

'Searching for a Sleeping State'

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The effect, if not the objective, of Muslim intellectuals' fate in their country is to obstruct their avenues for interpretation, prevent them for putting forward a possible meaning for the working of their society. They are a target for repression. In a number of those countries departments teaching philosophy (in Algeria), sociology (Morocco) and social sciences were closed down in the 1970s. The engineering disciplines were promoted, but that is exactly where protest against the regimes came from, more often than not with religious overtones: the Islamist parties are defined everywhere as the engineers' faction. For how can we separate thought processes? Semi-divine but incompetent leaders thought that engineers would get a society 'working' like a machine without any kind of questioning. This situation forms the basis for the thinking I want to pursue in this paper: the 'political' has always been present from humanity's origins up to today. In Marcel Gauchet's view the 'political condition' is what constitutes our humanity. Our identity is political. We are the 'actors of coexistence', a 'condition' made manifest as a process involving all kinds of 'changes'.

A second observation relating to intellectuals in Muslim societies is that they go unheard, although the universities in that region of the world resonate with names such as those that follow.

Ali Abd al-Razik, whose book *L'Islam et les fondements du pouvoir*, despite coming out in 1925, is often quoted, particularly for the following sentence:

Nothing stops Muslims building their state or system of government on the basis of the most recent creations of human reason and on the basis of systems whose solidity has been praised, those that the experience of nations has indicated to be among the best.

This writer, a religious judge, allowed himself to raise questions about the caliphate in this book, making a distinction between the Prophet Mohammed's apostolic mission and government of the caliphate. And he concludes that a theory of the state does not exist in Muslim law.

Khaled Mohamad Khaled, who asks (1950: 135): 'Shall we confuse religion and state and lose both of them? Or are we going to give each man and woman their own space so that we can win them over and gain our future?' His book was printed by the author in 2000 copies, which he handed over to the renowned bookseller Hagg Wahba to distribute.

We should also cite *Jamel El Benna* (2003), whose article 'Pas de sanction pour l'apostasie'¹ is taught and debated as well. According to Mouna Akouri (2001), who has written a book about the thinker, he thinks that wearing the hijab is not a legal obligation. Similarly Muslim women can marry without witnesses or legal guardian.

Another name that could be mentioned is *Mohammed Said Al-Ashmawi*, who wrote in the introduction to his book الإسلام السياسي (translated as *L'Islamisme contre l'Islam* but expressed more accurately as 'political Islam'): 'God made Islam a religion, people turned it into politics.' In that book the author writes that Islamic government is a demand emerging from the history of colonialism, the foundation of Pakistan, the creation of the state of Israel, from military and semi-military regimes, corruption, the decline of the west, oil wealth, frustrations due to technology, the increasing disorder in the international system, sexual morality and establishment of the imamate in Iran . . . all references to specific political contexts.

We cannot forget *Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd*, who calls for a historical reading of the Koran and who, after conflicts with Egyptian justice and death threats from fundamentalist groups, was forced to leave for the Netherlands, where he lives today.

This list of thinkers is substantial but, despite the importance of the debates I refer to, and in which intellectuals put their lives at risk, that part of the world is often presented as incapable of thinking. So Muslim intellectuals are interpreting, but 'we' do not hear them – or they are a target for repression. Not hearing them cuts them off even more. They are especially fragile because they are isolated. We should remember that between 1993 and 1998 a veritable plan to exterminate Algerian intellectuals was set in train. Mahfoud Boucebsi, Abdelkader Alloula, Djillali Liabes, Mohamed Boukhobza, Youssef Fathallah, Youssef Sebti, Nabila Djahnine: a long list. They were killed because they were intellectuals fighting for the adoption of principles such as social progress, democracy, rationality.

Yet other names come to mind, like Mohamed Tah, Sudanese chief editor of the weekly *Al-Wifaq*, murdered on 5 September 2006. His paper had dared to criticize the behaviour of Islamist groups in the Darfur region. But also Yadh Ben Achour, Mohammad Talbi, Mohamed Arkoun, Mohamed Abd el Jabiri, Abdou Filali-Ansary, all fortunately alive. These authors have taught and still teach and supervise theses in prestigious universities. They have been members of editorial committees of cultural journals and have embarked on critical thinking even from within Muslim societies and Islam's most prestigious institutions.

But I should also like to mention the work of the jurists, political analysts, sociologists, economists, who do not allow religion to have the monopoly of meaning. Many of them publish but are constantly required to take a stand because their writing is ignored. Reading these authors we discover that for many Muslim thinkers the religious does not have the monopoly of meaning – whereas those who continue to ignore them think everything that happens in that region of the world has its explanation in the religious sphere.

My argument aims to show that their ideas are stifled by the political manipulations they face. To understand that I think it is urgent to try to identify what the situation of the Muslim and the Muslim intellectual is like in particular social and historical contexts, while realizing that situation is political.

Intellectuals Kept in the Darkness of Cellars

This paper wishes to give as accurate an account as possible of a 'state of siege', that is, a situation in which the bearers of words, who can also be called elites, but also entire societies, are placed today. They are besieged and restricted to debates undermined by anxiety and insecurity. They are politically under siege.

The debates are concerned in the first instance with the political legitimacy of the language used. They are required to justify themselves politically for each word spoken or written. They manage only with difficulty to construct an utterance and the political conditions are created so that it will not be heard. The language used is a central issue: it gives legitimacy to pronouncements on the state of the society. Indeed many of these countries are emerging from a colonial situation and still define themselves in relation to the old colonial power.

In this post-colonial context intellectuals try to get away: they go to live and write abroad, most often to Europe. But inside the Muslim world itself the use of foreign languages makes it possible to escape from a concrete situation, since the freedom to think in Arabic remains very restricted and reduced by the 'state of siege' in which those societies find themselves. Intellectuals are not the only ones to use this strategy: young people flock to language centres, internet sites and makeshift boats. Various sociological surveys show that most of the 'harraga', undercover immigrants, are educated and are escaping from something else as well as their economic situation.

These educated youngsters are refugees, exiles in different languages. They have to interrogate the dictionary they use. It is in fact this that allows us to progress our thinking about the political state of siege.

Certain words have embodied a possible liberation. I think of the word 'south' as it was used in the 1960s. It could be translated into Arabic by الجنوب, *el djanoub*, and retain its emancipatory force. It was ربح الجنوب, the 'south wind'. That word implied the existence in the south of translators or people able to give an account of the real from a position in the south and fix it in any writing likely to be received.

This ability to interpret is one of the riches Muslims possess, to cite the Baghdad of the early centuries. Alfred-Louis de Prémare (2000: 312; see also 322, 337) describes the context in which the Koran took shape as a culture of writing: 'here we are not in a universe of oral traditions but one of composer scribes'. Receiving those texts meant being able to comment on them, and some commentators claimed to shed light on the verses from the context in which they were said to have been revealed (أسباب النزول). How did people receive and interpret The Text and what did they do with it? In a number of Muslim societies no questions of this kind are possible nowadays. However, أسباب النزول is a kind of Koranic exegesis that aims to establish the context(s) of revelation as it favoured the spread of Islam. Today any relationship between the socio-historical context and the content of revelation is suspect. It

would lay its author open to sanctions coming from both the political authorities and armed groups, since the censor's role is being taken on by the representatives of state Islam as well as fundamentalist movements: for all of them The Text is immanent, whereas since al-Wahidi exegesis has been pursuing the search for the أسباب (reasons) لنزول الآية (for the origin) of the different verses. Furthermore several authors establish a genealogy linking al-Wahidi (1075), al-Iraqi (1171), al-Jabiri (1309) and al-Suyuti (1505).

This contextualization carried out through the analysis of the sacred Text has made it possible to break it down into 86 suras from Mecca and 28 from Medina.² The ideas involved show that a work of contextualization was definitely carried out. It covers the exile and meeting with the others. السيرة, the *Sîra* or life of the Prophet Mohammed (blessings be upon Him), the official Muslim biography,³ tells us it was on his arrival in Medina, once Yathreb (Islam's second 'holy city' which contains the Prophet's tomb), that the Prophet (blessings be upon him) made the founding decisions as to Muslims' social organization: construction of the Mosque, the wish to create a spirit of brotherhood between Muslims (المهاجرون) and Ansars (الأنصار), the people of Medina) and especially drawing up a constitution that would regulate Muslims' lives and clarify their relations with the other communities, starting with the Jewish tribes.

What I wish to emphasize is the current political danger that authors who embark on a contextual re-reading of the sacred texts expose themselves to – *precisely because they are questioning the context.*

Returning to the texts and interpreting them is not the same as a literal reading. This exegesis involves an ability to interpret both from within and from outside the sphere of the sacred. It is that ability I wish to emphasize in the Algerian context. Algeria had an important symbolic role in the emergence of the political notion of 'south' between the 1950s and 1970s. Caught up in the problems of decolonization, the country was able to mobilize its people using a discourse of liberation. It fascinated intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon. This encounter between revolution and a wordsmith, expressed in the colonizer's language, led to a significant meeting with the rest of Africa through writing which is still a reference point today. Information, analysis, revolutionary strategies were associated with that experience and therefore that ability to interpret the notion of 'south', challenging the north and rejecting fixed definitions. At that time the phrase 'countries of the south' meant 'non-aligned nations', 'group of 77'. It was a political term capable of mobilizing consciousness in order to change reality. It designated peoples on the alert, engaged in a struggle. The words were part of a political practice and enabled the countries from that south to offer the rest of the world a representation of reality that was their own. Today that ability and symbolic capital are exhausted. Debates about the word 'south' refer to a specifier of identity in and through language. The word now assigns a particular identity to the economies of the south, the societies of the south, political actors from the south. Today it means more directly 'subordinate economies' or 'subordinate countries', which put up with reality and do not manage to propose another version of that reality. They do not give an account of themselves, nor of their projects, just the shadows they cast.

The wordsmiths are now in a cave. It is a reflection of a past history, now dis-

embodied, that they cast with their pleas for the south and for respectful exchange between north and south. And gradually the word has narrowed its horizons. In a country like Algeria it has become synonymous with 'Muslim world'. Sometimes the old dreams raise their heads and try to give life to mythical beings such as NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). For the experts from the north the 'south' also causes headaches. So it is replaced by the term 'emerging': emerging economies, emerging countries . . . But this word has no more meaning. Instead it tells us, when applied to Africa and the Arab world, that those countries are incapable of emerging, that their elites are not managing to produce any meaning, in economics, culture, politics, on the rocky road travelled by their people. The reverse reality of the word 'south' is censorship, repression, violence and poverty. It is more like a vision from folklore, a demagogic or humanitarian attitude: two sides of the same coin.

And so we see words being adjusted, since it is imperative to represent the environment as their speakers experience it, that is, as domination. In the words uttered the so-called peoples of the south today in fact feel that they are being 'spoken', 'acted': they do not speak about themselves, they do not act, they are represented. They are not building a new world through the genius of the word. They are under a 'state of siege'.

So they try to escape through what is allowed in language: by using the sacred. And it is their anger they express. That is because it has never been about asking questions through the Arabic language but rather about 'Arabizing' peoples in order to make them Algerian. This process has been allowed by intertwining language with the sacred. Thus the Algerian church cannot say mass in Arabic (a political decision: and a unique case in the Arab world) and peoples whose mother tongue has been Arabic since they adopted Islam have been Arabized in order to be re-Islamized. In this way time and historical experience have been wiped away. What I have to say will be accompanied by some lines from the poet Mahmoud Darwish, for when faced with the difficulty of taking part in scientific movements, society expresses itself better through cultural forms such as poetry:

In the state of siege, time becomes space
Petrified in its eternity
In the state of siege, space becomes time
That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.

The mechanisms introduced for assigning this identity through language were paradoxically promises of victory. The reconquest of a language that was nevertheless used daily (but was now more fluent and closer to the sacred, the Arabic of the Text) was supposed to give access to the heights that were the province of the arrogant Christian west. And yet, dispossessed of the promised victory, enchained and immobilized in cellars that are like caves, we glimpse generations of Muslims who do not attain to any enlightenment other than the lures set alight by their enemies. What are these cellars, who are these enemies who control the fires and the light? Why do many intellectuals take refuge in a cave? For sure they are kept there by the attitude of the outside world to their culture, but their culture only supports the authoritarian, repressive behaviour of the authorities in power.

Despite our efforts we watch the world evolving through our TV screens. We lack words, and others' words remain: democracy, human rights, civil society. And if, in Schopenhauer's dictum, 'the world is my representation', we struggle to recognize the authority of words to give an account of our reality, for that authority requires the ability to inhabit a language, to play it, but above all to speak to the world about current issues. But in a country like Algeria the use of Arabic that is allowed nowadays raises a number of obstacles to passing from reality to perceived experience then expressing it in language. Intellectuals who know present-day Algeria, as well as other Arabic-speaking countries, find that the language struggles to translate the uniqueness of experience. It stumbles up against censorship, repression, manipulation. This is particularly true of the manipulation of religious reference points, which are both the basis of otherness, compared to the now Judeo-Christian west, and a constraint, when they are first of all political issues. Whether it is a case of Arabic or French, Algerians are more and more finding they cannot inhabit a language that would allow them to develop the real from their experience. As far as language is concerned, it is now only about Islam in its legal guise and no longer about human experience lived from an earthly perspective that has finally been accepted. Again we find those links between identity and language in the case of France, our foremost interlocutor, which in the current debate binds national identity strongly to the French language. It is not possible to use the Koran's message alone to justify the intellectual situation and the absence of freedom of thought we see in Muslim countries.

All that remains of freedom of thought is nostalgia for it. Then we remember Granada and Ibn Rochd, or Iqbal, blanking out the fate meted out to the former and the content of the latter's thought. In the political field, where the preachers are also to be found, we recall Bejaïa, Tiemcen, Tahert . . . But we no longer have those towns nor the debates that resounded within their walls, we have only an image of them. Parts of the real are concealed through words and we need a critical return and a little memory to understand, for instance, that the word 'south' expresses a distance, meaning 'lands of the economically and culturally underdeveloped'.

A land that gets ready at dawn. We are becoming less intelligent
Because we watch for the hour of victory:
No night in our night lit by bombardment.
Our enemies are awake and our enemies light the light for us
In the darkness of the cellars.

So among the bonds that keep Arab intellectuals in the cave there is first the relationship Arab regimes have with the very idea of an elite. For them the intertwining of language with religion has made Islam into a tool for action.

Our Enemies Light the Light for Us

Lighting the light for all societies, including Muslim ones since the Holy Book starts with the emblematic injunction «اقرأ» ('read!'), means giving people literacy. So I am going to attempt a deconstruction, focusing on Algeria, of how the policy of so-called

'Arabization' is being used. In this way I shall show that what was often labelled 'incorrect Arabization' in fact meant challenging the existence of a local intellectual elite in favour of an elite obedient to the orders of a state Islam that decrees what is just, good, true or possible. It was not about transmitting the Koran's message but closing down the intellectual field.

In Algeria two slogans – or promises – made possible this use of religion: *democratization of education* and *Arabization policy*. As we can hear from the words, this meant redefining what 'connects' people and gives a national identity.

Initially the political choice of Arabization marked a shift. From an African country facing French colonial oppression Algeria found itself moved into the ideological and political sphere of the Arab world, which had gradually become an Arabo-Muslim one. The content of the decolonization process, which the country had to undergo with the rest of North Africa, was altered by this. It was no longer a matter of changing the nature of the links that united it with the former colonial power, but of rethinking its very identity. The evil was in the result not the colonial experience. We were guilty of moving away from ourselves. But it was that memory of Self that had enabled us to hold out against colonial humiliation. Little by little use of the Arabic language alone took on the ability to produce a new, Arab, being, who was said to be connected with a language that was imprinted with the seal of the sacred by reference to a holy Book. And so other parts of the identity of Islamized African Berbers, who had rubbed up against French culture for more than a century were denied. That complex historical being had to give way to a liberated Arabo-Muslim finally freed from the Other's gaze solely by the power of the change in language. This new Arabo-Muslim individual, even though supported by a great civilization, cannot come into being in societies where the political authorities are preventing intellectual elites from emerging and are encouraging ignorance and coercion: this individual is also suffering from the overuse of Arabic as the vector of an ideology of closure. The illusion of a cultural and social specificity places societies in a time experienced as unchanging. So authoritarian governments, faced with a strong demand for education, respond with a quantitative approach, since no questions are allowed about content.

The Algerian government, like a number of Arab regimes, encourages the Arabic language and thinks it can base its legitimacy on grand nationalist narratives in which resisting foreign domination is linked with defending the Muslim faith. It continues to reject debate about existing societies and their working. So it comes up against another epic, similarly legitimized by the shift in language: the return through a purer language to holier times, that is, the Muslim state. Facing a serious internal crisis, the regime is still negotiating a status quo by manipulating hackneyed topics on a daily basis and by setting secularists against Islamists, nationalists against allies of foreigners. The language is an issue around which divisions are articulated in terms of *French-speakers* and *Arabic-speakers*, allies of France and servants of the foreigner. Yet the most radical confrontations occur within Arabic itself between nationalists and Islamists. No opposition outside this pairing is managing to produce a narrative for external or domestic use that is able to gain people's support. An industry of words like civil society, democratization, electorate, citizenship, exists but cannot disguise the fact that the south wind is no longer blowing. How

have the actors from the second half of the twentieth century become hordes that the Holy alone can mobilize? Why has no other discourse been able to mobilize the people? Answering this question also means thinking about what the use of the Holy implies about disenchantment too:

Here, no 'I'
Here, Adam remembers the dust of his clay.

A disenchantment that today feeds the Arabic language and makes us ask what those societies know about themselves and how they express it. But in those societies do there exist conditions for another mode of representation capable of involving a country like Algeria in the development of an outside world that has always been part of the Muslim universe? Is it still useful to remind people that Islam is the sole monotheistic religion that has granted the status of *الذمي*, protected ones, to other believers? Besides the explicit recognition of the validity of previous prophetic messages gives the Islamic tradition a universal reach which ought to block the antagonisms that nowadays bedevil relations with the others. Furthermore Islam also has a renewing role for the traditions that are part of the Abrahamic inheritance.

How Defeat is Transmitted: the Education System

In an interview with the daily paper *Il Manifesto* Mahmoud Darwish (2007) defined himself as the poet of the defeated, a 'Trojan poet', one of those 'who have been deprived of even the right to pass on their defeat'. But this inability is constructed. Here is how the process operates in Algeria.

Once again at the start of this new academic year Algerian universities see students as clay dust, numbers that are rising fast. As for school students the explosion has continued steadily since independence (1962). There has been an occasionally dramatic 'democratization of education'.

Though school enrolment rates have soared, educational objectives in Algeria have never been pedagogical. They have been summarized as management of demographic fluctuations that are always seen in economic and financial terms. A general slogan has replaced a programme: 'national economic, social and cultural development'. In this context we have seen an astounding infrastructure expansion. In 1963 there was one university city; today there are 58 university centres throughout the whole country.

So Algerians are educated and literate in large numbers. However the conditions in which knowledge is transmitted create a genuine difficulty for university teachers and their status in Algeria. More often than not lecturers see themselves as 'teachers in higher education' and especially as far as the human and social sciences are concerned. A large number of these teachers have emigrated to other countries or moved into other work. According to the daily *El Watan* of 21 April 2004 80,000 university-level teachers have left Algeria since the late 1970s. Data supplied by the higher education ministry show that today there are only 3,442 professors and lecturers among the 23,205 people teaching in higher education.

This situation is the result of a redefinition of the role of the university institution, which, when it was created during the colonial period, was supposed to produce an elite able to lead the native people and act as an interface for them. Algerian teachers trained in French in the 1960s in the remains of that colonial university found themselves ideologically disqualified as 'intellectuals' in the new society that the ruling powers desired. Their Arabic-speaking colleagues, on the other hand, found themselves disqualified as regards science, since in the scientific centres of excellence courses were taught in French. Thus the university was a site of issues and conflicts around teaching values, between legitimate and dominant norms. Collapsing under the weight of numbers it ceased to be a space for scientific mobilization and found itself subject to ideological and political objectives. The university has gradually become de-institutionalized and taken over by society's relations and problems: the rising age of marriage, unemployment . . . It is no exaggeration to say that some university establishments have become less places for education than vast waiting rooms, reception areas or even warehouses.

The democratization of education has not meant democratization *through* education. Massive school enrolment and rapid growth in the higher education sector have not reduced inequalities with regard to knowledge. The students who succeed in the most sought-after fields, those that have a fixed intake (*numerus clausus*) and teaching in French, are from relatively well-off backgrounds. Their parents are most often professionals with degree-level qualifications. Those who 'fail' in the Arabic-speaking subjects are most often from poor backgrounds, with parents who are mostly manual workers or jobless, without qualifications or a low level. The cultural environment in which youngsters live is correlated with their educational achievement. Having your own room in a country where there is a serious housing crisis, a space to be alone and work in peace, having books, journals, dictionary available, but also speaking French at home, these are all factors favouring a good educational experience and the 'right' options.

You realize that, like everywhere, the greater the parents' educational capital, the more they invest in the cultural field by making available to their children not only school textbooks but also other cultural consumer goods that are just as important, encouraging reading for instance or attendance at a club for sport or culture. Profit-making secular private establishments have opened. For some years well-off parents (often professionals or university teachers, who therefore talk about their work) have set up private establishments, bilingual in French and Arabic, so that their children can continue their higher education abroad or in Algerian institutes and follow courses such as medicine or pharmacy with a limit on enrolments (*numerus clausus*). Those parents are closer to the university, as regards knowledge of programmes and destinations, than parents from modest backgrounds. The answers they provide through their children's educational career are a prognosis of opportunities for social mobility, which the largely Arabic-speaking Algerian university can offer young people from that social class.

A number of characteristics peculiar to the different geographical regions go to explain the contrast between urban and rural areas in particular. The rural areas are less well endowed with educational and cultural infrastructure (libraries, bookshops) and suffer especially from the lack of preschool education, so reducing the chance of

having a normal schooling for children from those areas. Similarly rural children's school conditions are different from those of students in urban areas. In particular they have transport problems, which explains why many girls in those areas are not even enrolled. They have not benefited from early education like children in urban areas, and have also had to repeat a year. Coming most often from a working-class background, they are less well favoured for books, tend to read much less and in addition do various jobs to help their families financially, whereas better-off urban youngsters take up sports or cultural pastimes and have access to foreign languages through their milieu or the various foreign cultural centres.

Over and above these access conditions, the problem of the language of instruction has also prevented any debate about the content of education. Use of the 'national language' was supposed to solve problems of training and pedagogy. An ideologically based contrast was set up between supporters of Arabization and those who in practice used only French. The issue of knowledge of foreign languages for scientific development was reduced to that conflict.

Today the linguistic reality is that Arabization has not been assimilated in many cases. This is not merely a matter of terminology but of the role assigned to the language, the process of conceptual construction. 'Despite the almost universal Arabization of teaching in the social sciences in North Africa, the organization of research in those disciplines continues to reproduce the French model of the 1970s and has not led to an improvement in the command of languages' (Kaci, 2003: 55).

There is first the sacred status conferred on the language, which has been endowed with an ideological power. This process has exploded the Arabic language because its effect has been to fix settled truths and established positions instead of mobilizing intellectual resources.

I think the unilateral nature of the pedagogic relationship and this way of relating to knowledge may come from the confusion, widespread in the educational system and society, between science as an object of 'revelation', in the near-religious sense of the word, and science as a process of construction of concepts and objects, that is, of phenomena.

The immanent power that has been attributed to the language partly explains the fact that for years we have noticed a weakness in the teaching conditions provided for the teaching of Arabic. That weakness is visible in publishing and translation in Arabic. It is necessary to stress this poverty of translation, added to which is the poor command of foreign languages: in Algeria today there are only vestiges of French, which take the form of a few classes in terminology at degree level.

Taken together, these factors – added to the fact that Algerian universities are not ranked in large-scale surveys of higher education such as the one carried out by Shanghai University – explain the low social value of university studies in Algeria. Coupled with the desire to go away, to quit the country, which young people and more generally Algerian society feel, this helps us to understand why the use of French is a feature of what could be an Algerian elite. What may at first sight appear shocking nevertheless seems legitimate in a more general context, where young people continually hear talk of globalization: they want to be part of the world and reject the idea of being left on the streets. Hardly a year ago the government stopped sending the best school-leavers to study abroad. But though the state has just put a

stop to that, the children of the *nomenklatura* and the small intellectual middle class are still being sent abroad by their parents, after completing a school programme in the private bilingual schools their parents have set up in campaigning style, or at the new 'Lycée International Alexandre Dumas' created by the French department of culture in Algiers. The *lycée's* school fees are high when compared with spending power in Algeria, but parents see it as an opportunity to send their children to study in France without facing any difficulty in getting the necessary visa. It is important to stress that, when they have the means, these parents no longer depend on state schools. In fact this method of filtering out young people explains, at least in part, the interest comfortably off parents have in their children's education: they use a certain amount of material and pedagogic resources with this objective in mind and thus increase their children's chance of succeeding, that is, their chance of going on to higher education abroad.

So that education is validated outside the country by foreign universities, particularly French ones since they are part of an education system familiar to Algerians. The promotion of excellence depends on education abroad, which illustrates the marginalization and waste of a valuable scientific and cultural potential. Few of those young people return to Algeria. The country is denying itself the possibility of having an elite capable of interpreting reality from an Algerian identity.

A General is Digging Down in Search of a Sleeping State

Nothing here has a Homeric echo.
Myths knock on our doors, if need be.
Nothing has a Homeric echo. Here a general
Is digging down in search of a sleeping state
Under the ruins of a Troy to come.

All those working in the school system are now talking about the excess of politicization that teaching the language suffers from. Raising questions about this situation should be a central aim of reforms that are proposed but always postponed, because awareness of the weak relationship to science always leads back to giving up the defence of Algerians' Arabo-Muslim personality. That is how politicians constantly set themselves up as knights of religion.

However, precisely because of language, inequalities have not been eliminated. The middle and upper social classes are still educating their children for and in the outside world. Their ultimate objective is to sidestep Algerian universities and avoid universities for the masses. The specificity of the Algerian case comes from the fact that access to jobs and social mobility do not involve Arabic. It is knowledge of foreign languages, especially French and English, that ensures a qualification validated within the country through employment in the private companies that are proliferating alongside public companies in Algeria. Similarly knowledge of French allows students to enter the new schools of higher education: banking, business and insurance schools . . . They have all sorts of job opportunities open to them.

So we can say that foreign-run higher education or higher education abroad is particularly attractive in a situation where inter-university exchanges are few and

far between, scientific books are hard to come by and libraries do not work well. The quest for higher education abroad also reflects the desire to become part of and operate in a high-quality intellectual context.

With these problems to resolve we cannot focus solely on the structure of the system. We have to give more importance to evaluation of its content and the conditions in which it is transmitted. Arabization, which was supported by the social sectors attempting to reposition themselves in the society and which has since then become the general rule in the universities, means that they are not well integrated into the social environment.

The difficulty in retaining in the country an Algerian intellectual elite able to produce a social project is easy to see. In its children's education that elite is today following a strategy of 'every man for himself'. The analysis I have set out raises the issue of the Algerian authorities' ability to create the conditions that will make it possible to retain in-country an elite capable of taking the lead, in whichever language, in thinking about society. The response cannot be reduced to the 'sacred nature' of the Arabic language. The manipulation of Arabic and Islam originate elsewhere: in the country's political government. The option of reflecting on the role of the university and of language in the production of knowledge would mean wanting to create a society based on producing rather than living on assets. This option would make it possible to plan for retaining an elite in-country whose existence implies economic conditions, it is true, but also political ones, among them the practice of democracy and access to human rights. The weakness of the cultural environment and the productivity of the education system explain the importance of family structures in Algerian society. Authoritarian systems are bolstered all the more by this, since people remain stuck in that class at the expense of taking on a social role in the public sphere.

Far from producing a new individual freed from the demeaning gaze of the Other, the Arabization policy, reduced to a simple change of languages at the service of an authoritarian government, has produced alienated people created by a system for training elites that gets its legitimacy from a relationship to the Other rather than from knowledge. We have to remember that the elites who were educated in Arabic, including the *oulama* or the national poet Moudi Zakarya, were forced into exile just as much as the French-speaking elites. I should mention the closing of the *medersa* and the Franco-Muslim schools, which provided effective bilingual teaching. The change of language was at first an opportunity to domesticate society by reducing Arabic to a category of the Holy. And this is so for other countries, like Egypt or Syria, where a majority of the elite able to speak Arabic as well as French and English are also abroad.

Beyond the superficial explanations pontificating on modes of authoritarian command that are supposed to be peculiar to Arab societies, we should look at the social origin of Algerian leaders who, since they have for the most part a modest level of education, seem to fear the persistence or emergence of an elite, be it Arabic- or French-speaking. All the measures adopted pedagogically, like the closure of philosophy teaching which occurred on one occasion or changes to history teaching in a reductive direction, have had the aim of enclosing students in a circular, non-dialectical kind of thinking, without memory or critical spirit. The people's

dictionary changed then. For an authoritarian regime with no legitimacy based on education, the temptation to rein in the capabilities of that language was irresistible. Those leaders are unable to organize reproduction and are distancing themselves from the Koran's message on knowledge at the same time as they claim it as their inspiration. Let us remember how Moussa, when he met a person with knowledge in the cave, asked to benefit from his teaching: 'Can I follow you so that can teach me what you were taught about the right direction?' (xviii, 66–68).

So on the one hand the explosion in school enrolments accompanied by the implosion of the educational system, and on the other the submissive links between institutions and immediate social and cultural environment, have brought about and maintained a dogmatic closure serving an authoritarian government and based on manipulation of the sacred. Thus knowledge seems to be a value that is struggling to make its way in this society. Of course it should be supported, but its social and political implications – starting with the emergence of people possessing knowledge about their reality and aspiring to a better life that they are now able to conceive of – are preventing an exhausted government, simply clinging on to power, from developing it. The present holders of power, though they are aware of the errors in the education system, still pursue a quantitative discourse which blocks any thinking about pedagogy focusing on the lack of a scholarly language and scientific instruments. The recent start of the new academic year was chaotic and it is no longer a matter of language.

As for the poet, although he was in a corner, he left on a note of hope:
On the brink of death, he says:
I have no more traces to lose:
I am free very close to my freedom. My future is in my hands.
Soon I shall penetrate my life.
I shall be born free, without kin,
And I shall choose azure letters for my name . . .

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Mahmoud Darwish (2004)

State of siege – Extracts

Here, on the slopes of the hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time
Near the gardens with their broken shadows,
We do what prisoners do,
What the jobless do:
We cultivate hope.
A country gets ready at dawn. We are getting less intelligent
For we are watching for the hour of victory:
No night in our night lit by bombardment.

Our enemies are awake and our enemies light the light for us
In the darkness of the cellars.
Here there is no 'I',
Here Adam remembers the dust of his clay.
On the brink of death, he says:
I have no more traces to lose:
I am free very close to my freedom. My future is in my hands.
Soon I shall penetrate my life,
I shall be born free, without kin,
And I shall choose azure letters for my name . . .
Here where the smoke is rising, on the steps of my house
No time for time.
We do as those who rise towards God do:
We forget the pain.
You who are standing on the thresholds, come in,
Drink Arabian coffee with us
You would feel you are men like us
You who are standing of the thresholds of the houses
Come out of our mornings.
We shall be reassured to be
Men like you!
Nothing here has a Homeric echo.
Myths knock on our doors, if need be.
Nothing has a Homeric echo. Here a general
Is digging down in search of a sleeping state
Under the ruins of a Troy to come.
.....
In the state of siege, time becomes space
Petrified in its eternity
In the state of siege, space becomes time
That has missed its yesterday

Notes

1. Available on the internet at the site www.islamophile.org, an online journal which defines itself as 'Islamic resources in French'.
2. The Mecca verses, which are said to deal with the relationship with the divine, can commonly be distinguished from the Medina ones, which would be about relations between humans and their organization. By convention the former are thought to have been revealed before the hegira (610–622) and the latter afterwards (622–632), with reference to the cities of Mecca and Medina. I support the idea that the reference to the place and time is not merely formal.
3. The oldest biography of the Prophet Mohammed (blessings be upon Him) is by Ibn Ishaq (died around 768). It was reworked by Ibn Hichâm (died 828 or 833). Ibn Ishaq's *sîra* has been published in full in 2 volumes with the title *La Vie du prophète Muhammad* (Ibn Ishaq, 2001).

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