

"The Foundations of Identity and Belonging in Light of Algerian Bedouin Singing"

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Abstract:

The article addresses the representations of the components of national identity and their psychological, social, political, cultural, and civilizational dimensions as reflected in Algerian Bedouin songs. These songs serve as an authentic medium that embodies the culture and civilization of the community, providing a spontaneous means of expressing itself freely, sincerely, and without constraints. They represent a genuine and instinctive expression of the nation's dreams, aspirations, misery, and struggles, serving as a shadow accompanying it through time, regardless of changing circumstances and places. As the saying goes, "He who has no heritage has no homeland, and he who has no homeland has no life." This essence is vividly reflected in Algeria's traditional Bedouin songs across various stages, contributing to the consolidation of national belonging and the reinforcement of the constants of national identity.

Keywords: Belonging – Identity – Song – Heritage.

Introduction:

Folk literature is considered one of the arts most connected to reality, as it results from a living relationship between it and society, reflecting its culture in all its complex networks through history, geography, and relationships between individuals. In other words, it is a condensed memory of the society's cognitive system. From this perspective, the creators of folk poetry in Algeria made significant contributions in portraying and embodying the nature of Algerian songs. They express the spirit and reality of society, its joys and sorrows, and also convey the tragedies of the Algerian people.

Civilization touches Bedouin life with its luxury and the harshness of its existence. The Arab cannot be separated from poetry; poetry is and always has been his characteristic, his gateway. The connection between the Arab and poetry is a twinship created by God, one that cannot be divided. It is an ancient love story that still challenges time and stands firm against those who attempt to distort this bond. It hides the burning fire that reveals

the Arab as a fully realized human, sharpened by sensitivity and noble nature. Moreover, poetry has attained a sacred status among Arabs, who take pride in and boast about the emergence of a poet among them. Throughout their history, they have only submitted to one authority—the authority of the tongue, adorned with the necklaces of poetry.

From birth to death, human beings go through various stages. Starting with infancy, where the child depends entirely on their parents, dominated by egocentrism and self-centeredness. Gradually, as the child grows, they slowly move away from excessive egocentrism, becoming more open to the world and others, eventually learning to rely on themselves until they achieve independence from their parents and build their own new family.

This mature individual belongs to multiple spheres of affiliation:

- They belong to a family/clan/tribe.
- They belong to a neighborhood/village/city/region/governorate/district.
- They belong to a state with defined borders, sovereignty, constitutions, and laws.
- They belong to a people with its history, heritage, past, present, and future aspirations.
- They belong to an ethnic group with ancient roots, civilization, achievements, and ambitions.
- They belong to a religion with its pillars, rituals, laws, and cultural contributions to civilization.
- They belong to an intellectual or political framework with its principles, propositions, and objectives.

- Finally, they belong to a vast, inclusive humanity that unites all individuals across all races, peoples, ethnicities, nations, religions, beliefs, sects, and ideologies.

The Boundaries of Belonging

Belonging means that a person affiliates, associates, connects, and refers to those who remind them of all that is good, support them in pursuing it, and prevent them from engaging in any evil. This sense of belonging becomes a guiding force in life, shaping one's journey with the strongest, best, and most complete foundation for progress. It fosters continuous growth and development, enabling one to achieve happiness in every aspect—intellectually, emotionally, physically—and ultimately, eternal and everlasting joy in the hereafter.¹

This interpretation aligns with the linguistic root of the word "belonging," derived from the notion of "growth." It also corresponds closely to the concept of identity, which serves as a personal identification card: Who am I? Who are those around me? What is their origin and reference point?²

The attribute of belonging is innate, placed within humans by their Creator as part of their inherent qualities for their benefit and happiness. It is akin to the umbilical cord between a fetus and its mother—an analogy to the divine connection (and to God belongs the highest example, and nothing compares to Him). This connection nurtures, sustains, and brings joy. Without it, one faces misery, collapse, and ruin.³

A person's first and foremost belonging is to God—their Creator, Sustainer, Provider, Helper, and Guide. This is the noblest, strongest, most secure, and happiest form of belonging. Maintaining this connection guarantees safety, tranquility, honor, greatness, elevation, dignity, and stability.

Secondly, a person belongs to the earth they live on and loves it, as it is—after God—the source of their sustenance, growth, work, and livelihood, contributing to their happiness.

¹ .Saleh, Ahmed Roshdy. Folk Arts. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1961 Edition. P100

² .Saleh, Ahmed Roshdy. Folk Arts. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1961 Edition. P122

³ .Saleh, Ahmed Roshdy. Folk Arts. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1961 Edition. P103

Thirdly, a person belongs to the humanity they share the world with, for all people are descendants of Adam. They find joy in their collective existence, their love for one another, and their shared humanity. The term "human" itself derives from the root meaning "to find solace," denoting mutual kindness, the removal of alienation, and shared joy.

Intellectual belonging and adherence to the system of Islam represent a steadfast bond. Whoever holds on to this belonging achieves safety and happiness in both their worldly life and the hereafter, radiating security and joy to all who coexist with them.

Following this, a person belongs to their nation and homeland—the geographic space where they live and which is identified by a specific name and system agreed upon by its inhabitants. As long as this system aligns with the universal principles of morality and ethics taught by the Creator since the time of Adam, belonging to one's homeland and its people fosters mutual love, collaboration, and happiness. It enhances intellectual and practical growth, productivity, and harmony, ultimately leading to collective prosperity and well-being.

After belonging to one's nation, comes belonging to one's family—those connected through close blood ties, kinship, and marriage. The bonds within a family bring a unique kind of joy, as they form a closely-knit human group characterized by compassion, love, cooperation, and solidarity in dialogue, learning, work, production, celebrations, and hardships. This unity leads to greater growth, higher productivity, and deeper cohesion, resulting in greater happiness in both this life and the hereafter.¹

On the Concept of Identity

Identity represents a network of mental, necessary relationships and bonds, encompassing social, economic, cultural, political, moral, and human dimensions. These relationships are woven by a specific historical evolution, rooted in time and place. Identity manifests across three dimensions:

¹ . Khurshid, Farouk. *The Fascinating World of Folk Literature*. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, First Edition, 1991. P 25
www.psychologyandeducation.net

1. The relationship of the self with itself: This involves self-awareness and may include narcissism, a sense of superiority, or a feeling of distinctiveness and excellence. Conversely, it can also involve a persecution complex and feelings of inferiority.
2. The relationship of the self with the subject: This pertains to the subject of work and knowledge, encompassing interactions with the natural and social world. This relationship oscillates between alienation and freedom.
3. The relationship of the self with the other: This involves dependence, submission, imitation, and emulation, contrasted with independence and individuality.

In all these aspects, identity is the unity of consciousness and existence, thought and reality, similarity and difference, unity and multiplicity—all founded on the principle of negation, which carries within it the ideas of history and progress.¹

The Word in the Bedouin Song: The Title of Belonging (Language)

Historically, this type of popular Bedouin music is said to have emerged alongside the appearance of the *azjal* and *muwashahat* (traditional poetic forms), specifically during the 4th century AH (10th century AD) following the arrival of the Hilali tribes in the Maghreb. However, it is important to distinguish between Bedouin poetry and urban poetry, as poetry—above all—is the backbone of Bedouin music. Some poems are shared between the Bedouin and popular music styles, but we will focus here on the pure Bedouin song.

The presence of Bedouin music is deeply national. For example, in the western region of Algeria, the Wahrani Bedouin song includes a large group of poets and singers, such as Hamada, Walid Al-Zein, Abdelkader Al-Khalidi, Ben Qannoun, Mustafa Ben Ibrahim, Lakhdar Ben Khlouf, Walid Manour Mostaghanemi, Al-Madani, Abdel Moulah Al-Abbassi, as well as Qayous Al-Jilali, Jilali Ain Tadlees, Hajj Ben Sabban, Qayesh Al-Sanusi, and Al-Arabi Kadour.

For the Chaoui Bedouin song, its prominent figures include Shuyukh such as Isa Al-Jurmouni, Ali Al-Khenshli, Omar Al-Bar, and the Sheikh Baqar

¹ Khurshid, Farouk. *The Fascinating World of Folk Literature*. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, First Edition, 1991. .p89
www.psychologyandeducation.net

Hada. As for the Algiers Bedouin song, it is hosted by the Boumerdès region, with the legendary Sheikh Mohammed Al-Boumerdasi at the forefront. Similarly, there is no difference between the Algerian foothill (Tell) music and the Saharan Bedouin song, as seen in figures like Khalifi Ahmed, Ben Ghiton, Ben Krio, Mohamed Ababsa, the popular poet Mohamed Belkhir, Ben Allal, and other poets and performers of this genre.

In the Kabylie region, Si Mohand Ou Mohand writes Bedouin poetry in the Berber dialect, and many Kabyle voices have sung his works.

The poetry upon which Bedouin music is based is called "Al-Lagha Al-Aroubi," a term close to "language," which can imply "idle talk" but, in the Algerian vernacular, refers to calling out or shouting, as seen in lines like: "*Alghay ya L'chira, ghay ahlak w ma kan barawiya,*" meaning "Call, O girl, to your people, and to those who may be strangers." It refers to the specific poetry composed for folk songs, traditionally structured through verses, quatrains, and intermediate forms, with the number of lines and rhymes influencing the style of singing.¹

Elements of the Bedouin Sound: The *qasabah* (reed flute), *qelal* (drums), and the dancer are all essential elements of Bedouin music. Without these, we cannot speak of Bedouin song. The *qelal* (also known as *quloz*) is an ancient percussion instrument, considered the precursor to the *darbouka* drum. There is a close relationship between the singer and the *qelal*, as every student under a Bedouin song master must learn to play it well, as skill with the *qelal* qualifies them to become a master themselves. The true master is the one who can play the *qelal*. Traditionally, it is made from a hollowed-out piece of cactus, covered with goat skin, and fixed by traditional methods. The *qasabah* or *shababa* is a wind instrument made from wild reed and has three variations:

- The five-hole *qasabah*: for desert music.
- The six-hole *qasabah*: for central and western regions.
- The seven-hole *qasabah*: for the eastern regions, with its three substyles: *Rikrouki*, *Naili*, and *Samati*.

¹ . Taymour, Mahmoud. *The Art of Storytelling - Studies in Short Stories and Theater*. Egypt: Al-Adab Library and Press, Edition Undated. P145

The difference in instruments does not alter the essence of the Bedouin song. It remains a spontaneous genre, rooted in the depths of the people. The topics of Bedouin songs include love, praise, joy, harvest, weddings, and more. Notably, the Bedouin song has always treated Algerian women with fairness, as women have long been present in this genre, contributing the best of their talents. Bedouin songs reflect the purest state of Algerian society.¹

Identity, the Melodic Word, and the Bedouin Song:

It is extremely difficult to discuss the future of Bedouin song in the current circumstances, especially after the loss of an iconic figure, Khalifi Ahmed. Thus, we can say that Bedouin song has been forgotten and sidelined, losing its audience. In the 1960s, there was a Bedouin music group within the National Radio, which used to perform traditional Bedouin songs, preserving the nation's history and memory through recordings. However, over time, many of its members, such as the *qesab* player Kadour Said, retired or left, and the group disbanded without any attempt by the radio to form a new Bedouin group or discover new talents. As a result, the group disappeared forever.

One of the reasons for the fading of this genre is the lack of support from the authorities, who did not encourage performers like Khadir Mansour and Hassan Brahim. Silence and neglect became their fate. Additionally, the media has contributed to the loss of this genre, while other national musical forms have flourished. We must pay attention to this art form because it represents the essence and authenticity of our culture. Personally, now that I am retired, I am trying to contribute by preparing a program called *Journeys to the Desert* to discover talent in folk cultures.

Conclusion:

The foundation of Bedouin song is folk poetry. Perhaps without Bedouin music, we would not have access to the works of Khalidi and Belkhir.

¹ . Dr. Al-Barghouti, Abdel Latif. *Features of Palestinian Folk Songs*. Lecture delivered at the Teacher Training Center in Ramallah, 1993. P210

Therefore, we can consider it the true reason for the survival of folk poetry. Now, I do not know how to resolve the situation, but I believe that the singer tends to prefer the heritage, unwilling to take risks with new poets. For them, reinterpreting a traditional poem guarantees success, and the audience will prefer it. However, this is a mistake. The performer should look for new folk poetry, select pieces that suit their voice and abilities, and present them to society. Folk poetry has evolved since the last century, and the themes it addresses today are very different and can deeply resonate with society. Thus, I believe the poet is not to blame; they offer their poem with one life. The second life, perhaps eternal, will be given to them through Bedouin song, if it carries the poem and elevates it alongside the *qasabah* and *qelal*.

Bedouin song has always been and remains a symbol of national identity, an essential element that fosters belonging and embodies patriotism par excellence. It holds a long and rich history filled with adventures and is a historical record teeming with events, facts, and stories. It evokes the presence of authentic history, living through events, awakening words, and enhancing melodic renditions while valuing the poetic language.

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- ². Khurshid, Farouk. *The Fascinating World of Folk Literature*. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, First Edition, 1991.
- ³. Taymour, Mahmoud. *The Art of Storytelling - Studies in Short Stories and Theater*. Egypt: Al-Adab Library and Press, Edition Undated.
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