى الغرب يا أهل قارتي / تعالوا لنسعى سعية المتحزّم"

"حقيق علينا أن نطهّر أرضنا / من الجهل والأمراض، بل كل مأثم"

"من الفقر والأمراض واسعوا بجهدكم / لنلحق أفريقيا بركب التقدّم"

From the East to the West, O people of my continent / Come, let us strive with the effort of the resolute.

It is our duty to purify our land / from ignorance and diseases, and indeed every sin.

Purify it from poverty and diseases and strive with your effort / so that we may join Africa to the procession of progress.

In these passages, the poet re-directs the compass of discourse from the past to the present, and from confrontation with the external to internal reform efforts. This shift indicates the maturity of the critical consciousness, where self-critique is presented not as belittling or flogging the identity, but as one of the conditions for civilizational construction. It is observed here that the poet's tone transforms from anger to motivation, and from condemnation to positive incitement for collective action, calling upon all the continent's peoples—from the "East to the West"—to possess the spirit of the المتحزّم/*al-muttaḥazzim* (the resolute one), meaning the person ready for serious action, aware of the gravity of the stage, and willing to embrace change with collective will.

These verses put forward a reformist vision stemming from the conviction that true liberation is not measured only by the absence of the colonizer, but by the people's capacity to build themselves and societies according to the values of knowledge, solidarity, and dignity. The discussion of "الجهل/ignorance," "الفقر/poverty," "الأمراض/ diseases," and "المآثم/sins" is not presented as a neutral description but as a sharp diagnosis of the effects of post-colonialism, which left the continent in a state of structural imbalances at the levels of education, health, economy, and social values.

Through his call to "join the procession of progress," the poet re-integrates Africa into the general human trajectory, without subjecting it to the logic of dependency or assimilation. The vision he proposes is neither dependency on the West nor isolation from it, but an independent renaissance vision that sees progress as a human value that must be formulated from within the African culture and with its own tools.[47]

- **Peace and Knowledge: A Reversal of the Value System Towards Civilizational Construction**

In a notable semantic shift, the poet moves in this verse from the language of resistance and confrontation to a discourse based on re-ordering civilization priorities,

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[47] Kaba, *ash-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī fī al-Gharb al-Ifrīqī khilāla al-Qarn al-ʿIshrīn al-Mīlādī*, 1/219.

where he calls for the rejection of war and the adoption of peace and learning as the basis for progress:

<div dir="rtl">

دعوا الحرب واسعوا للسلام وأقبلوا / لندرك ما نبغى بحسن التعلم"

</div>

Abandon war, strive for peace, and come forward / So that we may achieve what we seek through excellent learning.

With this proposition, the traditional value system, which often linked glory to military might and victory in wars, is overturned, placing peace and knowledge at the center of the new identity. Civilization, in the poet's view, is not built upon the ashes of wars, but upon what he calls "excellent learning" (التعلم حسن/*ḥusni at-taʿallum*), meaning purposeful, well-founded learning connected to the needs and aspirations of African societies.

This orientation expresses one of the most prominent facets of positive Cultural Criticism, which is not content with deconstructing heritage or condemning the colonial legacy but seeks to formulate valuable alternatives that contribute to shaping a renaissance consciousness. In this context, African heroism is redefined, not in its combat form, but in its cognitive and developmental form. This proposition resonates with modern post-colonial critical trends, which attach great importance to the rehabilitation of culture as a resource for life, not as a tool for glorifying the past or celebrating empty military victories. It is also understood from this verse that the poet does not merely reject war as violent behavior but rejects the related populist mentalities based on hollow national slogans and false pride in the past without linking it to productive, real work.

The call for "peace" is not just an ethical appeal but a strategic vision that believes societies can only thrive in a stable and secure environment that allows for learning, thinking, and creativity, and provides the conditions for social and cultural construction. [48]

   • **The Spiritual Reference as a Unifying Framework for Civilizational Identity**

The poet concludes his poem with verses that carry high symbolic and spiritual significance, directing a salute and invocation to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him):

<div dir="rtl">

صلاة من الرحمن يتلو سلامه / على من هدانا بين عرب وأعجم
هو السيد المبعوث للخلق رحمة / فبارك عليه يا إلهي وسلّمِ"

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[48]   Abdullahi, Z. M., & Haruna, H. A., "The Role Of Nigerian Arabic Literature in Providing Security and Safety in Nigeria", *Journal of Arabic Language Teaching*, 4/1 (2024), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.35719/arkhas.v4i1.1921

A prayer from the Merciful, followed by His peace, | upon the one who guided us, among Arabs and non-Arabs.

He is the Master sent as a mercy to creation, | So bless him, O my God, and grant him peace.

This conclusion is not accidental or driven by traditional poetic convention but constitutes a moment of spiritual and civilizational framing for the entire text. The Prophet is invoked as a symbol of unity between Arabs and non-Arabs, and evidence of the possibility of transcending ethnic affiliations and national borders toward building a unified, universal cultural identity. With this reference, the poet transcends narrow local contexts to establish a comprehensive reference framework that elevates the values shared among peoples and races, within an African context that has long suffered from externally imposed divisions.

By directing the prayer and peace upon the one who "هــــدى بــــين عــــرب وأعجـــم/guided among Arabs and non-Arabs," the unifying role of Islam is evoked, not from a purely religious perspective, but as a civilizational system capable of establishing a comprehensive cultural project where identities converge under a spiritual and ethical umbrella. This vision is integrated with the overall discourse of the poem, which tends towards the unity of African peoples and overcoming the effects of colonial fragmentation.

3.2.4. The Artistic Structure of the Poem

• Language and Lexicon

The language of the poem is characterized by refined linguistic and stylistic features, manifested in its eloquence and clarity. The poet relied on a fluent, graceful, classical Arabic expression that draws from the source of classical Arabic eloquence (*al-bayān*), lending the text an authentic heritage character without losing its contemporary vitality. It is evident that the poet possesses a flexible linguistic ability that allows him to transition smoothly between deep emotional expression and conscious intellectual contemplation, which imbues the poem with a semantic balance between feeling and thought.

From a lexical perspective, the poet deliberately employed vocabulary belonging to a semantic field associated with identity and belonging, such as: أَحــــنّ/*aḥinnu* (I long), أنـتمي/*antamī* (I belong), تـمائـمي/*tamāʾimī* (my amulets), فـمي/*famī* (my mouth), and طـينتي/*ṭīnatī* (my clay). These terms are rich with connotations of deep emotional and spiritual connection to the self, the land, and history, expressing the human adherence to primary roots and longing for the sources of existential and cultural formation.

He also borrowed vital elements from the African nature, evoking vocabulary that expresses environmental and geographical diversity, such as الـغابـات/*al-ghābāt* (forests),

المعادن/al-maʿādin (minerals), البحار/al-biḥār (seas), الشمس/ash-shams (the sun), الرياح/ar-riyāḥ (the winds), النبات/an-nabāt (plants), الجبال/al-jibāl (mountains), and الطين/aṭ-ṭīn (the clay). These terms embody a vibrant, throbbing scene of African nature and contribute to reinforcing the feeling of physical and spiritual intertwining with the continent, as if they represent an organic extension of the poetic self.

In addition to this, the poem features a strong presence of the lexicon of struggle and historical conflict undertaken by people for liberation and dignity. The poet employs words such as: غزاة/ghuzāh (invaders), قتال/qitāl (fighting), سافكي الدم/sāfikī ad-dam (shedders of blood), خانوا عهودهم/khānū ʾuhūdahum (they betrayed their covenants), النهب/an-nahb (plunder), الفساد/al-fasād (corruption), التحرر/at-taḥarrur (liberation), and التعليم/at-taʿlīm (learning). These terms carry a high emotional and cultural charge, transporting the reader to the sphere of confrontation and steadfastness, and reflecting a collective memory burdened with pain and hopes, extending from the colonial past to the crisis-ridden present, and charged with the aspiration for a future where justice and freedom are achieved.

This rich lexical diversity not only reflects the poet's skill in choosing his words but also indicates the depth and richness of the poetic experience, both cognitively and emotionally. The feelings of the individual intertwine with the concerns of the collective, the subjective moment intersects with the historical moment, and personal longing meets with an ingrained collective consciousness. Thus, the structure of the poem is formed in a way that grants it a holistic dimension transcending the limits of the self, to express the sentiment of a nation, evoke the spirit of a civilization, and establish a poetic vision that belongs to the land and the human being, embracing the grand values of struggle, belonging, and dignity.

- **Metaphor and Imagery**

The poem is abundant with multiple rhetorical images belonging to the worlds of metaphor (majāz), simile (tashbīh), and analogy (istiʿāra), which lend the text a remarkable pictorial and aesthetic richness and grant it an artistic dimension that links language with emotion, and form with content. These artistic images are not used for rhetorical adornment or stylistic luxury, but serve a deep expressive function, embodying the feelings of the poetic self and transforming them into vivid scenes pulsating with life and emotion.

One of the most prominent metaphorical images that carries deep symbolic connotations is the poet's saying: "كما أن كل الحوت للماء ينتمي" (Just as every whale belongs to the sea). The poet borrows an image from the world of marine nature to compare his emotional and spiritual belonging to the African continent with the whale's belonging to the water—a simile that indicates a vital, indeed existential, connection to the place.

Just as the whale cannot live outside its natural environment the poet cannot conceive of his existence separate from Africa, which represents for him the space of life, growth, belonging, and identity. This image carries great semantic energy, reflecting a profound sense of total integration between man and his cultural and geographical environment.

The poet also continues to build bodily metaphorical images that represent the ultimate identification between the self and the place, saying: شـمس جـوّك فـطنتي / ريـاحـك أنـفاسـي / بـحارك مــن دمـي The sun of your sky is my intelligence / Your winds are my breaths / Your seas are from my blood.

Here we see the elements of African nature transformed into existential components in the poet's body and soul, leading to the obliteration of barriers between man and environment. The metaphors "ريـاحـك أنـفاسـي/Your winds are my breaths" and "بـحارك مـن دمـي/Your seas are from my blood" express the extent of the intimate and deep cohesion between the poet and his land, to the point where nature speaks of his being and is embodied in his body. These images do not merely describe the relationship between the poet and the homeland but reformulate the concept of identity as an organic relationship between the self and the place, where the homeland becomes an extension of the poet's body, feeling, and thought.

This pictorial unity becomes more cohesive with his saying: نباتك من شعري، جبالك أعظمي / Your plants are from my hair, your mountains are my bones.

The poet vests the components of the human body onto the structure of the land, borrowing language from his body to embody the total solidarity between himself and the continent. Poetry—symbolizing creativity and thought—unites with plants, while the mountains—a symbol of permanence and antiquity—become synonymous with the poet's bones, suggesting solidity and robust organic belonging. These metaphors affirm that Africa is not just a geographical space for the poet, but an existence within him, breathing with him and pulsating with his blood.

Also noteworthy is the poet's use of popular heritage in his saying: "إذا رأيت الفأر يرقص جهـرة عـلى جـلد قـطّ، فـانـدب الـموت"/If you see the mouse dancing openly on the skin of a cat, then mourn for death. This is a popular phrase with rich symbolic connotation, skillfully employed here to depict the moment of historical breakdown when the scales are tipped, and the weak prevail in the absence of the strong. This proverb not only carries a sarcastic dimension about reality but establishes a critical vision of the colonial period and the subsequent failure of standards, where ignorance prevailed, the values of justice and strength collapsed, and distortion reached a level where the mouse is pictured dancing on the skin of the cat, a symbol not hidden from the conscious Arab reader. Continuing this image, the poet says: متى مـا رأيت الفأر يرقص جهرة /

على جلد قطٍّ، فاندب الموت، تسلم/Whenever you see the mouse dancing openly / on the skin of a cat, mourn for death, you will be safe.

This is a poetic verse that combines popular wisdom with poetic eloquence, embodying a painful paradox that calls for contemplation and caution, and refers to a time of defeat and brokenness, where the scales of justice were disturbed, and false appearances overshadowed essential truths.

This rich network of metaphors, analogies, and similes demonstrates the poet's skill in transforming abstract meanings into vivid, tangible images, enabling the reader to experience the poem not merely as linguistic discourse but as a profound emotional and cognitive journey in which feelings are embodied, values are materialized, and the features of belonging and struggle are drawn in a poetic language brimming with vivid images and multiple connotations.

- **Rhythm and Phonetics**

This poem belongs to the *Baḥr aṭ-Ṭawīl* (The Long Meter), which is one of the most prominent meters in Arabic poetry in terms of vitality and rhythmic movement. It is characterized by its strong, vibrant rhythm, abundant with dynamism and tonal tension. This meter is based on the foot **"*Fa'ūlun Mafā'īlun Fa'ūlun Mafā'ilun*,"** a foot distinguished by its rhythmic richness and flexibility in prosodic variation. This makes it suitable for expressing sharp emotional states, strong expressive positions, and subjects that demand a high rhetorical tone and a flowing emotional energy. This aligns perfectly with the general structure of this poem, which is dominated by the voice of the enthusiastic self and an emotional fervor for issues of belonging and liberation.

The poet's choice of this meter does not appear arbitrary but reveals a rhythmic consciousness that harmonizes with the nature and expressive objectives of the text. The internal music of the poem interacts with its intellectual and emotional connotations, contributing to the forceful and impactful delivery of the poetic message. The *Baḥr aṭ-Ṭawīl*, with its high kinetic energy, enables the poet to accommodate the flow of feelings and emotions and allows for the repetition of rhythmic forms, which is consistent with the rhetorical and pictorial escalation found throughout the text.

At the level of phonetic patterns, the dominance of a few letters that repeat significantly in the structure of the poem is noticeable. These are not merely fleeting sonic repetitions, but serve a clear aesthetic and semantic role, deepening the musical character of the text and enriching its suggestions.

Among these letters, the letter *mīm* (م) stands out, recurring in words such as: تمائمي/ *tamā'imī* (my amulets), فـمـي/*famī* (my mouth), and *ṭīnatī* (my clay). This is a resonant labial sound that suggests a soft, flowing tone, lending the poetic breath a tender emotional touch. This repetition also contributes to creating a type of musical iteration

that grants the verse a harmonious vocal continuity, reflecting the extension of feeling and the continuity of attachment to the land and identity.

As for the letter *nūn* (ن), its prominent presence grants the text a character of insistence and affirmation, given the sound's indicative tone of confirmation, stability, and adherence to belonging, as seen in terms like: أنـتمـي/*antamī* (I belong), يـنتمـي/*yantamī* (he belongs), طـــينتـي/*ṭīnatī* (my clay), etc. This letter is one of the nasal sounds that emanates from the depth of the chest, increasing the reader's sense of sincerity of the emotion and the warmth of the feeling.

- **Poetic Music**

The music in this poem is considered an essential element of artistic expression, as it is based on a masterful interaction between the rhythm of the foot (*Baḥr aṭ-Ṭawīl*) and the system of rhyme (*qāfiya*) and final rhyming consonant (*rawiyy*), which ends with the letter *mīm* (م). This is one of the phonetic letters with a resonant, flowing tone and a clear rhythm. This letter is known for its sonic properties characterized by softness and breadth in pronunciation, which lends the rhyme a pleasing quality to the ear and gives it a warm, homogenous tone consistent with the poem's emotional and evocative nature.

The poet carefully chose this type of rhyme. Its function is not limited to the musical closing of the hemistich or the verse; rather, it plays a semantic and tonal role that enhances the emotional impact of the text. The sound of the *mīm* at the end of the verses harmonizes with the poetic atmosphere saturated with emotion, belonging, and supplication, giving the poem a sonic character that combines strength and softness, and musical relaxation with emotional resolve.

Alongside this external structure, internal music is manifested in the poem, resulting from the repetition of vocal movements and sounds consonant with the connotations, thereby creating an internal rhythm that harmonizes with the external structure in a cohesive sonic unity. This internal rhythm stems from the harmony of letters and the consistency of verbal segments, from the artistic repetition of certain words and phrases, in addition to the clever use of antithesis (*ṭibāq*), paronomasia (*jinās*), and partial sonic rhythms.

This poetic music—both internal and external—contributes to reinforcing the rhetorical structure of the text, especially in moments characterized by a calling tone, such as his saying: "أيـا خـير أرض الله" (O best land of God), where the call carries within it reverence and emotional summoning that highlights the nature of deep attachment to the land. This musical function also emerges prominently in supplication and pleading, as in the poet's words: "حـمى الله إفـريـقيا" (May God protect Africa) and "فـبارك عـليه يـا إلـهي وسـلّم" (So bless him, O my God, and grant him peace). The prosodic rhythm and the

rhyming tone accompany a psychological state of hope and yearning for protection and tranquility, making the poetic impact transcend the words to create an internal emotional resonance in the recipient.

Through this precise intermingling of meters, rhyme, and sonic repetitions, it can be said that the music in this poem is not merely a formal backdrop but a self-sustaining semantic and expressive structure. It parallels language and meaning in poetic performance and plays a major role in delivering the poetic message with power and depth, activating reception, stimulating emotional interaction with the text, and cementing in the reader's or listener's mind an integrated poetic image where emotion is not separated from rhythm, nor is the idea isolated from the sound.

- **The Semantic Structure of the Poem**

The general semantic structure of the poem is based on three interconnected core axes that collectively form a comprehensive cultural vision. This vision transcends the purely evocative emotional character to present a poetic discourse of deep civilizational and substantive content. The poem is not merely an emotional expression of the self, but rather a symbolic plea that expresses a historical consciousness and a deeply rooted cultural identity, in a vital interaction between national belonging and the aspiration for renaissance.

The first of these axes is the deep belonging and overwhelming longing for Africa. The continent is manifested in the poem not merely as a geographical expanse, but as an emotional and spiritual identity rooted in the depths of the poetic self. Africa here becomes a living entity that merges with the poet's very being, becoming an inseparable part of his body, mind, and emotion, as appeared in the repeated bodily metaphors that transform manifestations of African nature into constituent elements of the poet's self. This belonging is not presented superficially but is offered as an existential, fated relationship, expressing an awareness of identity and an evocation of the roots of belonging with which the poet identifies in all the details of his life and art.

The second axis is the sharp awareness of Africa's colonial history and the explicit critique of the colonial era with all the tragedies, injustice, and hegemony it brought. The poet addresses, sometimes directly and sometimes symbolically, the images of oppression, destruction, and exploitation perpetrated by colonial powers against the continent's peoples, which often came in the name of civilization and enlightenment. The poem transforms into a discourse of resistance that exposes colonial hypocrisy and lays bare the moral duality of those powers that destroyed the cultural and social structure of African nations under false slogans. In this context, vocabulary associated with violence, plunder, and corruption is evoked to serve as a poetic record of the collective memory that refuses to forget and rejects the obliteration of the landmarks of the liberation struggle waged by the continent against the colonizer.

The third axis is futuristic in nature, as the poem entails an explicit call for progress, enlightenment, and civilizational renaissance. The poet is not content with merely reviving historical memory but looks toward the future, urging the building of a new Africa based on learning, unity, and adherence to religious values as a unifying spiritual and ethical reference. In this regard, the return to religion is not proposed as tradition or isolation but as a moral and civilizational foundation through which a comprehensive renaissance project can be achieved. Here, the call for education, awareness, and knowledge converges with the belief in the unity of African peoples as a necessary condition for overcoming dependency and achieving intellectual and cultural sovereignty.

These three axes—namely, Belonging, Resistance, and Resurgence—form, in their overlapping, a cohesive semantic fabric that reflects an integrated reformist cultural vision. The poem, in this sense, becomes a text with interwoven intellectual, historical, and social dimensions, transcending the individual emotional character to a broader level of collective and civilizational expression. It is a poem that carries the features of a cultural project, blending the nostalgia for the past, the awareness of the present, and the foresight of the future, within a synthesis that restores dignity to the African self and its capacity for renewal and resurrection from beneath the ashes of colonialism and fragmentation, to reclaim its active position in the world.

- **The Argumentative and Rhetorical Structure**

Despite the text belonging to the genre of poetry, which necessitates aesthetic and emotional characteristics, its general structure reveals a prominent argumentative and rhetorical character. This adds a functional dimension that transcends subjective expression to influence the recipient and direct them toward a specific stance or action. The poet employs a set of stylistic and rhetorical devices that emphasize this dimension and deepen its connotations.

The first of these devices is the use of address (*nidā'*), emphasis (*tawkīd*), and repetition. Phrases such as: "أيا خير أرض الله ” :" (O best land of God) and "حقيق علينا..." (It is our duty...) occur. These are linguistic forms that command attention and open an avenue for direct rhetorical communication with the recipient, whether the recipient is an individual or a group. The address carries an emotional and appealing character, while emphasis and repetition are used as mechanisms to reinforce the message and fix it in the auditory memory of the reader or listener, achieving a kind of positive urgency and an implicit call for response.

There is a noticeable shift in the poem's structure from subjective description to collective discourse. This is clearly seen in the transition from the singular first-person pronoun to the plural pronoun in phrases such as: "تعالوا لنسعى..." (Come, let us strive...). This transition is not merely a linguistic change but represents a semantic shift that

expresses the poem's move from the realm of individual revelation to the scope of collective participation, where the speaker becomes the voice of the group, and subjective feeling transforms into a shared consciousness seeking incitement and influence. In this sense, the poem becomes a tool for emotional and intellectual mobilization simultaneously.

This orientation is further enhanced by the intensive use of the imperative and supplicatory mood, as in: دعــوا الحــرب / *Da'ū al-ḥarb* (Abandon war), اســعو /*as'aw* (strive), طهّــروا /*ṭahhirū* (purify), صـلّوا /*ṣallū* (pray), سـلّم /*sallim* (grant peace). These are verbs with clear directive weight, revealing the guiding dimension in the poem. These forms are employed in a stimulating context aimed at bringing about real change, whether at the level of behavior or thought. These verbs vary between what is ethical (طهّــروا /*ṭahhirū*), social (دعوا الحرب /*da'ū al-ḥarb*), and spiritual (صـلّوا، سـلّم /*ṣallū, sallim*), which indicates the comprehensiveness of the reformist vision in the poet's discourse.

Considering the above, it can be said that the argumentative and rhetorical structure in the poem does not come at the expense of its poetic quality; rather, it complements it within a framework of balance between artistic aesthetics and the missionary function. The poet does not merely provoke emotion but skillfully directs it toward a lofty goal: awareness, reform, and the call for change, thereby leveraging the energy of poetry as a tool for mass influence capable of combining beauty and persuasion.

Conclusion

In concluding this research, which addressed national identity and belonging in Arab-African poetry through the study of Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry in light of Cultural Criticism methodologies, it can be stated that the analyzed poem represents a telling model of how African national consciousness integrates with the Arab-Islamic reference, to form a multi-layered poetic vision that combines memory, history, culture, language, and belonging.

First, the study reveals that Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry does not present identity as a static or closed concept, but as a dynamic structure in which several elements interact: awareness of African history, a sense of belonging to the Arab-Islamic world, longing for the land, and the representation of shared values that shaped the consciousness of African societies through centuries of civilizational overlap. Through his poem, the poet highlighted how identity is not just geographical belonging but a symbolic space that stores and reproduces collective memory through poetic discourse, which makes poetry an effective means for cementing national consciousness.

From the perspective of Cultural Criticism, the poem emerged as a counter-discourse that re-reads the relationship between Africa and the outside world, deconstructs the stereotypes attached to the "Black Continent" by Orientalist or colonial

writings, and reclaims its capacity to produce civilization and knowledge. The poet's evocation of African land symbols and the spiritual connection with his homeland falls within a broad cultural project aimed at restoring dignity to the African self and highlighting its place in human history. This aligns with one of the most important functions of Cultural Criticism: deconstructing symbolic authority and highlighting the voices marginalized in dominant discourses.

The analysis also showed that the poet builds his national belonging through a poetic language charged with symbols and connotations, where the vocabulary of land, mother, blood, and roots is repeated to reflect the poet's need for continuous connection with his homeland, despite the circumstances of geographical or cultural alienation. This language allowed the poet to transform the individual experience into a collective one, to which the African reader connects through shared spaces of memory and meaning. This tendency reveals a deep appreciation for the effectiveness of poetry in shaping public consciousness and in leading projects of symbolic and cultural liberation.

From an artistic standpoint, the analysis showed that the poem relies on a balance between the traditional prosodic structure and modern symbolic imagination, making it a text that combines the roots of authenticity with manifestations of modernity. The poet also employed metaphor, analogy, and simile to generate new connotations related to identity and belonging, opening multiple dimensions for the reader to understand the African self and its anxieties.

The research concludes that Ibrahim al-Malī's poetry represents an extension of a broad Arab African poetic discourse that sought to express a new national consciousness founded amidst major political and cultural transformations witnessed by Africa during the last two centuries. This consciousness does not contradict the Arab-Islamic affiliation but interacts with it within an integrative formula that reflects the nature of civilizational overlap in the region.

Based on the foregoing, the study of Arab African poetry—especially in West Africa—from the perspective of Cultural Criticism is not merely a literary reading but a cognitive necessity for recovering the history of African identity in its linguistic and symbolic manifestations. Moreover, the poetry of Ibrahim al-Malī provides rich material for understanding how national identity is formed in contemporary consciousness, and how poetry reformulates the relationship between the individual and the group, the self and the homeland, and the past and the present.

Thus, this research opens new horizons for scholars in approaching Arab African poetry as a complex cultural field and confirms the need for more studies that utilize the tools of Cultural Criticism in reading the poetic discourses that contributed to the construction of identity and belonging throughout Africa's literary history.

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EPIPHANY AND EMANATION: NEO-PLATONIC ASCENT AND THE MODERNIST CRISIS OF TRUTH IN JAMES JOYCE'S "ARABY"

Emrah IŞIK[1]

Introduction

Modernism came about as a literary and philosophical crisis of truth. It was marked by a split between the world of appearances and the intangible scope of meaning that had always given people a sense of certainty in their religious beliefs. James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) is a good example of this tension. It is a collection of short stories that look at paralysis, perception, and the loss of transcendence in the spiritual restlessness of early twentieth-century Dublin. Considering all the stories in the collection, "Araby" most clearly shows the modernist feeling of wanting something but not being able to get it. The protagonist's journey from North Richmond Street to the bazaar serves as a secular analogue to the Neo-Platonic ascent to the One, occurring in a context where the divine is notably absent. Joyce adapts the Plotinian and Augustinian dialectic of illumination to the psychological sphere of aesthetic experience, presenting the failed epiphany as a modernist analogue to mystical revelation. This study argues that "Araby" stages the Neo-Platonic structure of emanation and return as a modernist allegory of truth, in which the protagonist's longing for beauty, subsequent disillusionment, and eventual self-awareness constitute a secular reinterpretation of the soul's ascent toward the divine.

Neo-Platonic Context and The Modernist Recasting of Truth

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was a big epistemological crisis because positivism and materialism weakened the metaphysical truths that had always been part of Western thought. Modernist authors did not merely dismiss spirituality; rather, they transformed it into an aesthetic form of revelation. As Morris Beja asserts, "an epiphany is a sudden spiritual manifestation-a showing forth, an illumination, a revelation" (1971, 15). In this respect, Joyce's works mostly seeks an epiphany of meaning in the midst of the profane, recovering transcendence through immanence. This effort to restore vision amid fragmentation mirrors the Neo-Platonic conception of truth as an ascent from the shadows of the sensible world to the unity of the One. In *The Enneads*, Plotinus underlines that "the Intellectual-Imagination and Intellectual-Memory, distinct from the lower Imagination and Memory, deal with the intellectual element of sensation, presenting sensations, as it were, to the higher faculty for

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judgement and for the uses of the semi-divine life of philosophic Man" (1991, 41). For Joyce, literature assumes the role of this faculty, operating as a secular analogue to contemplation and enabling art to penetrate surfaces in pursuit of spiritual form. Hugh Kenner famously described *Dubliners* as "a moral history" (1956, 48) of Ireland, yet it also constitutes a metaphysical anatomy of perception. Joyce structures "Araby" as a pilgrimage from ignorance to vision, superimposing a Neo-Platonic topography onto the modern cityscape. The protagonist's environment referring to "the other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces" (Joyce, 1993, 17) evokes the material and fallen realm, casting Dublin as an analogue to Plato's cave. The narrator's longing for Mangan's sister operates as the soul's "Eros" for the Beautiful, recalling "Diotima's" ladder in the *Symposium* (Plato, 2022, 114-116). The journey to the bazaar becomes a figurative ascent through desire toward illumination; however, the narrative concludes not with transcendence but with irony, as vision collapses into darkness. This dialectic of ascent and disillusion exemplifies what Jean-Michel Rabaté names "Joyce's negative theology" (2004, 80), revelation as the recognition of the void.

To discuss "Araby" through a Neo-Platonic perspective is not to impose metaphysics upon modernism but to trace the genealogy of Joyce's concept of epiphany. In *Stephen Hero*, Joyce implies defines epiphany as a "spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. […] it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (1963, 211). The phrase "spiritual manifestation" situates Joyce within a lineage extending from Plotinus through Augustine to Renaissance humanism. In *The Enneads*, Plotinus conceives beauty as an emanation from the One, perceivable through intellectual vision: "But how are you to see into a virtuous Soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look; and if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful" (1991, 191). The movement inward toward the divine image becomes, in Augustine's *Confessions*, the path to truth: "I entered even into my inward self, Thou being my Guide: and able I was, for Thou wert become my Helper" (154). At the end of "Araby, "Joyce's protagonist goes through a similar inward change, where self-recognition replaces divine light.

Marsilio Ficino also changes this tradition to fit with how we think about beauty today. Ficino regards the soul's rise as a desire for divine beauty that is shown through physical things. "The vapors of the eyes are subject to the emotions of the soul" (2004, 195). This metaphor is shown by the main character's gaze at Mangan's sister: "Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side" (1993, 17). Joyce employs modern irony to criticise Ficino's idealisation, which claims that vision and desire combine to form a spiritual power. The protagonist's

selfish mind alters his perspective on the girl, rendering her both sacred and false. This situation reveals what the soul desires in a world that has lost its magic.

Nothing remarkable happens in Joyce's Dublin, and none of the characters, especially the main character, attain any spiritual insight. The first paragraph of 'Araby' lays the foundation for the story's deeper meaning:"North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free" (1993, 17). The word 'blind' can have both a literal and a figurative meaning. This reminds us of Plato's cave and Augustine's idea that sin is ignorance. The narrator's house, which has "Air, musty" and the "waste room behind the kitchen," (1993, 17) shows how Dublin's spiritual life has gotten worse.

Plotinus says that "the Soul that breaks away from this source of its reality, in so far as it is not perfect or primal, is, as it were, a secondary, an image, to the loyal Soul. By its falling-away, and to the extent of the fall, it is stripped of Determination, becomes wholly indeterminate, sees darkness" (1991, 197). In the narrative of Joyce, every outward action signifies darkness and corruption. For example, the market voices cry "O'Donovan Rossa," (1993, 18) and the boy meets "the drunken men and bargaining women" (1993, 18). The city represents the material disorder that the Neo-Platonic soul strives to transcend. But unlike Plotinus's universe, Joyce's Dublin doesn't really have an ascent; the only way to get to illumination is through the twisted perspectives of desire.

The narrator begins to grow by first understanding what love means to him. He uses religious words to describe how much he likes Mangan's sister: "Her name was like a call to all my foolish blood" (1993, 18). The word "summons" brings to mind Augustine's "Spirit of God" (321) in *Confessions*. "Foolish blood" can mean both sexual follishness and spiritual passion. His daily routines, like waiting for her to show up and following her from the door to the point where they part, are like the Neo-Platonic lover's journey from physical to spiritual beauty. Joyce's use of language transforms adolescent desire into the level of divine devotion.

The main character's desire to go to the bazaar and give a gift shows the eros of the soul looking for union with the divine. He envisions himself as a knight-pilgrim with a secularized mysticism: "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes" (1993, 18). This picture combines the Platonic idea of rising up with the Christian idea of chivalric mysticism. However, the grandiosity of his vision reveals that it is self-referential. Joyce's epiphanic moments were, as Maud Ellmann puts it, its self-referential character. As Maud Ellmann notes, Joyce's epiphanic moments were " the sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing" (1982, 83). In this context, the self mistakes its own projection for divine truth. The boy's gaze at Mangan's sister becomes a mirror in which he sees not her reality, but the idealized image of his own soul.

The bazaar, called "Araby," is simultaneously exotic and illusory, representing an imagined Orient and serving as a marketplace of the mind. The term itself brings to mind the East, where the sun rises, which is a sign of light and illumination. The protagonist's determination to reach the bazaar, it despite problems like his uncle's being late, the slow train, and the dark night is like how the soul has to work hard to get to the spheres. Joyce calls this kind of inner monologue "I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: O love! O love!" (1993, 18) that brings to mind Plotinus's description of the soul as "longing for unison" (1991, 445).

The train ride, which goes through "ruinous houses" (1993, 20) and "dark dripping gardens," (1993, 17) marks a shift from everyday life to a moment of reflection. Joyce, on the other hand, Joyce challenges this sense of mystery by using realism. The bazaar appears ordinary, is about to close, and lightened by nearly all the stalls… in darkness" (1993, 20). The merchants' voices seem unimportant, and the goods are not special. As a result, what could have been a sacred journey becomes just a routine task. Even though the revelation is disappointing, this sense of loss is where modernist truth appears. As Kearney explains, Joyce's epiphany first takes the reader "to an unreal mythic world of fusion and immanence" and then "leads us to the absence of God" (2003, 34-107).

The climactic paragraph of "Araby" is one of the most famous parts of modernist prose. It is a mix of metaphysical and psychological revelation. Joyce writes, "I saw myself as a creature driven and mocked by vanity as I looked up into the darkness, and my eyes burned with pain and anger." (1993, 21) This image brings together sight and pain: the eyes burn, but the light only shows how we lie to ourselves. The Neo-Platonic ascent does not end in union with the divine, but in acknowledging its absence. The protagonist's upward gaze, which is usually a sign of the soul's ascent, becomes a sign of his fall. In this reversal, Joyce makes a modernist change that makes it impossible to tell the difference between enlightenment and disillusionment. Augustine characterized conversion as the soul orienting itself towards God's light; Joyce substitutes God with the self and grace with awareness of vanity. Thus, the epiphany represents an inversion of Plotinian ecstasy. The narrator's "anguish and anger" (1993, 21) signify the disintegration of ideal form into the material, a progression into self-awareness that is simultaneously ethical and aesthetic. The truth that was found is the truth of limits.

Joyce's adaptation of the Neo-Platonic ascent into a psychological drama aligns with his overarching aesthetic theory. Stephen Dedalus describes art as the way that sense reveals the divine in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is similar to what Ficino said in 2004, when he said that beauty in the visible world is a reflection of "the total perfection of being which is God" (97). However, Stephen also says that the artist must stay "within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence"

(Joyce, 1993, 166). The paradox that simultaneously expresses both the existence and non-existence of the divine reflects the tension between Plotinus' emanation of forms and the indescribability of the One. In modernism, truth is found not in metaphysical certainty but in aesthetic perception. This style is clearly seen in "Araby" through transitions from light to darkness, silence to noise, and interior to exterior spaces. The narrative structure presents reflections that transform spiritual experience into physical form, offering a model for Neo-Platonic mental faculties. The burning eyes at the end of the story do not symbolise blindness. Thus, they represent the transformation of those within, beyond the painful openness and fragility of truth. The final darkness in the narrative reveals the purpose of the reversal of the divine light motif.

Although Joyce denied organised religion, his narrative style was deeply influenced by religious themes.The absence of God in "Araby" paradoxically signifies a form of presence, like the "via negativa" (the negative way) in Christian mysticism (Versluis, 2016, 322). Augustine's *Confessions* says, "Thou wert more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest" (68). The protagonist's inward turn at the conclusion of "Araby" exemplifies the paradox in which the absence of God is internalized, manifesting as heightened self-awareness. Richard Kearney argues that modernism requires "the need to reimagine the sacred" "within a concrete historical context that follows the death of God" (201, 6-9). Joyce's narrative serves as a case study for this interpretive approach. The story's divine imagery serves as vestiges of a repressed theology. Still, these things keep revealing things, turning the ordinary into a place where signs of the sacred can be seen. Ficino calls this "divine light" (2004, 179) that passes through matter, and Joyce calls it an epiphany. The protagonist's last vision, "I saw myself" (1993, 21), means both a fall and reaching a goal. As self-awareness takes the place of divine knowledge, the essence of revelation mystically persists. The ascent of the spirit ends in turning inward, which shows that God is not there. This inward focus transforms theology into a phenomenological perspective. "Araby" deals with metaphysical knowledge and also propelled the readers to realise that the value of their data is increasingly compromised. Augustine's views did not require either intellectual compromise or the acceptance of sin as a relationship with humility. Similarly, the main character's acceptance of his pride is a coherent self-assessment. His "anguish and anger" (1993, 21) are aimed at both his own delusion and the perceived banality of existence. In conclusion, Joyce's protagonist achieves a kind of salvation through knowledge, despite its painful nature; knowledge thus replaces traditional salvation. The final glance into darkness has a moral significance; it is a modern form of repentance and an acceptance of how limited human beings are. Plotinus says that the soul is purified through contemplation, but Joyce uses irony instead of contemplation. Even when faced with disappointing realities, moral responsibility clearly demands recognition. The hero's dark vision represents a moment of moral

awakening and is the first step towards authentic understanding. This enlightenment is not a mystical union; it is an acceptance of the constraints imposed by desire. With this change, Joyce transforms the meaning of the concept of 'reality' from an ontological idea to an ethical one. The Neo-Platonic structure of 'Araby,' consisting of processes of expansion, ascent, and transformation, is embedded within the story. The transition from darkness to light and then back to darkness forms a circular pattern similar to Plotinus' concept of 'emanation and return' (1991, 35). This schema suggests that the One emanates its existence outward, while all beings turn inward through contemplation. Joyce's story also progresses from the ordinary to the extraordinary and then back to self-awareness.

Kenner refers to this phenomenon as an "epiphany of experiential constriction" (1955, 363). Revelation lies not in content, but in form. The manner in which the story is told resembles the manner in which events unfold. The Neo-Platonic One persists not as a metaphysical structure in modernism, but as an aesthetic framework characterised by unity through fragmentation. Rabaté underlines that Joyce uses a "form characterized by incompletion" (2004, 163). The rhythm of the sentences, the interplay of light and shadow, and the final shift in light reveal the dialectic of expansion and return in 'Araby'. Joyce's art is not religious, but it is still metaphysical. The protagonist's final nightmare remains an important part of memory. From this perspective, modernism appears to be a haunted, nostalgic metaphysics, haunted by the ghost of the One that is not there. The influence of 'Araby' extends beyond Joyce and the broader modernist movement. Like Eliot's *Prufrock* and Yeats's *Journey to Byzantium*, Joyce's story transforms metaphysical desire into art. In each work, the Neo-Platonic ascent serves as a reflection on the difficulties of attaining transcendence in contemporary times.

Eliot's "overwhelming question" (Balachandra, 1976) and Yeats's "soul clap its hands and sing" in *Sailing to Byzantium* both express the same back-and-forth between desire and despair. Joyce distinguishes himself through his ironic style. By finding meaning in failure, he rejects both transcendence and nihilism. The protagonist's final darkness is not entirely negative; it makes room for vision. Plotinus stated that the One is more than mere existence and knowledge. On the other hand, Joyce's modernist One signifies nothing and can only be understood through art. In this respect, 'Araby' resembles Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, where truth is always unattainable. The Neo-Platonic legacy still lives on, but not as a set of beliefs. Instead, it is a structure: the never-ending ascent of consciousness within its own labyrinth. Once its content has disappeared, modernism takes on the form of theology.

Conclusion

Joyce's "Araby" is a brilliant example of modernist realism and the quest for truth. Light arises from the darkness of real disappointment. By transforming the Neo-Platonic ascent into a story about adolescent desire, Joyce alters our way of thinking about the relationship between seeing and knowing. The story takes place on the streets of Dublin and shows how Plotinus' drama of expansion and return developed, demonstrating that metaphysical currents are always present. The protagonist's ultimate realization about himself, "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (1993, 21), sums up the modernist problem: the soul sees but no longer believes. This act of seeing brings to the fore a new form of belief in seeing itself. Augustine's introversion becomes self-awareness, Ficino's divine beauty becomes aesthetic form, and Plotinus' One becomes the elusive consistency of art. 'Araby' transforms the metaphysics of light into the phenomenology of darkness and uses the Neo-Platonic ascent as a modernist metaphor for perception. Truth continues to exist in reality, but only as a brief flash of light within the cave. This paradox contributes to the story's enduring significance. To perceive it clearly in the modern world, one must look upwards into the darkness, as exemplified by Joyce's young narrator.

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THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF THE WESTERNISM MOVEMENT IN EARLY REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY

Zafer GÜRBÜZ[1]

Introduction

Discussing the ideology of the early Republican period in Turkey involves more than describing a specific historical moment; it requires an analysis of a fundamental political and philosophical transformation concerning the source of sovereignty, the position of the sacred in political life, and the normative principles upon which social order was reconstructed. From this perspective, the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic represents not merely a change of regime, but a radical redefinition of political legitimacy. Sovereignty was detached from transcendent foundations and rearticulated on an immanent basis, while the sacred was displaced from the center of politics and public order was reorganized around a secular epistemology.

This transformation reshaped not only the institutional form of the state but also the relationship between state, society, and the individual, as well as the normative frameworks of law and collective identity. As the ummah-centered political imagination of the Ottoman order dissolved, a nation-centered political subject was constructed. The Republic thus emerged as a constitutive threshold at which a new civilizational orientation was proclaimed through deliberate ideological choices. These choices raised decisive questions regarding continuity and rupture: which elements of the Ottoman legacy were to be preserved, which were to be abandoned, and which intellectual currents would form the ideological backbone of the new state.

In this respect, early Republican ideology did not develop as a compromise among competing traditions, but through a selective process of elimination and reconstruction. Westernism and Turkism were elevated to the ideological center, while Islamism was largely excluded from the sphere of legitimate politics. This orientation was institutionalized through wide-ranging reforms in law, education, culture, and everyday life. Yet the Republic did not arise in an intellectual vacuum. Its ideological foundations were laid during the final century of Ottoman modernization, particularly through debates among Ottoman intellectuals seeking answers to the question of how the state and society could survive amid imperial decline.

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Within this context, Westernism should be understood not as superficial admiration for Europe, but as a comprehensive response to a perceived civilizational crisis. From the *Tanzimat period* onward, it evolved from a concern with technical reform into a broader project of mentality, knowledge, and moral order. Among the thinkers who articulated this project most systematically, Abdullah Cevdet and Ahmet Ağaoğlu occupy a central position. Despite their differences, both conceptualized *Westernization* as a comprehensive civilizational choice rather than a selective adaptation. This study examines their contributions in order to situate Westernism as an internally generated ideology of modernization that became institutionalized in the early Republican era.

The Intellectual Origins of Westernism in the Ottoman Context

The history of the Turkish Republic did not emerge in a historical vacuum, nor did it constitute an abrupt rupture detached from its past. On the contrary, the political, social, and intellectual transformations that rendered the Republic possible must be traced back to the structural crises of the late Ottoman Empire, its experiences of modernization, and, most notably, the intense intellectual debates that crystallized during the Second Constitutional Period. From administrative organization to legal reforms, from educational restructuring to ideals of social transformation, strong continuities can be observed between the late Ottoman era and the Republican period. This continuity is crucial for understanding Republican Westernism, as the ideological foundations of the Republic did not arise spontaneously but represented the culmination of a long-standing intellectual accumulation.

At this point, it is essential to emphasize that ideas cannot be detached from the historical, political, and social contexts in which they are produced. Intellectual formations are rarely the outcome of abstract theoretical pursuits; rather, they are responses to concrete crises, anxieties, and expectations. Ottoman modernization thought, in this sense, was shaped primarily by military defeats, administrative disintegration, and the Empire's deteriorating position within the international system. As Şükrü Hanioğlu has explicitly stated, in order to understand the ideas articulated during the late Ottoman period-particularly those emerging after the Second Constitutional Revolution-it is necessary to examine not only intellectual texts but also the political and social environments in which these texts were produced.[2]

The earliest systematic intellectual responses to modernization within the Ottoman context can be observed among the Young Ottomans. For this generation, Islam continued to function as one of the primary bonds holding the Empire together. Although the necessity of adapting to the modern world was acknowledged, Islam was still perceived as the moral and social foundation of both state and society.

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[2] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* [*Doctor Abdullah Cevdet as a Political Thinker and His Era*], İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1986, pp. 1-2.

Consequently, constitutionalism was often legitimized through Islamic references, and figures such as Namık Kemal developed a critical stance toward what they perceived as the excesses of Tanzimat-era Westernization. However, as the process of imperial disintegration intensified, this conciliatory approach gradually came under scrutiny.

By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, a critical shift occurred in Ottoman modernization debates. The central question was no longer merely how reforms should be implemented, but whether the existing social and mental structures were capable of sustaining modernization at all. This interrogation marked a new threshold in Ottoman intellectual history. As François Georgeon notes, by the time of the Second Constitutional Period, a growing number of Ottoman intellectuals had come to believe that modernization could not be achieved through technical and administrative reforms alone, but required a profound transformation of mentality itself.[3]

Within this framework, the Young Turk movement constituted a decisive turning point in Ottoman political thought. For the Young Turks, the overriding concern was identifying the most effective means of preventing the Empire's collapse. As a result, their intellectual production was shaped less by theoretical coherence than by pragmatic concerns aimed at political survival. The Imperial School of Medicine (Mekteb-i Tıbbiye) emerged as one of the most significant institutional sites where these new intellectual orientations took root. Hanioğlu demonstrates in detail that exposure to French positivist and biological materialist thought through foreign textbooks and instructors fostered a new type of intellectual who questioned the determinative role of religion in social and mental life.[4]

The modernization debates that evolved within this intellectual milieu gradually crystallized into two main approaches. As Nilüfer Göle has observed, one approach advocated constructing the future in continuity with the past, preserving cultural and moral heritage while limiting Western influence to technical and administrative domains. The other approach, by contrast, insisted that civilization constituted an indivisible whole and that genuine modernization necessitated the transformation of tradition itself.[5] Westernism emerged as the increasingly dominant and more radical articulation of this latter perspective.

The rise of Westernism in the Ottoman intellectual environment cannot be explained solely through admiration for the West. Rather, it was closely tied to diagnoses concerning the perceived backwardness of the Islamic world. Many Muslim intellectuals of the modernization period attributed societal decline to erroneous

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[3] François Georgeon, *Osmanlı-Türk Modernleşmesi 1900-1930* [*Ottoman-Turkish Modernization 1900-1930*], trans. Ali Berktay, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2023, p. 15.

[4] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, pp. 6-8.

[5] Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem* [*Modern Privacy*], İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2016, p. 51.

interpretations of Islam and the persistence of superstition. Yet, while sharing this diagnosis, they diverged sharply in their proposed remedies. Islamist thinkers sought salvation in a return to the authentic essence of religion, whereas reformist and Westernist intellectuals argued that liberation required emancipation from religion's determinative role in social and political life.[6]

Although the *National Struggle* temporarily brought together Islamist and reformist actors, this convergence proved fragile. As Murat Yılmaz has emphasized, the forced alliance between Islamists and revolutionaries dissolved rapidly once the struggle ended, giving way to a clear ideological rupture during the early Republican period.[7]

At this juncture, Westernism ceased to be merely an intellectual inclination and assumed the form of a systematic ideological project aimed at redefining civilization in its entirety. Articulated most forcefully in the circles surrounding the journal *İçtihad*, this project rejected selective modernization and insisted that Western civilization must be embraced "with its roses and its thorns".[8] Yet at this stage, Westernism had not yet crystallized around a single figure; rather, it represented a broad intellectual orientation shared by various actors committed to a comprehensive transformation of mentality.

For this reason, understanding the intellectual origins of Westernism in the Ottoman context requires first analyzing the discursive terrain that made such figures possible. Abdullah Cevdet would later emerge as one of the most consistent and radical representatives of this orientation. His thought did not constitute an abrupt break, but rather the logical outcome of a long-standing intellectual quest-a culmination that can only be properly understood once the broader context has been established.

Abdullah Cevdet: Biological Materialism, Education, and Radical Westernism

Following the Second Constitutional Period, the idea of Westernization gained an increasingly systematic, ideological, and comprehensive character within Ottoman intellectual circles. Among the most radical and theoretically coherent representatives of this orientation was Abdullah Cevdet. Earlier Westernization efforts, largely confined to military, administrative, or technical reforms, were transformed through Cevdet's intervention into a comprehensive civilizational project centered on epistemological, cultural, and mental transformation. In this respect, Cevdet's Westernism possessed a depth, continuity, and transformative ambition that cannot be reduced to conjunctural political preferences.[9]

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[6] İsmail Kara, "İslamcı Söylemin Kaynakları ve Gerçeklik Değeri" ["Sources and Factual Value of Islamist Discourse"], in Tanıl Bora & Murat Gültekin (eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık* [*Political Thought in Modern Turkey: Islamism*], Vol. 6, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005, p. 38.

[7] Murat Yılmaz, "Darbeler ve İslamcılık" ["Coups and Islamism"], in Tanıl Bora & Murat Gültekin (eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005, p. 632.

[8] Abdullah Cevdet, "Şîme-i Muhabbet," *İçtihad*, No. 89, 16 Kânûn-ı Sânî 1329 [1913], pp. 1979-1984.

[9] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, pp. 1-2.

At the core of Cevdet's intellectual framework lies the conviction that the crisis confronting Ottoman society could not be explained merely by institutional or administrative deficiencies. According to him, the fundamental problem was an epistemological rupture in the way nature, human beings, and society were conceived. Consequently, Westernization required not only the reform of institutions but also a radical transformation of modes of thinking and regimes of knowledge. As Hanioğlu has noted, Cevdet's Westernism did not constitute a reformist program seeking accommodation with existing social realities; rather, it aimed at transcending and reconstructing them in a manner that corresponds to Karl Mannheim's concept of "utopian" thought. This utopian orientation did not signify an abstract ideal projected into the future but instead implied a radical mental break involving the liquidation of the prevailing social order.[10]

One of the principal intellectual foundations of this radical transformation project was Cevdet's engagement with biological materialism. In his thought, materialism was not a metaphysical preference but an inevitable consequence of modern scientific discoveries. The influence of the German materialist philosopher Ludwig Büchner is particularly evident in this regard. Büchner regarded the materialist worldview as the logical outcome of nineteenth-century scientific progress, and Cevdet adopted a similar position, arguing that nature and humanity could only be understood within the framework of biological laws. For Cevdet, the dominance of scientific reason constituted an indispensable condition for social progress.[11]

Nevertheless, Cevdet's materialism cannot be characterized as a rigid or reductive positivism. As Şerif Mardin has emphasized, despite his strong materialist inclinations, Cevdet did not entirely dismiss the role of spirituality in social life. However, this spirituality was not to be grounded in religious institutions or traditional belief systems but rather reconstructed through ethics, aesthetics, and humanistic values. In Cevdet's view, religion had historically fulfilled certain functions in Ottoman society, yet in the modern age it had become an obstacle to progress. Accordingly, the moral and spiritual needs of modern society were to be satisfied through secular and non-religious sources.[12]

Another defining feature of Cevdet's Westernism was his insistence on viewing Western civilization as an indivisible whole. Rejecting the selective approach common among Ottoman intellectuals, often summarized by the phrase "let us take Western science while preserving our own morality," Cevdet argued that Western civilization had to be adopted "with its roses and thorns." According to him, Western technological

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[10] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, p. 403.

[11] Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri (1895-1908)* [*Political Ideas of the Young Turks (1895-1908)*], Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1964, p. 169.

[12] Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri (1895-1908)*, pp. 166-168.

and scientific superiority could not be separated from its moral and cultural foundations; Westernization therefore necessarily entailed a profound transformation at the level of values, lifestyles, and mentality.[13]

The most influential medium through which this radical Westernist vision was articulated in the public sphere was the journal İçtihad, published by Cevdet over many years. İçtihad functioned as a platform where Western thought was systematically introduced into the Ottoman intellectual field, legitimized, and placed at the center of public debate. The journal adopted a distinctly critical stance toward traditional religious authorities and reflected a clear distance from popular religious practices. At the same time, it reinforced the conviction that social progress could only be achieved under the leadership of an enlightened intellectual elite. The writings of Kılıçzade Hakkı in İçtihad, which called upon the public to listen not to "softas" and "sheikhs" but to the proponents of science, reason, and free thought, exemplify this elitist and pedagogical outlook.[14]

Education occupied a central position in Abdullah Cevdet's conception of Westernization. He regarded the elevation of cultural level as the primary condition for societal progress. In a memorandum submitted to the International Congress of Social Education held in Paris in 1900, Cevdet explicitly stated that the advancement of Turkish society was possible only through approaching the West and realizing Westernization. Education was envisioned as the most strategic instrument of this process, as social progress could not be achieved without transforming the individual's mode of thinking.[15]

In this context, the influence of Gustave Le Bon on Cevdet merits particular attention. Le Bon's emphasis on collective mentality and the psychological foundations of social behavior helps explain why Cevdet prioritized cultural and educational transformation over political reforms. For Cevdet, the internalization of modern ideas within Muslim societies could only be realized through a long-term transformation of mentality. Westernization was thus conceived not as an abrupt or superficial institutional reform but as an intergenerational project of culture and education.[16]

Within this framework, the historical significance of Cevdet should be sought not in the concrete theses he advanced during the Republican period, but in his contribution to the construction of the ideological and mental foundations that made the Republic possible. His radical Westernism generated the intellectual premises of secularism,

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[13] Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'nin Siyasi Hayatında Batılılaşma Hareketleri* [*Westernization Movements in the Political Life of Turkey*], İstanbul: Yedigün Matbaası, 1960, pp. 80-81.

[14] Kılıçzade Hakkı, *İçtihad*, No. 58, 14 March 1329 [1913].

[15] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, pp. 165-169.

[16] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, pp. 370-404.

educational reforms, and cultural transformation policies, redefining Westernization as a comprehensive civilizational project rather than a temporary political choice. This intellectual ground would later be revisited with different emphases and orientations in subsequent phases of Westernist debate, and the civilization- and society-centered Westernism of Ahmet Ağaoğlu would assume particular importance in understanding the relationship of continuity and divergence within this tradition.

Ahmet Ağaoğlu and "Üç Medeniyet" (Three Civilizations): The Construction of Westernism as a Theory of Civilization

Ahmet Ağaoğlu stands out as one of the most systematic thinkers within Ottoman-Turkish Westernism who approached the relationship with the West not merely as a matter of technical progress, institutional reform, or administrative modernization, but rather through the lenses of civilizational hierarchy, mentality, and the conception of the individual. Unlike pragmatic or selective approaches to Westernization, Ağaoğlu articulated a comprehensive civilizational choice that encompassed historical, cultural, moral, and social dimensions. In this respect, a strong continuity can be observed between his biographical experiences and his theoretical production, a feature that distinguishes his thought from both eclectic reformism and purely political Westernism.

The multilayered life trajectory that began in Azerbaijan and extended through Iran, Russia, and the Ottoman lands enabled Ağaoğlu to observe Eastern societies from within while positioning the West as a contrasting civilizational model. His intellectual formation, particularly shaped by his encounters with Russian intellectual life and his education in France, allowed him to conceptualize Western superiority not merely in terms of military power or technological advancement, but rather through mentality and the structuring of the individual. As François Georgeon emphasizes, the East-West distinction in Ağaoğlu's thought does not constitute an abstract or speculative dichotomy; it is instead grounded in lived historical, social, and political experience.[17]

This intellectual accumulation found its most systematic and condensed expression in Ağaoğlu's work *Üç Medeniyet* (Three Civilizations), written in 1919 during his exile in Malta. The text offers a comprehensive theoretical framework that analyzes the position of the Islamic world vis-à-vis the modern West not merely through political or economic power relations, but through the holistic structure of civilization itself. For Ağaoğlu, civilization cannot be reduced to science and technology alone; rather, it constitutes an organic whole that "embraces all aspects of life, from modes of thought

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[17] François Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)* [*The Origins of Turkish Nationalism: Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)*], trans. Alev Er, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2023, pp. 103-106.

and inquiry to forms of dress".[18] This definition transforms Westernization from a selective and partial adaptation into a radical transformation of mentality encompassing the entirety of social life.

At this point, Ağaoğlu explicitly rejects the synthesis-oriented approach prevalent among many Ottoman intellectuals, which advocated adopting Western science and technology while preserving indigenous moral and cultural values. According to him, civilization is "an indivisible whole," and it is therefore impossible to selectively appropriate certain elements from a civilizational sphere while rejecting others.[19] This insistence on civilizational integrity differentiates Ağaoğlu's Westernism from conciliatory reformist positions and situates it as a theoretical foundation that later nourished the radical transformation ethos of the early Republican period.

Ağaoğlu conceptualizes world history through three major civilizational spheres: Western, Islamic, and Buddha-Brahmanic. In the modern era, Western civilization occupies a victorious position, whereas the other two remain defeated. This defeat, however, is not limited to military or economic dimensions; it signifies a deeper mental and moral disintegration. According to Ağaoğlu, the decline of the Islamic world is not the result of a sudden rupture, but rather the outcome of a historical process spanning approximately three centuries.[20] Such an interpretation elevates Westernization from a voluntary or contingent choice to the level of historical necessity.

At the core of this necessity lies the individual. Ağaoğlu attributes the backwardness of Eastern societies to the suppression of the individual by religious dogmatism, entrenched social traditions, and the overwhelming authority of the state. Without the emergence of individual intellectual and moral autonomy, societal progress remains unattainable. In contrast, the superiority of Western civilization derives from the liberation of the individual, which in turn enabled material, scientific, and intellectual advancement. As Georgeon notes, in Ağaoğlu's thought the individual constitutes the central axis of civilizational progress, and Western superiority is inseparable from this emphasis on individual agency and freedom.[21]

In *Üç Medeniyet*, this argument adopts a more rigid and normative tone. Ağaoğlu contends that Western civilization has not only surpassed other civilizations but has also become the determining reference point across all domains of life. Consequently, salvation does not lie in partial imitation or cautious adaptation, but in the wholehearted acceptance of the West as it is: "If we wish to survive, we must conform

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[18] Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet* [*Three Civilizations*], İstanbul: Doğu Kitapevi, 2013, p. 19.

[19] Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet*, 2013, p. 24.

[20] Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet*, 2013, p. 23.

[21] Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri*, 2023, p. 10.

to it with our minds, our hearts, and our modes of perception".[22] This formulation provides a critical lens for understanding why early Republican reforms did not confine themselves to limited institutional adjustments but instead aimed at a comprehensive transformation of social life.

Ağaoğlu's conception of religion constitutes an integral component of this holistic Westernist perspective. Religion, in his view, fundamentally regulates the ethical relationship between the individual and God; once transferred into political and legal domains, it becomes an obstacle to social development. The progress of Western societies was made possible by the withdrawal of religion from its role as an authority shaping public order and its confinement to its proper moral sphere. According to Ağaoğlu, this process did not undermine religion; on the contrary, it purified it from its historical burdens and distortions.[23] This conceptualization of religion as an ethical rather than political authority positioned Ağaoğlu's Westernism at the intersection of civilizational theory and secular state-building, anticipating key normative assumptions of early Republican ideology.

In this respect, Ağaoğlu's Westernism constitutes one of the principal intellectual trajectories underpinning early Republican conceptions of secularism, the nation-state, and the individual. At the same time, as Georgeon has pointed out, Ağaoğlu's strong emphasis on individual freedom gradually entered into tension with the increasingly authoritarian practices of the single-party regime, rendering him not only an ideological precursor of the Republic but also an internal critic of its limits.[24]

Ağaoğlu's uncompromising defense of Westernization appears consistently throughout his Republican-era writings. Although only a short period elapsed between the initial composition of *Üç Medeniyet* and its publication as a book, Turkey underwent profound political and social transformations during these years. In the preface to the work, Ağaoğlu explicitly refers to these developments and expresses admiration and gratitude for the fact that the Westernization program he had theoretically articulated was implemented within less than a decade under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü.[25]

From Westernization to State Ideology: Secularism, the Nation-State, and Reforms

The political and social horizon of modern Turkey emerged not through an abrupt rupture following the proclamation of the Republic, but rather through the convergence of Westernist intellectual currents shaped during the Second

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[22] Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet*, 2013, p. 25.

[23] Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet*, 2013, pp. 40-42.

[24] François Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)*, 2023, pp. 117-119.

[25] Ağaoğlu, *Üç Medeniyet*, 2013, p. 13.

Constitutional Period with state power. This continuity can be clearly traced in the writings of Cevdet from the early Republican years, texts that explicitly articulate an imagination of modern Turkey. Cevdet's conception of modernization, which he famously described as a "very wakeful sleep," points to a Republican vision that had not yet materialized institutionally but had already been constructed at the level of thought. As Bernard Lewis has underlined, Republican reforms largely consisted of the implementation, through political authority, of modernization projects that had been formulated in the late Ottoman period.[26]

In the Ottoman political and social order, Islam functioned not merely as a belief system but as a constitutive element shaping law, morality, and social hierarchy. As Şerif Mardin observes, religion in Ottoman society was "embedded in the spirit of the laws".[27] With the advent of the Republic, this constitutive position underwent a radical transformation. Religion was no longer defined as a foundational principle determining the social order, but was instead reclassified as a secondary and superstructural element. This shift signified not only an institutional separation but also a comprehensive ideological intervention aimed at reconstructing the system of social values.

At this juncture, Cevdet's understanding of Westernization assumes particular importance for grasping the intellectual background of Republican reforms. For Cevdet, Western superiority did not lie solely in technology, but in scientific mentality, moral codes, and cultural values, all of which he regarded as indispensable elements that had to be transferred to Ottoman society. He adopted biological materialism as a scientific framework for explaining backwardness and argued that religious thought, in this context, had become an obstacle to social progress.[28] That Cevdet was able to articulate these views more openly and comfortably after the proclamation of the Republic indicates the absence of a serious ideological conflict between his thought and the new regime. Indeed, the uninterrupted publication of İçtihad during the Republican period stands as a significant indicator of this intellectual compatibility.[29]

Ağaoğlu's thought represents another crucial line along which Westernism intersected with Republican ideology. Ağaoğlu approached the West not merely as an institutional model, but as a civilizational reference point essential for individual emancipation, political virtue, and the reconstruction of social morality. His emphasis on political virtue, inherited from Montesquieu, played a decisive role in his critiques

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[26] Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu* [*The Emergence of Modern Turkey*], trans. Metin Kıratlı, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1984.

[27] Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset: Makaleler 3* [*Religion and Politics in Turkey: Essays 3*], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017, p. 10.

[28] Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi*, p. 370.

[29] Hanioğlu, 1986, p. 385.

of authoritarian tendencies in the post-Republican period. In this respect, Ağaoğlu's Westernism differed from that of Cevdet by offering not only a scientistic and secular transformation, but also a normative framework aimed at re-establishing political morality.

The principle of secularism, which constituted one of the cornerstones of the Republic, derives its meaning from the intersection of these two Westernist intellectual trajectories. As Nuray Mert has noted, secularism emerged in the late Ottoman period as part of the idea of "saving the country," and was later transformed into a clear and explicit principle of the state with the Republic.[30] In this sense, secularism did not simply signify the exclusion of religion from the political sphere, but rather the limitation of religion's determining role over the social order.

The rigid implementation of secularism by the Kemalist elite was largely motivated by the perception of Islam as a potential counter-ideology. As Binnaz Toprak has pointed out, many of the reforms carried out in the early Republican years were aimed less at structural transformation than at reshaping the system of social values.[31] From this perspective, reforms concerning dress, the hat, and the alphabet can be interpreted as instruments serving the symbolic construction of a Western identity.

The prominence of history and language policies in the process of nation-state building also formed part of this ideological orientation. Efforts to create a shared national consciousness necessitated a distanced relationship with the Ottoman-Islamic past, a void that was sought to be filled through an emphasis on pre-Islamic Turkish history. The establishment of the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Society, along with the development of the Sun-Language Theory, functioned as institutional tools of this new historical narrative.[32]

In this context, Cevdet's critique of religion and Ağaoğlu's moral-political Westernism nourished the ideological framework of Republican reforms from different angles. While Cevdet positioned religion as the primary cause of backwardness, Ağaoğlu tended not to exclude religion outright but to redefine it as an element incompatible with the modern political order. The tension between these two approaches renders it necessary to consider together both the harsh secular practices of the early Republic and its concurrent search for moral and political legitimacy.

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[30] Nuray Mert, "Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Laiklik ve Karşı Laikliğin Düşünsel Boyutu" ["The Intellectual Dimension of Secularism and Anti-Secularism in Republican Turkey"], in Tanıl Bora & Murat Gültekin (eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, vol. 2: Kemalizm [*Political Thought in Modern Turkey, Vol. 2: Kemalism*], İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p. 199.

[31] Binnaz Toprak, "Türkiye'de Dinin Denetim İşlevi" ["The Regulatory Function of Religion in Turkey"], in Ersin Kalaycıoğlu & Ali Yaşar Sarıbay (eds.), *Türkiye'de Politik Değişim ve Modernleşme* [*Political Change and Modernization in Turkey*], İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2000, p. 392.

[32] Toprak, 2000, p. 392.

These debates demonstrate that Westernism in the Republican period functioned not merely as a strategy of modernization, but as a decisive intellectual foundation in the shaping of state ideology. At the same time, the internal differences and tensions within this foundation require separate consideration in order to fully understand both the direction and the limits of Republican reforms.

Conclusion

This study has approached Westernism not merely as a set of reforms or a collection of institutional transformations, but as a long-term intellectual and ideological trajectory that shaped the political and conceptual horizon of modern Turkey. The political order established with the proclamation of the Republic did not emerge from an abrupt rupture; rather, it crystallized through the convergence of Westernist debates formed during the late Ottoman period with state power. Within this framework, Westernism functioned as a comprehensive civilizational discourse through which fundamental notions such as progress, legitimacy, morality, and identity were redefined.

The intellectual positions of Cevdet and Ağaoğlu demonstrate clearly that Westernism did not constitute a homogeneous ideological formation. Cevdet's radical and scientistic Westernism conceptualized religion primarily as an obstacle to social progress and framed modernization as an unavoidable civilizational necessity grounded in biological materialism. This perspective provided an important intellectual backdrop for the rigid secular reforms of the early Republican era. In contrast, Ağaoğlu's Westernism was structured around the emancipation of the individual, political virtue, and moral autonomy, interpreting Western civilization not merely through its technical superiority but as a normative model centered on a distinct conception of the individual and society.

The intersection of these two intellectual trajectories shaped the core foundations of Republican ideology. In this context, secularism did not signify solely the separation of religion and state, but rather a profound transformation of mentality in which the constitutive role of religion in organizing social order was fundamentally restricted. Reforms in language, history, education, and culture during the nation-state-building process complemented this transformation at both symbolic and practical levels. As a result, a secular, Western-oriented social imagination was constructed through a deliberate distancing from the Ottoman-Islamic past.

Nevertheless, the transformation of Westernism into a state ideology also generated significant internal tensions. The ideal of the free, rational individual often conflicted with centralized and disciplinary political practices, while reforms carried out in the name of modernization frequently assumed the character of social engineering. This

tension rendered visible not only the transformative but also the constraining dimensions of Westernism within the Republican experience.

In conclusion, Westernism in the Turkish context cannot be understood as a simplistic imitation of the West nor merely as a technical modernization strategy. Rather, it functioned as a comprehensive intellectual framework that redefined political authority, social values, and the conception of the individual. The ideas articulated by thinkers such as Abdullah Cevdet and Ahmet Ağaoğlu remain central for understanding both the possibilities and the limits of Republican ideology. This intellectual legacy continues to inform contemporary debates on secularism, identity, and state-society relations, underscoring the enduring relevance of Westernism as a formative yet contested paradigm in modern Turkish political thought.

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