The Geopolitical Dimension of Algerian Identity

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Abstract

To comprehend the geopolitics of identity in Algeria, it is necessary to be familiar with the cultural, historical, and political factors that shape the country's national identity, including its cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. The resolution of these factors and the promotion of national unity are imperative. The concept of identity is a pivotal catalyst for the convergence, interaction, and exchange of ideas in international relations. The principles of acceptance, respect, acknowledgement of uniqueness, and recognition of differences characterise this paradigm. This can affect the smooth handling of local and regional issues, whether related to ethnicity, gender, lineage, or religious, political, or ideological beliefs, within a positive and tolerant context. Identity plays a crucial role in analyzing, interpreting, and anticipating potential changes and trends, as it is a motivating and influential force in international affairs. However, it is also the primary source of human divisions and the leading cause of wars and conflicts. It faces various challenges and can create a crisis between "self" and "other." This necessitates defending national values by activating the role of the state in protecting its principles and fortifying its youth.
Keywords: Crisis of self and other, Geopolitics of Identity, identity challenges, identity diplomacy, symbolic interaction

ملخص

يتطلب فهم جيوسياسة الهوية في الجزائر إلمامًا بالعوامل الثقافية والتاريخية والسياسية التي تُشكِّل الهوية الوطنية للبلاد، بما تنطوي عليه من تنوّع ثقافي ولغوي وديني. كما تتطلب هذه القضايا التوفيق بين هذه العوامل وتعزيز الوحدة الوطنية؛ وهي، في الوقت نفسه، قوةٌ مهمّة تدفع إلى التقارب والتفاعل والتبادل في العلاقات الدولية ضمن إطار يقوم على قبول الآخر واحترامه، والاعتراف بتفرّده وبالاختلاف عنه. غير أنّ ذلك قد يؤثر في التعامل السلس مع القضايا المحلية والإقليمية، سواء تعلّقت بالعرق أو الجنس أو النسب أو الاعتقادات الدينية والسياسية أو العقائد الأيديولوجية، وذلك في سياق إيجابي ومتسامح. لذلك تلعب الهوية دورًا حاسمًا بوصفها عاملًا لتحليل وتفسير وتوقّع التغيّرات والاتجاهات المحتملة في الشؤون الدولية، لكنها في الوقت نفسه المصدر الرئيس لتقسيمات البشر والسبب الأساسي وراء الحروب والنزاعات. وتواجه الهوية تحدياتٍ متنوّعة، وقد تُحدِث أزمةً بين «الذات» و«الآخر»، الأمر الذي يستدعي الدفاع عن القيم الوطنية من خلال تفعيل دور الدولة في حماية مبادئها وتعزيز دور الشباب.

كلمات مفتاحية :أزمة الأنا والآخر، جيوسياسة الهوية، تحديات الهوية، دبلوماسية الهوية، التفاعل الرمزي.

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Introduction

The term "geopolitics of identity" refers to the influence of social and cultural identity on international and regional politics. It helps understand the various interactions and dynamics that arise between nations, communities, and different cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, and their role in conflict resolution, promoting understanding, and peaceful coexistence. It explores how states deal with issues of identity and diversity in the context of foreign policy and international relations. It encompasses the strategies and policies of governments and international organizations in addressing identity issues, including the protection of civil, cultural, and religious rights of minority groups and the promotion of diversity and solidarity among different cultures.

For this reason, Algeria, with its cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, serves as a good example of the issues raised by identity diversity and the challenges it faces in the context of the geopolitics of identity. Identity is a fundamental issue in contemporary Algeria, dominating intellectual debates, social and political analyses, with a focus on the tradition/modernity axis amid current global economic, social, political, and cultural transformations.

In this regard, the geo-cultural dimension is considered a strategic factor that Algeria invests in at the geopolitical level. It is an Arab-Islamic, Mediterranean, and African Maghreb pole capable of bringing about radical changes in favor of the Algerian party by exploring the diversity imposed by historical circumstances. The country has experienced significant cultural dynamics due to the multiplicity and interaction of different cultures, allowing Algerian society to engage with various civilizations such as Roman, Ottoman, Arab, and European, resulting in a cultural mosaic and diversity in which individuals coexist within a comprehensive framework that seeks to preserve Arab/Amazigh and Islamic identity. This is achieved by enhancing its cultural and political presence, benefiting from the demographic spread across the Arab and Islamic worlds, and providing enormous geopolitical opportunities.

However, this cultural richness also carries implicit and complex threats that often lead to contradictions between identity elements, creating obstacles to achieving harmony and integration. This is particularly evident among the youth, whom the Algerian state seeks to organize and provide a unified cultural framework to avoid individual fragmentation and internal conflicts. It is undeniable that French colonization created a values system in Algeria that led to disputes within Algerian society, dividing it into diverse regional and cultural groups, with effects still visible today.

On the other hand, the openness of the media in Algeria, both Arab and Western, has created contradictions with the established norms of Algerian society, leading to practices that contradict entrenched values. This has emerged through the ongoing debate between adhering to original and authentic sources of identity and envisioning a new project for the present and future identity, advocated by those calling for openness towards the West. Therefore, the study raises the following research question:

- To what extent, and through which mechanisms, does Algeria's cultural diversity contribute to the construction of its geopolitical identity, and how do the Algerian state's policies aimed at promoting national unity and positive interaction among cultural components mediate the relationship between internal social cohesion and the country's international distinctiveness?

The study starts from the hypothesis that cultural and linguistic diversity can be an essential geopolitical factor, playing a pivotal and strategic role in enhancing Algeria's international distinctiveness. However, it requires prior achievement of internal cohesion and national unity, necessitating additional efforts to strike a balance between preserving cultural and linguistic diversity and promoting sustainable unity and social cohesion. Algerian society faces multiple identity challenges that have created a crisis of "self" and "other," leading Algerians to seek new foreign identities and cultures that are alien to local society, despite the numerous risks this poses to national integration.

It is worth noting that the literature review on *The Geopolitical Dimension of Algerian Identity* points to a substantial body of scholarship at the intersection of identity studies, geopolitics, and political sociology. Classical and contemporary works—such as Mohamed Harbi's studies on the formation of national consciousness during the nationalist movement, Benjamin Stora's research on colonial memory, and Luis Martinez's work on the state and power in Algeria—have focused on how Algerian identity was shaped within a colonial–liberation context, and later within the post-independence state with its Arab–Islamic and anti-colonial frame of reference. Over the last two decades, studies published in journals such as *The Journal of North African Studies* and *Mediterranean Politics* show a shift towards more complex dimensions of identity, including its relationship to regional security, energy and gas policies, irregular migration, and regional competition in the Maghreb and the Sahel. The literature thus moves from a general view of Algerian national identity as an imagined, historically constructed identity to a more focused examination of how it is instrumentalized by ruling elites and regional actors in current geopolitical struggles.

This body of work situates Algerian identity within a broader field of geopolitical studies on the Maghreb and the Mediterranean Basin, while highlighting Algeria's specific position as a medium regional power with demographic, military, and energy weight. On the one hand, contributions by scholars such as Lahouari Addi and Saïd Chikhi (Saïd Chneni / Chennine, depending on the transliteration used) emphasize the central role of the War of Liberation's memory in shaping the official identity discourse and Algeria's stance on regional issues (the Palestinian question, Western Sahara, international alignments).

On the other hand, various Arab and Western studies present divergent perspectives: some argue that Algerian identity discourse tends toward closure (due to the centrality of the revolutionary narrative and resistance to external intervention), while others highlight an increasing dynamism in redefining identity through recognition of linguistic and cultural plurality (Amazigh, Arabic, and the Mediterranean–African dimensions). Historically, the relevant literature traces the trajectory of identity from the Ottoman era, through French colonialism and the War of Liberation, to the postcolonial state, presenting a spectrum of convergent and divergent views on the weight of each phase in shaping identity. It also discusses heated debates on the place of Amazighity in the national identity, the relative prominence of the African–Sahelian versus the Mediterranean–European dimension, and the impact of transformations in the international system after 9/11 and the events of 2011 on the re-politicization of identity in Algerian geopolitical discourse. The most recent contributions published between 2018 and 2024 -shifts in Algeria's energy policy, and its growing involvement in Sahel and Libyan affairs—indicate that the literature review in this field is now up-to-date and responsive, with increasing interest in how identity is being re-deployed as a

tool of domestic legitimacy and as a bargaining chip in regional and international geopolitical negotiations.

Features of Algerian Identity and Its Geopolitical Dimensions

Features of Algerian Identity

Algerian identity is defined by its cultural and social dimensions, which form the core of Algerian selfhood. Like any society, Algeria's identity condenses individual and collective experiences shaped by an ongoing struggle for progress amid cultural contradictions arising from global power imbalances, conflicts, and civilizational encounters. It is therefore a historical product of internal dynamics and external pressures that continue to influence its evolution.

In light of Algeria's growing regional and global role and the complexity of contemporary political and economic developments—including the Palestinian issue—it has become necessary for Algerian intellectuals to reconsider the question of cultural identity with greater objectivity. Beyond material expressions of selfhood, Algerian identity is distinguished by a rich cultural diversity visible in linguistic plurality, traditions, customs, religious practices, arts, music, and especially the Tamazight heritage, which forms a key component of Algeria's cultural specificity. The country also possesses a significant literary and artistic legacy, classical and modern alike, rooted in its political and social history and playing a pivotal role in shaping national consciousness (Bougherira, 2017).

From this perspective, Algerian identity can be understood as a multidimensional construct in which cultural and historical components intertwine to define a distinct national presence. The central debate centers on Algeria's historical position and the extent to which its identity reconciles Islamic values with historically rooted ethnic and geographic affiliations. The legacy of French colonialism further complicates the picture, raising epistemological and political questions on ideological, linguistic, and historical levels (McDougall, 2017). Any serious approach to Algerian identity must therefore integrate its Arab–Amazigh–Islamic foundations with the enduring impact of colonialism.

A second key premise is that cultural identity in Algerian society derives many of its elements from the youth. Within the national development and reform project, the institutions of socialization—especially the family and school—play a leading role in shaping the identity of successive generations, balancing openness to local and global interactions with the preservation of essential national traits. This makes the education–socialization nexus a strategic lever for consolidating a cohesive yet outward-looking Algerian identity.

Youth are the primary human resource in any society and a key indicator of its internal balance. Through social interaction and exchange, they seek to satisfy their psychological, social, and cultural needs, internalize the values of their environment, and gradually build their identities. This process produces a "social imprint" that reflects the society's dominant standards and values and aims to maintain cohesion and unity (Kroger, 2007). In this sense, youth identity formation is not merely an individual trajectory but also a test of society's capacity to transmit and renew its core norms.

Identity formation, however, faces obstacles linked to normative conflicts, unmet needs, and role tensions (Chun, 2009). Public authorities seek to overcome these obstacles to maintain internal cohesion and prevent social instability that external forces may exploit through domestic actors. A key concern is to avoid forcing youth into a stark choice between values driven by changing socio-economic needs and those rooted in their own cultural environment.

Algerian policy thus seeks to shield young people from disorientation amid the competing identities of globalization and to protect them from dissolution into foreign cultures and Western civilization. Managing identity is therefore conceived as a protective and adaptive process in response to global cultural pressures.

Geopolitical Dimensions of Algerian Identity

The geopolitical dimensions of cultural identity refer to the political factors that influence how a society's cultural identity is formed, negotiated, and projected outward (Harshe, 2006). In the Algerian case, these dimensions clarify how internal identity dynamics interact with regional and international environments that shape the country's role and image.

- **Globalization and Technology**: Interaction with globalization and technological change places pressure on cultural heritage by promoting cultural homogenization and Western models. At the same time, technology enhances communication and intercultural exchange. For Algeria, globalization represents both a threat to cultural specificity and an opportunity to assert its own identity in the global arena.

- **Cultural Policies**: Cultural identity is strongly affected by state policies. Authorities may seek to preserve heritage and promote cultural diversity or to emphasize a unified national identity. In Algeria, cultural policy is thus a key instrument for balancing diversity and cohesion.

- **Cultural Conflicts**: Differences in language, religion, customs, or traditions can generate tensions between groups and affect cultural identity as well as social and political stability. In Algeria, managing such tensions is crucial to preventing identity-based disputes from evolving into structural instability.

- **Migration and Cultural Diversity**: Emigration, immigration, and return migration produce new patterns of cultural interaction and raise questions about coexistence and integration. For Algeria, these movements deepen debates over boundaries, inclusiveness, and the redefinition of national identity.

- **Cultural Diplomacy**: States use cultural diplomacy—through the exchange of arts, literature, music, sports, cuisine, customs, and traditions—to promote their cultural identity and foster mutual understanding. For Algeria, cultural diplomacy offers a channel to transform internal identity capital into external influence.

These geopolitical dimensions intersect with broader social, political, economic, and technological transformations that vary from one country to another and shift with regional events and political change. Even in "normal" circumstances, identity is surrounded by multiple challenges (Masolo, 2002); in periods of transition, such as those Algeria has been experiencing, these challenges become more complex. Thus, identity has persistently troubled Algerian decision-makers as they govern a society in a chronic state of transition across various fields and spaces.

At the Individual Level

Cultural belonging appears at the individual level as a personal and psychological experience of integration within a specific social framework. Each person carries particular experiences and attachments shaped by the community to which they belong. Social values and norms are central in building this sense of belonging: when individuals share the same values and standards as the group, they feel accepted and integrated and internalize those standards through socialization in the family, education system, and surrounding environment (Bennette, 2004).

If, for example, societal values emphasize close family ties and mutual respect, individuals are more likely to feel comfort and a sense of belonging within that social frame. When solidarity, cooperation, and social justice are emphasized, people may adopt these values and express them in their behavior and thinking. In this way, cultural belonging becomes a core dimension of personal identity. In Algeria, this is particularly visible in the esteem accorded to Arab–Amazigh values and Islamic references (Kandil, 2020). Algerian identity at the individual level thus emerges from a constant negotiation between personal trajectories and shared Arab–Amazigh–Islamic frameworks.

At the Political Level

Politically, Algerian identity is manifested through community projects, civil associations, and political parties, which individuals join based on ideological affinity. Here, identity becomes more complex, especially when global ideological currents intersect with national concerns. A central question arises: how can individuals integrate their local, national, and Algerian identities while adhering to broader ideological projects and, at the same time, uphold national unity and shared values?

This is particularly relevant in relation to Islamic, socialist, or liberal parties, in a global context where Islam often faces misrepresentation. Political engagement in Algeria, therefore, requires balancing ideological commitments with the imperatives of national cohesion and an inclusive understanding of Algerian identity, rooted in religion and local customs yet open and respectful of others.

At the Cultural Level

Cultural identity challenges emerge as several ethnic and cultural groups claim the right to represent "Algerian identity." The central dilemma concerns the form of cultural identity to adopt: should it be an inclusive, composite identity that integrates all partial identities, or should one identity dominate and marginalize others? Although all these components ultimately form the rich Algerian mosaic that can support economic, touristic, and cultural development, effective management requires clear and rational regulation of boundaries, rights, and modes of recognition (Jetten, 2012). The task is to institutionalize cultural pluralism in a way that consolidates, rather than fragments, the national project.

At the Religious Level

Religious identity is especially sensitive due to its close connections with other societal domains. Recent transformations in Algeria's religious sphere—driven by global religious currents, media influence, and mobility—have sharpened questions of religious identity at two levels:

- **Generational differences**: Younger generations are more exposed to new religious discourses and globalized religious models, making them more susceptible to change, while older generations tend to preserve traditional references.
- **Sectarian diversification**: In a society that historically perceived itself as religiously unified, new sectarian categorizations have emerged, posing challenges in managing religious pluralism.

Religious identity in Algeria has thus shifted from an unquestioned unifying factor to a dynamic field requiring deliberate governance to maintain social cohesion.

At the Family Level

Within the broader framework of cultural, social, and educational reforms, Algeria's educational system has faced complex linguistic and pedagogical challenges, especially

concerning the relationship between family and school. These challenges complicate social, religious, political, and professional socialization processes and affect the stability of the educational model, which still seeks to articulate a fully coherent Algerian Arab Muslim identity in curricula, language policy, and practice. The family–school nexus is therefore a critical arena where national identity is concretely shaped and transmitted.

This multiplicity of dimensions makes Algeria socially and culturally distinctive as a predominantly unified yet internally diverse civilization. Despite repeated attempts to exploit differences and undermine national stability, Algerian identity appears as a complex but coherent mosaic whose resilience depends on careful management of its various levels.

Challenges of Algerian Identity

As part of its foreign policy and state-building project, Algeria faces the challenge of integrating multiple local cultural identities into a broader national framework. The current situation—marked by cultural richness—has sometimes become a source of crises grounded in an "us vs. them" logic, turning diversity, which could enrich unity, into a basis for polarization and fragmentation.

This logic has enabled external actors to exploit internal divisions, dividing a once cohesive society into competing groups along ethnic, linguistic, or social lines. Conflicts have shifted from struggles over resources to internal strife fueled by perceived identity-based "scarcity." Identity has thus become a strategic tool in regional and international rivalries rather than merely an internal cultural matter.

Ongoing conflicts in several Arab countries—from Iraq to Sudan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Lebanon—illustrate how an unregulated identity landscape can lead to civil wars, fragmentation, and calls for separation, autonomy, or new statehood. The move from nation-state discourse to the promotion of hybrid minorities and sub-identities has produced acute identity crises, often stoked by foreign powers, with severe regional and international repercussions.

Concepts such as "homeland," "nationality," and "citizenship" have acquired fluid, contested meanings and are frequently applied to suit situational needs. Imported from external intellectual frameworks, they are now influenced by three major trends:

1. **Accelerating globalization** has revived many sub-identities as a form of resistance to homogenization and as a way to assert difference and superiority, often within "divide and rule" logics.
2. **The media and communication revolution** has empowered sub-identities and subcultures to mobilize followers and, at times, to internationalize issues before they gain genuine local legitimacy, thereby escalating internal conflicts.
3. **Global power shifts and redistribution**, which have eroded traditional social orders, undermined customs and traditions that sustained belonging, and fostered short-lived identity alliances shaped by immediate interests. Concepts such as post-globalization, post-modernity, and post-knowledge reflect attempts to capture this transition.

As a result, many societies, particularly in the Maghreb, Arab, and African contexts, face a destructive "culture of estrangement" that targets local and regional communities. This has led to internal penetration, marginalization, political decay, economic decline, and cultural regression, undermining democratic and human values amid competing geopolitical interests. Identity crises here are both a cause and a consequence of broader structural vulnerabilities.

In such a context, global powers—such as China, France, Germany, the European Union, the United States, and Turkey—present themselves as alternative models to address local crises, shaping value hierarchies and conceptual frameworks. Over time, this has produced an imbalance in the conceptualization of identity within Algeria, influenced by multi-perspective external pressures and internal weaknesses (Filiu, 2017). These dynamics have given rise to three key analytical approaches to Algerian identity: the logic of conflict, symbolic interactionism, and the realistic perspective.

The Logic of Conflict

The logic of conflict helps explain the relationship between material structures (infrastructure) and value systems (superstructure), and thus the link between Algeria's regional foreign policy environment and its internal social fabric (Gündoğan, 2021). Within this framework, values are not abstract but rooted in socio-economic realities, with the economic structure shaping and transforming them over time.

When the economic system is based on fairness and balanced development, it supports positive human and cultural values such as justice, cooperation, and mutual respect. Conversely, when societies are mired in violence, conflict, and economic hardship, values tend to erode: opportunism, isolation, and monopolization replace solidarity, and social trust and cohesion weaken.

Accordingly, any attempt to protect and consolidate Algerian identity must be accompanied by economic and social reforms that foster justice, reduce inequality, and promote social peace. Investment in sustainable development and equitable opportunities becomes a precondition for nurturing shared values and a stable, inclusive national identity.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the role of symbols and shared meanings in structuring human interaction. Language—spoken and written—is a primary medium through which individuals exchange meanings and construct collective understandings. Symbols can also be visual, such as road signs or map icons, and their interpretation varies across cultural and social contexts (Carter & Fuller, 2016).

In Algeria, identity is reproduced and negotiated through a dense network of linguistic, religious, and historical symbols—Arabic, Tamazight, Islamic references, the memory of the liberation war, national heroes, and shared rituals. These symbols mediate self-awareness and shape how society presents itself internally and externally.

Symbolic interactionism thus illuminates how Algerian society negotiates its internal cohesion and its external image, how it interprets others, and how it uses symbols to manage the relationship between national identity and global influences. Through this lens, identity-building appears as a continuous process of meaning-making within a symbol-laden cultural and social environment.

Realistic Perspective

In a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse world, identities have become fluid, multiple, and continuously reconfigured. Individuals no longer belong exclusively to a single, stable community; instead, they navigate among several social, cultural, and even virtual affiliations. This plurality of choices regarding belonging and interaction has weakened the idea of identity as fixed and immutable, highlighting its fragmented, negotiated, and context-dependent nature (Raud, 2016).

Against this background, many societies are seeking forms of national identity that are at once *moderate* and *relatively stable*, capable of absorbing internal diversity while withstanding external pressures associated with globalization, transnational flows, and shifting power balances. Such a national identity is expected to foster social cohesion, reinforce a sense of belonging, and provide a shared symbolic framework that can endure rapid political, economic, and cultural transformations. This search is inherently challenging: a viable national identity must not deny or suppress diversity but rather integrate it through norms of tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusive dialogue.

Identity, whether national or local, is not merely a cultural ornament; it is a foundational resource that shapes a community's collective consciousness. It emerges from shared beliefs, core values, historical memory, and the specific geographical and cultural environment to which people belong. In this sense, identity is a *flexible structure* whose content evolves with changing circumstances and challenges, while still providing individuals with a sense of continuity, distinctiveness, and attachment.

Local identity, in particular, remains a crucial dimension of belonging. For many citizens, it is perceived as a non-negotiable component of who they are, even when it appears to conflict with the demands of modernization or global integration. This attachment often manifests more strongly at the popular level than among national elites. At the same time, local identity can be politically instrumentalized, mobilized by various actors to secure support, legitimize specific policies, or polarize public opinion. Recognizing this ambivalence is essential: local identity can be a resource for cohesion and participation, but it can also be a tool for manipulation.

The central challenge, therefore, is to find a *dynamic balance* between preserving local and national identity, on the one hand, and engaging constructively with global transformations, on the other. Modern technologies, global communication networks, and intensified transnational exchanges offer opportunities for economic development, cultural creativity, and international visibility. However, these opportunities can only be fully realized if they are anchored in a clearly articulated cultural and national self-understanding. Policies that invest in education, cultural industries, heritage preservation, and intercultural dialogue are crucial for strengthening this self-understanding while maintaining openness to the outside world.

This challenge is particularly acute in the current regional and international context, marked by strategic competition, overlapping conflicts, and complex webs of interests. Contemporary political marketing and communication strategies, often supported by sophisticated media ecosystems, play an increasingly significant role in shaping perceptions, constructing narratives, and influencing domestic and international public opinion. States and non-state actors increasingly rely on tailored media campaigns, digital platforms, and symbolic politics to define their image, promote their causes, and attract allies.

For Algeria, these dynamics underscore the importance of a *coherent cultural and media strategy* that clearly expresses its identity, values, and foreign policy priorities. Algeria's historical legacy—especially its anti-colonial struggle and its long-standing discourse on sovereignty, non-alignment, and support for causes—provides strong normative and symbolic foundations. However, translating this legacy into a compelling contemporary narrative requires more than rhetorical continuity: it demands careful articulation of national identity that resonates with domestic diversity and speaks convincingly to international audiences.

Consequently, Algeria can draw lessons from countries that have successfully managed internal diversity while projecting a consistent, attractive external image. This involves designing and implementing strategic communication and public diplomacy tools that highlight Algeria's cultural richness, political choices, and regional role. Reviewing and updating Algeria's cultural and media policies is thus not a merely technical exercise; it is a core component of strengthening its national identity internally and enhancing its influence externally—especially in a period characterized by ongoing and anticipated waves of democratic change and geopolitical reconfiguration.

The Role of the Algerian State in Protecting National Identity and Enhancing its International Influence

National identity is the central identity of the state. It cannot be dismantled or arbitrarily redefined, yet it must be flexible enough to accommodate and interact with sub-identities. Although it evolves under the influence of internal dynamics and external factors, it remains a core instrument for fostering citizenship, loyalty, and belonging.

However, attempts to reshape national identity through political marketing or manipulation can fuel resentment and heighten internal tensions (McDougall, 2006). Any transformation of national identity must therefore arise from a democratic and inclusive process that involves all social and cultural components. The challenge is to preserve a shared national framework while recognizing and respecting cultural diversity and pluralism.

Neglecting the construction of a strong local–national space weakens the state's capacity to express itself internationally and to resist external interventions seeking new balances and influence (Roberts, 2015). The clarity and cohesion of Algeria's internal identity architecture are thus directly linked to the strength of its external image.

Identity-related struggles often begin with efforts to influence the educated elite—especially students—before extending to broader social circles, through diversified means of cultural and symbolic dissemination. Many Algerian intellectuals argue that previous models of identity analysis have focused too heavily on cultural and social factors, neglecting personal experiences and individual agency. They also note that modern media and communication have reshaped values and relationships, sometimes in ways that deviate from the spirit of the traditional Algerian civilizational model.

There is therefore a need to rethink the relationships governing Algerian social groups prior to purely political considerations, by revisiting the civilizational purposes of Algerian identity and assessing the extent to which social and cultural practices align with that essence. This entails re-examining the philosophical foundations of identity studies and incorporating personal and experiential dimensions into future analyses, including how identity is expressed in symbolic structures, urban forms, time organization, dress, cuisine, and value systems.

On the other hand, the relationship between geopolitics and identity has become a central concern in contemporary political science and international relations. Traditionally, geopolitics referred to the influence of geographic factors—such as territory, resources, and strategic location—on state power and foreign policy (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Flint, 2017). However, critical and constructivist approaches have shown that space is not only physical but also socially and symbolically constructed, and that states' geopolitical behaviors are profoundly shaped by how they define "who they are" in relation to "others" (Agnew, 2003; Kuus, 2010). In this sense, identity is not merely an internal cultural phenomenon; it is a constitutive dimension of how geopolitical interests, threats, and alliances are imagined and justified.

From a constructivist perspective, collective identity provides the cognitive and normative frameworks through which political actors interpret the international environment (Wendt, 1999). National narratives about history, culture, and religion contribute to defining "friends" and "enemies", spheres of influence, and legitimate geopolitical ambitions (Hopf, 2002). Thus, the geopolitical identity of a state can be understood as the set of self-representations and narratives that link territory, history, and culture to a particular vision of the state's role in regional and global orders (Browning, 2018; Rumelili, 2004). This identity is not fixed; it is produced and reproduced through discourse, foreign policy practices, school curricula, media representations, and diplomatic performances.

Conversely, geopolitical settings also shape identity formation. Borders, colonial legacies, regional conflicts, and patterns of external intervention all influence how communities imagine themselves and others (Paasi, 1996; Said, 1978). In postcolonial contexts, national identity is often constructed in opposition to former colonial powers and in relation to broader civilizational or regional spaces (e.g., Arab, African, Mediterranean, Islamic) (Acharya, 2014; Bilgin, 2012). This interaction generates what some scholars call the "geopolitics of identity," in which struggles over territory, recognition, and representation are inseparable (Malmvig, 2016). Identity becomes both an object of geopolitical contestation and a resource mobilized to legitimize specific geopolitical orientations.

Within this broader literature, cultural diversity plays a dual role. On the one hand, internal pluralism—ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional—can enrich a state's geopolitical identity by enabling it to project multiple affiliations and to act as a bridge between different regions or civilizational spaces (Checkel, 2008; Kinnvall, 2004). On the other hand, if mismanaged, such diversity can be politicized in ways that fragment the national narrative and weaken internal cohesion, thereby constraining the state's external projection (Gagnon, 2004). The key analytical question, therefore, is not whether diversity exists, but how state institutions and political elites manage and represent this diversity in domestic and international arenas. This is where the link between geopolitics and identity becomes most evident: identity is simultaneously a domestic field of negotiation and a strategic asset—or liability—in the conduct of foreign policy and regional positioning (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017).

Defending Algerian Identity Values against the "Western Wave"

To analyse the defence of Algerian identity values, it is first necessary to clarify the main concepts at play in this debate. By *'identity values*,' this article refers to the historically sedimented set of cultural, linguistic, religious, and symbolic references through which Algerians perceive themselves as a political community. These references include, but are not limited to, the intertwined Amazigh–Arab heritage, Islam as a religious and historical marker, and a shared anti-colonial experience.

By *state values*, we mean the normative principles that have been institutionalized through constitutional texts, legislation, and public policies, particularly since independence. These principles crystallize around notions such as national sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, social justice, and the protection of national unity and cultural pluralism. They constitute a political and legal translation of deeper identity values shaped by the liberation struggle and prior historical layers.

The expression *"Western wave"* designates a set of real and perceived influences emanating from Western centres of power—political, economic, cultural, and media-related—that seek, consciously or not, to reshape values, lifestyles, and representations in societies of the

global South. This "wave" is not homogeneous: it combines universalist human rights discourses, consumerist and individualist cultural patterns, and geopolitical strategies that can, at times, collide with or instrumentalize local identity references.

Adopting these working definitions allows us to move away from simplistic dichotomies ("authenticity" versus "Westernization") and instead examine how Algerian identity values are negotiated and reconfigured within a shifting international environment.

From Discourse to Culture: Limits of the Current Identity Strategy

The Algerian state possesses a dense corpus of reference texts and official discourses that affirm cultural rights and identity protection, particularly following successive constitutional amendments. From a normative standpoint, there is no shortage of proclaimed principles or visions concerning identity and culture.

However, the core problem does not lie in the *absence of discourse*, but in the *capacity to translate discourse into lived culture and effective symbolic practices,* and to penetrate everyday practices, popular culture, and the digital public sphere. This is what official institutions and bodies are vigorously doing through the consistent, well-thought-out integration of these values into the social system, using all available and potential means.

Internal Plurality and the Impossibility of a Single Centralized Perception

Empirically, it is neither realistic nor analytically accurate to assume the existence of a single, unified "mental image" of the self and the other in Algerian society. Perceptions of identity and external influences vary significantly by region, class, generation, and ideological orientation.

- For some actors, the "Western wave" is primarily perceived as a *threat* to authenticity and to religious or cultural continuity.
- For others, it is viewed as a *source of opportunities*—for rights claims, personal freedoms, economic mobility, or cultural innovation.

A defensible analysis must therefore recognize that *plural perceptions and internal contestation* are not merely symptoms of weakness, but intrinsic features of any complex national identity under conditions of globalization.

International Influence, Media, and Political Marketing: Underexplored Dimensions

The defence of Algerian identity values against external pressures cannot be analysed solely within national borders. International influence operates through:

1. **Institutional channels**: trade agreements, security partnerships, development programs, and diplomatic alliances that shape policy choices and narratives.
2. **Mediated channels**: transnational media, social networks, entertainment industries, and digital platforms that disseminate representations of Algeria and competing models of life and identity.
3. **Market logics**: the penetration of global brands, consumption patterns, and lifestyles that normalize specific values (individualism, consumerism, secular public culture) while marginalizing others.

Existing analyses often emphasize the first channel (formal diplomacy and agreements) while underdeveloping the second and third channels, especially in *media and political marketing*. However, in the current global context, the struggle over identity values is increasingly waged in symbolic arenas—on screens, platforms, and narratives—rather than only in treaties and official speeches.

Between Analysis and Normative Positions: Conditions for a Strategic Defence of Identity

From a *normative and policy* perspective (distinct from the analytical diagnosis above), defending Algerian identity values against destabilizing external pressures requires at least three conditions:

1- **Institutional coherence**: aligning constitutional principles, legislation, and public policies with practices that effectively protect cultural pluralism, participation, and the rule of law, rather than merely invoking identity rhetorically.

2- **Inclusive protection of cultural groups**: avoiding both the marginalization of any cultural component (Amazigh, Arab, Saharan, etc.) and the over-politicization of difference, so that identity pluralism reinforces rather than fragments national cohesion.

3- **Strategic communication**: developing media and political marketing strategies that present Algerian identity values—not as defensive slogans—but as a credible and attractive narrative domestically and internationally.

At the same time, a more robust strategy must acknowledge potential *counterarguments*: some internal actors may see rigid identity policies as limiting individual freedoms or as tools of political control; some external partners may interpret strong identity discourse as a sign of isolationism. Responding to these concerns requires a careful balance between asserting sovereignty and engaging in open, mutually beneficial international cooperation.

Repositioning Algerian Identity within Emerging Geopolitical Configurations

Building on the preceding diagnosis of internal dynamics and Western influences, a future-oriented analysis of Algerian identity must move beyond defensive postures to examine how identity can be repositioned as a *positive geopolitical resource.* This requires rethinking Algeria's place in a rapidly transforming international system marked by shifting power centres, new regional constellations, and the rise of non-Western normative projects (Acharya, 2017; Hurrell, 2018).

Rather than treating identity merely as an object to be protected from external pressures, this section explores how Algerian identity—understood as a synthesis of Arab, Amazigh, Islamic, African, and Mediterranean references—can underpin a proactive strategy of *normative projection, regional coalition-building,* and *multi-vector diplomacy*. From this angle, three interrelated analytical moves are necessary:

a. Reframing Algerian identity within broader debates on *"multiple modernities"* and *post-Western international orders.*

b. Translating identity capital into *geopolitical leverage* in Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Arab–Islamic world.

c. Embedding identity debates within *future-oriented scenarios* that account for technological, demographic, and environmental transformations.

From Defensive Authenticity to "Multiple Modernities"

Recent work on *multiple modernities* and *post-Western IR* argues that modernity is no longer monopolized by a single Western template, but is being re-articulated through diverse civilizational and regional trajectories (Eisenstadt, 2000; Acharya, 2014). In this perspective, societies of the global South are not passive recipients of norms but active producers of alternative models of political community, development, and world-making. For Algeria, this theoretical shift opens up a conceptual space where identity is not simply defined in opposition to a homogenizing "Western wave", but is seen as a potential contributor to *plural global modernities:*

- The *anti-colonial legacy* and centrality of national liberation can be read as part of a broader Southern repertoire of *emancipatory modernity*, anchored in self-determination and social justice (Young, 2016).
- The *Arab–Amazigh–Islamic–African synthesis* can be understood as a case of *hybrid modernity*, combining rootedness in local traditions with selective appropriation of global norms and technologies (Bayat, 2017).
- The emphasis on *sovereignty and non-alignment* resonates with ongoing attempts in the global South to articulate *post-hegemonic orders* that resist both unilateral Western dominance and new forms of dependency vis-à-vis emerging powers (Pleyers & Brisset, 2023).

In this perspective, the defence of Algerian identity values acquires a *positive geopolitical meaning*: it is not only about protecting cultural authenticity, but also about contributing to the *pluralization of global political imaginaries,* in dialogue—and sometimes in tension—with Western and non-Western centres of power.

Arab–Amazigh–African Identity as a Geopolitical Asset

Recent scholarship on *identity geopolitics* stresses that cultural configurations can function as sources of *soft power, coalition-building,* and *strategic positioning* in regional and international arenas (Pouliot & Thies, 2015; Hall & Lamont, 2013). In the Algerian case, at least four identity axes possess untapped geopolitical potential:

1 *Maghrebi and Amazigh axis* Algeria's strong Amazigh component, constitutionally recognized and culturally embedded, allows it to:
   a) Speak credibly to *Amazigh communities* across North Africa, potentially mediating between nationalist projects and identity claims;
   b) Enhance Maghrebi cultural cooperation in education, media, and academia, even in the absence of deep economic integration (Zoubir, 2022).

2 *Arab and Islamic axis:* As a country with a solid Arab and Islamic identity, yet a distinct anti-colonial and non-sectarian tradition, Algeria is well placed to:
   a. Contribute to *intra-Arab and intra-Islamic dialogues* on reform, governance, and Palestinian rights;

3 *African axis* Algeria's historical support for African liberation movements and its geographical depth towards the Sahel offer a basis for:
   b. positioning itself as a *mediator* in Sahelian security and development debates (Boukhars, 2019);
   c. Contributing to *African knowledge production* on postcolonial statehood, cultural pluralism, and regional integration, in line with African Union agendas (Tieku, 2020).

4 *Mediterranean and Euro-Maghrebi axis* Algeria's long Mediterranean coastline and deep links with European societies through migration and energy trade create opportunities to:
   - advance a *South–North dialogue* that problematizes securitized approaches to migration and terrorism, while promoting co-development and cultural exchange (El Qadim, 2023);
   - Use cultural diplomacy (film, music, literature, memory of anti-colonial struggle) as a counter-narrative to reductionist representations of North Africa.

Conceptualizing these axes as *identity-based vectors of influence* requires moving beyond bilateral "identity vs. West" framings to more complex *network logics,* in which Algeria navigates overlapping circles of belonging and interest.

Digital, Demographic, and Environmental Futures: New Arenas of Identity Geopolitics

A future-oriented study of Algerian identity must also integrate *structural transformations* that will shape the content and geopolitical uses of identity in the coming decades:

1- **Digital connectivity and platform geopolitics:** The rise of digital platforms has created transnational public spheres in which narratives about Algeria are produced, disseminated, and contested. Research on *platform geopolitics* shows that global digital infrastructures (social networks, streaming services, AI systems) function as new arenas of soft power and norm diffusion (DeNardis, 2020; Morozov, 2019).

For Algeria, this implies:

a) The need to invest in *digital cultural industries* (games, series, web content, podcasts) that articulate Algerian narratives for domestic and diasporic audiences;

b) The strategic use of *diaspora networks* in Europe and North America as bridges for cultural diplomacy, knowledge exchange, and economic partnerships (Brand, 2018).

2   **Demographic dynamics and youth imaginaries:** With a predominantly young population, the future of Algerian identity will be heavily shaped by *youth imaginaries* of mobility, dignity, and participation (Honwana, 2013). These imaginaries are increasingly transnational, influenced by global protest cultures, digital activism, and comparative experiences in the Arab region and beyond.

Geopolitically, this raises key questions:

- How will youth expectations regarding rights, governance, and inclusion influence Algeria's external image and alliances?

- Can Algeria transform youthful aspirations into *regional leadership* in areas such as higher education, green technologies, and cultural production?

3   **Climate change and territorial re-imagination:** Climate change is reshaping the geostrategic value of territories, particularly in the Sahel–Sahara and Mediterranean zones (Benjaminsen & Hiernaux, 2019). Algerian identity—historically linked to land, desert, and revolution—will necessarily be reinterpreted as environmental pressures transform livelihoods, migration patterns, and security agendas.

a) A forward-looking identity strategy could:

b) position Algeria as a *regional hub* for Saharan and Sahelian climate adaptation knowledge;

c) embed environmental stewardship into the symbolic repertoire of national identity, linking *resistance to colonial extraction with resistance to ecological degradation.*

Towards a Multi-Vector "Identity Diplomacy"

Linking these elements together, we can envisage a form of *"identity diplomacy"* in which Algeria deliberately mobilizes its cultural and historical specificities as instruments of foreign

policy (Nye, 2011; Hocking, Melissen & Riordan, 2012). Such a strategy would rest on four pillars:

1. **Norm entrepreneurship:** Algeria can champion specific norms that resonate with its historical experience—anti-colonialism, sovereign equality, cultural pluralism, and solidarity with liberation causes—within African, Arab, and UN fora (Acharya, 2011). This would reinforce its image as a **principled actor** rather than a purely reactive one.

2. **Strategic narrative construction:** Following work on strategic narratives in international relations (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2013), Algeria needs coherent stories about:
   a) Who it is (a plural, postcolonial, sovereign republic);
   b) Where it comes from (anti-colonial struggle, civilizational depth);
   c) Where it is going (green and digital transition, African partnership, Mediterranean dialogue).

These narratives must be tailored to different audiences (domestic, regional, global) and disseminated through both traditional diplomacy and digital cultural production.

1. **Coalition-building around shared identity references:** Algeria can form or reinforce coalitions with states and movements that share similar identity configurations or normative priorities (e.g., other postcolonial republics, African states emphasizing sovereignty and non-alignment, Arab and Islamic actors prioritizing Palestine and cultural rights). Here, identity becomes a *basis for coalition-building* that can complement material interests.

2. **Institutionalization of identity policy:** Finally, identity diplomacy requires institutional mechanisms:
   a) inter-ministerial coordination between foreign affairs, culture, higher education, communication, and diaspora affairs;
   b) Permanent observatories or think tanks dedicated to *identity and foreign policy,* producing regular strategic assessments (Boucher, 2021);
   c) Partnerships with universities and research centres to feed foreign policy with *evidence-based, critical knowledge* rather than ad hoc or purely rhetorical invocations of identity.

Research Directions for a Future-Oriented Geopolitics of Algerian Identity

To consolidate these insights into a robust academic agenda, at least four lines of research appear promising:

1. **Comparative studies of postcolonial identity diplomacies.** Comparing Algeria with other postcolonial states (e.g., South Africa, India, Vietnam, Brazil) can illuminate common patterns and specificities in how identity is mobilized geopolitically (Acharya & Buzan, 2019).

2. **Empirical mapping of Algerian cultural and digital influence.** Through media content analysis, network analysis of diasporic communities, and audience research, scholars can quantify and qualify Algeria's *soft-power footprint* in Africa, the Arab world, and Europe.

3. **Scenario-based futures of Algerian identity:** Using foresight methods (scenario planning, Delphi studies, horizon scanning), researchers can explore how different combinations of domestic reforms, external shocks, and technological changes may reshape Algerian identity and its geopolitical uses by 2040–2050 (Miller, 2018).

4. **Every day, geopolitics of identity:** Finally, micro-level ethnographic and sociological work on how ordinary Algerians—especially youth, women, and marginalized groups—experience and interpret international influences can ground macro-geopolitical analyses in lived realities (Dalby, 2010; Bilgin, 2016).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the debate on Algerian identity should not be confined to a binary between "defence against the Western wave" and "uncritical openness". Instead, a *future-oriented geopolitics of identity* invites us to consider how Algeria can *co-create global norms,* build *multidirectional alliances,* and project a *distinctive yet inclusive identity* in an increasingly post-Western international order.

Conclusion

Addressing the geopolitics of identity in Algeria requires starting from the composite "Amazigh–Arab" configuration as the main structuring principle of the country's cultural and political landscape. This study has shown that Algerian identity is neither homogeneous nor reducible to a single axis (ethnic, linguistic, or religious); instead, it functions as a layered framework that articulates Amazigh, Arab, Islamic, African, and Mediterranean references. Within this framework, identity is not a fixed essence, but a dynamic field in which historical memories, linguistic practices, and symbolic repertoires are continuously renegotiated.

A central finding of the article is that cultural identity in Algeria cannot be analytically separated from the broader geopolitical environment. International stereotyping and distorted external representations not only misdescribe Algerian reality; they actively shape the conditions under which Algerians negotiate their belonging. The recognition of the Amazigh dimension, the politicization of Islam as both a resource of resistance and a marker of authenticity, and the emergence of new forms of social openness are all mediated by transnational norms, institutions, and discourses on diversity. In this sense, the "geopolitics of identity" refers to the way domestic identity configurations are co-produced through the interaction of internal actors and external pressures.

The study also clarifies the conceptual relationship between *religion and identity*. Islam in Algeria functions simultaneously as (i) a doctrinal belief system, (ii) a historical memory of anti-colonial struggle, and (iii) a symbolic boundary that distinguishes the national community from external "others". Treating Islam solely as a religious doctrine obscures its political and cultural functions, while reducing it to a political tool ignores its normative and spiritual dimensions. Likewise, "identity" is approached here not as a primordial given, but as a contingent outcome of power relations among state institutions, civil society, and social movements that mobilize religious and cultural symbols for competing projects.

From this perspective, one of the article's key contributions is to demonstrate that the unity of identity in Algeria is better understood as a *shared, overarching framework* rather than uniformity. The coexistence of multiple references can reinforce national cohesion when it is managed through inclusive institutions and equitable recognition. However, it can also fuel polarization when these references are instrumentalized in zero-sum struggles over legitimacy and resources. The geopolitical stakes of identity thus lie in how these plural references are integrated into a national narrative that is open to diversity without dissolving the boundaries of belonging.

At the same time, the analysis underscores that policy responses centred exclusively on legal reforms or declarative recognition are insufficient. Without more profound transformations in the practices of citizenship, the rule of law, and participatory mechanisms,

identity will continue to be mobilized as a substitute for unresolved socio-economic and political grievances. A more coherent configuration of identity, religion, and citizenship requires institutional arrangements that reduce the incentives to instrumentalize symbolic differences and that create spaces for negotiated compromise.

Based on these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. Empirically, there is a need for studies that examine how younger generations across different regions (urban/rural, coastal/interior) experience and articulate their Amazigh, Arab, Islamic, African, and Mediterranean affiliations in everyday practices—both offline and online. Conceptually, further work is needed to refine the notion of "identity geopolitics" by comparing the Algerian case with other North African and Mediterranean contexts where religion, language, and memory play similar yet distinct structuring roles. Finally, policy-oriented research could explore which specific institutional designs (in education, media regulation, and local governance) are most effective in transforming identity from a potential fault line into a resource for social cohesion and strategic regional engagement.

In sum, the article argues that the Algerian case illustrates a broader theoretical point: identity, when examined through a geopolitical lens, is not merely a background variable but an active, multi-level force that shapes both domestic order and international positioning. Recognizing this dual function of identity—as an internal field of negotiation and an external instrument of projection—is essential for understanding how Algeria can simultaneously preserve its national cohesion and enhance its capacity to act as a credible and constructive regional and international partner.

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Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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