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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ANALYTICAL ACCOUNT OF CHAOUI IDENTITY.

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Abstract

Cross-World cultural studies refer to the complexity and the diversity of language and ethnic identity. Language and its culture are a complex, multidimensional construct that can be studied on several levels: international, national, regional, and organizational (Shachaf, 2008). According to Norton (1997), “an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space” (p.410). Indeed, understanding concepts like identity and culture cannot be solely achieved through tracing back their origin in past historical events and archives. Next to these useful sources of information, one has to critically look into how pre-established truths have been deliberately used as subversions to alienate and acculturate linguistic and ethnic identities (Laroche, Kim and Hui, 1997). This is how fake cultural identities have been pre-fabricated and deep harmful conflicts and contradictions have been created to weaken the personality of the individual and to corrupt the social collective identity. This was the case in many countries like the USA, Canada, and Australia. Algeria is no exception. Our paper seeks not only to highlight ambiguous concepts, but to attempt to come face-to-face with our realities, as well. Furthermore, we strongly believe that it is high time for all Algerians to know who they are and what they are to live together as one people, one nation, in one country as patriots of different origins, but on the top of all as Algerians first. This might be a sound and pertinent far-reaching aim.

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Introduction:-

The core values and norms of national culture and identity are framed by the perceptions of native citizens. However, the Algerian rich cultural landscape portrays attributes of diversity and complexity of language and ethnic identity. Undoubtedly, one’s culture is an enduring paragon for every individual in so far as it takes him through the dimness to the break of the day. Culture implants exuberance and vigor both in the mind of people and in the body of the families, schools, colleges, states, and so forth. Moreover, it gives concrete prospects and humane plausible answers for dilemmas. It is, almost, indubitably the soul of the nation.

To put it plainly, as a vector for homogeneity and diversity, it is the thing that gets us to the completing line on such a variety of extreme issues inside present-day social societies (prejudice, intolerance, bigotry, violence, dismissal of differences, and undermining of identity (Guerroua, 2015).

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Both French and post-independence Algerian leaders promulgated a simplistic, limited definition of the Algerian identity. These decisions were directed, eventually, by perusing ideologies connected with colonization and Pan-Arabism, marginalizing other key basics about Algerian identity. Thence, both the colonizer and the government leaders were unable to adequately uphold force to vying cultural, linguistic, and ethnic facets for Algerian identity against alternate (Bekkai, 2015). This system engendered an absolute amalgam vis-à-vis other dialects, especially Tamazight and the Chaoui dialect. Tamazight was scarcely instructed until the aftermath of the 1980s. Although Algerian state rulers have eagerly yearned a sui generis policy to maintain a unified vernacular identity for the nation, many Algerians feel bewildered vis-à-vis who they are. They tend to ask themselves “Are we Arabs, Berbers (Amazigh), or just Algerians?” From this platform, this paper attempts to shed light on some opaque concepts related to culture and identity with the purpose of showing the essence of what it means to be Algerian. Is it related to ideological, ethnic, cultural or linguistic attributes?

The Essence of Identity:-

Over the recent years, researchers working within a momentous body for social sciences and humanities fields have taken an extraordinary enthusiasm towards inquiries concerning identity. In political science, for instance, we discover the idea of “identity” during the focus for enthusiastic spirited discussions clinched alongside each main subfield. For comparative politics, “identity” takes a focal part in debates related to patriotism and ethnic conflicts (Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 1991; Deng, 1995; Laitin, 1999). Within international relations, the concept of “state identity” represents a core factor for constructivist critiques about realism and analyses about state prepotency and supreme power (Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1999; Katzenstein, 1996; Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996; Biersteker and Weber, 1996). With respect to political theory, inquiries related to “identity” mark various contentions with respect to gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in connection to radicalism and its alternatives (Young, 1990; Connolly, 1991; Kymlicka, 1995; Miller, 1995; Taylor, 1989). In spite of this unfathomably expanded and broad-ranging concern towards “identity”, the idea itself remains problematic and intriguing (Fearon, 1999). In this account, thence, we attempt to portray the essence of “identity” and relevant concepts.

Identity, literally as taken from the Merriam-Webster’s Learner Online Dictionary (2016), comes from “middle French *identité*, from late Latin *identitat* or *identitas* probably from Latin *identidem* repeatedly contraction of *idem et idem*, literally same and same”. Identity refers to “who someone is: the name of a person, his qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others”. In Dictionary.com (2016), the term identity started to be used from 1560-70 to mean “*ident* or *idem*”. It refers to “the state or fact of remaining the same one or ones, as under varying aspects or conditions. Identity highlights the condition of being oneself and characterises who a person is or what a thing is. It also distinguishes a person thanks to his qualities, and beliefs.. In Cambridge Online Dictionary (2016), identity refers to “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others”.

Based on some conventional definitions taken from political science and international relations, identity has been qualified as:

1. Identity is “People’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others.” (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p.2)
2. Identity refers to “the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture.” (Deng, 1995, p.1)
3. Identity is considered as “the way in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.” (Jenkins, 1996, p.4)
4. For Bloom (1990), “national identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – internationalized the symbols of the nation.” (p.52)
5. According to Kowert and Legro (1996), “identities are [...] prescriptive representations of political actors themselves and of their relationships to each other.” (p.453)
6. Hall (1989), quoted in Fearon (1999, p.5), defines identity as “a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the other to oneself.”

The extensiveness, complexity, and variations among these conceptualizations are really distinctive. This shows the multidimensional perceptions that identity could denote. Nonetheless, the working definition adhered among all in this account is that identity, on the one hand, could refer to individuals’ personal attributes, but on the other hand, it is constructed and represented through personality, ethnicity, and culture of individuals within temporal and spatial contexts.

Algeria's Unique and Diverse Culture:-

Algeria is of mixed ancestral heritage, mainly of Berber or Arab antecedents, but also with descendants of Europeans (such as the French or Spanish) and Sub-Saharan Africans. Algeria's culture is strongly influenced by the country's neoteric history, as well as other aspects such as their literature, music, arts, crafts and religion. Nine out of ten people live in the northern coastal region, where the major towns and cities are situated. In the Saharan regions of the south, some communities remain nomadic or semi-nomadic, such as the *Tuaregs* and *Gnawa*. Most people speak a North African dialect of Arabic known as *darja*. But education and the written language are in classical Arabic (Our Africa, 2016). Arabic is Algeria's idiopathic language and is used by around 82% of the population. The French colonialism experienced by the nation in the past has resulted in French being the second language of many educated Algerians, and English is very scarcely used. Many Algerians, also, speak distinctive vernaculars of Berber. It is known that the past of most countries may instigate and spur their culture, and this is an absolute truth of Algeria. Algeria, also, is the melting pot fruit of many ethnic groups that, definitely, contribute to its diverse and fascinating culture. Islam is the official religion of Algeria and the majority of Algerians are Muslims. Since the departure of the French, Christianity is a secondary religion. Approximately one percent of Algeria's populace is Jewish (Algeria.com, 2016). Algeria has a thriving music, literature, and handicrafts industry. All these attributes worked prominently in creating the charming richness and diversity of the Algerian culture and identity.

Understanding the Causes of the Amalgam:-

Cultural diversity has played a nucleus role in shaping the identity of the Algerian nation. Nonetheless, many Algerians, especially after the ordeal civil war of the black decade, think that they have a fragmented, fractured, antagonistic heritage or as Sophie Bessis, the Franco-Tunisian sociologist, put it a "national heritage of pain" (Guerroua, 2015, p.1). These pessimistic ideologies worked negatively towards creating a sense of strain, discomfort, and burden within the relationship between culture and identity. Algeria, unfortunately, for a decade suffered from the political and ideological conflict that weakened the cultural and societal bonds and, mainly, created a sense of an identity crisis. Algerians during the 1990s experienced hardships, cultural and ideological misunderstanding of youth concerns, "Hogra!" (Despise in the Algerian colloquial dialect), and mainly a destruction of the democratic fervor. Algeria for many years has suffered from colonial exploitation and violence (Guerroua, 2015) which led to a twisted sense of culture and identity.

With respect to language, Algerians consider that it is inextricably linked with the conflicting visions of their country's identity. Is it Arab, Islamic, Berber, or as some politicians would put it Mediterranean? The Economist (1998) contended that "Algeria may be all of the above, but 36 years after the departure of the French colonizers who had forcibly imposed their own language and culture, the country is still struggling to reconcile the various aspects of its personality" (p.1-2). For instance, the Chaoui mother tongue, Berber, is an oral language still in the process of standardization struggled to achieve its prominent status as an official language because this latter is considered by opponents to be mainly "unsuitable for knowledge and science" (The Economist, 1998, p.2). In fact, besides the former reasons, this has generated a sense of disruption of identity and an unconscious life.

Nonetheless, because "the logic of identity is the logic of the true self" (SUNY ONEONTA, 2016, p.3), we believe that it is high time for Algerians to know who they are and what they are to live together as one people, one nation, in one country as patriots of different origins, but on the top of all as Algerians first. Identity and culture are, above all, an idea to think of. Verily, it is a stigma to neglect and be oblivious towards our personal and national identity. So, it is due time to recognize our character flaws and honestly consider criticizing ourselves.

Being An Algerian Chaoui:-

Based in the main district of the Aurès Mountains in Eastern Algeria, the Chaouis are an indigenous group of Berber individuals whose name is originated from the Berber word alluding to the national God of the Numidians – the Berber tribes who lived in Numidia, an area including a huge part of North-Eastern Algeria and into cutting edge Tunisia between 202 BC and 46 BC. The name Chaoui is taken from the Berber word 'Ich', signifying "horn" and is a reference to the Numidian God Amon, who is depicted as having a human head with the horns of a ram. In cutting edge Algeria, during the aftermath of the nation's independence, the Chaouis have remained essentially in the district of the Aurès Mountains – an expansion of the Atlas mountain range. They are found in Khenchela, Batna, Sétif, Souk Ahras, Tébessa, Oum El Bouaghi and in the Northern part of Biskra. They talk the Chaoui dialect, likewise alluded to as Shawiya, Shawia, Tachawit and Tachauith. With more than two million speakers, they are the second greatest Berber-dialect speaking group in Algeria. As primeval dialect which does not have words to

depict some present day concepts, Chaoui speakers frequently utilize French, Arabic or English where no Chaoui word exists. Up to this point, the Chaoui dialect was not a composed dialect and was not part of the educational agenda in Algeria. This has apparently begun to change as individuals need to protect their legacy, including keeping the first type of the Chaoui dialect unadulterated (Algeria.com, 2016).

Being an Algerian Chaoui, we believe, has nothing to do with materialistic features and traits. It is more fundamental; it abides by the values of individuals, and it is more a reflection of a "Savoir Vivre". Thus, the following attributes could be coined to what it means to be an Algerian Chaoui:

1. Being a very respectable person no matter where or with whom you live.
2. Respecting other's differences and truly applying what is said in our religion: "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion" (Disbelievers: (El Kafirun) Verse, 6, The Holy Quran).
3. Knowing the history of our culture, the greatest people of our history, and using them as an example to try to make a change in this world as they did before.
4. Always doing what is best for you and for the others too; individualism is very damaging to our nation, and we are not going anywhere by staying hidden in our homes ignoring what the world is going through or even, what our Algerian brothers and sisters are enduring.
5. Be yourself, no matter what to do, and do not try to imitate other cultures, thinking that they represent modernity.
6. Help each other for God sake and represent our Algerian hospitality and charity spirit by accepting our differences and the other.

In brief, the Algerian Chaoui is free, tolerant and respectful of otherness. He remains very proud of his identity characteristics and close to his individuality.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, it is evident from the former account that identity and culture issues engendered extremism or exclusion: Islamism, Arabism, Berberism and other things. Thus, to put an end to the ideological and political amalgams and perceive the Chaoui identity as a focal constituent of the Algerian common wealth and national heritage, this paper has attempted to enlighten local and broad awareness about the necessity of accepting our differences as idiosyncrasies of what it means to be Algerian. It has been summoned that to accept the Chaoui, or Berber, or any other quality of the Algerian cultural heritage, each individual needs to be aware, wise and mature enough to reconcile with all the diverse multiplicities that make up our shared identity and heritage rather than considering them as perennial toxic battlefronts. Despite our ideological, political, religious, or ethnic differences, we are Algerians, and we are proud because as Taylor (1989) put it "my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose." (p.27).

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