

Part I

The Evolution of the Concept of Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in Arab and African Countries

Social and Human Sciences and Academic Freedom: Historiographic Practices in Algeria and the Arab World.

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Abstract

After the emergence of the Universities of the XIII Century, a great deal of progress has been achieved by humanity in terms of acquisition of academic knowledge and the critical thought which conditioned it. The Results achieved seem to be unequally spread according to disciplines, cultural zones as well as geo-political considerations. This is the case sometimes also for Darwinian paradigm, natural sciences or social and human sciences, socio-anthropology, linguistics and history.

So, education and research activities are often threatened by limitations and restrictions on academic freedom due to censor practiced by the state, religious institutions and more generally by society and the various ideologies active in the social context.

We are particularly interested, in this contribution; in the situation of historiographic practices in the Arab world and the case of the Algerian society, which has been marked profoundly by its colonial past and the recency of national state established after the independence of the country.

More precisely we raised the question of the official policy vis-à-vis 'writing and re-writing history' and its impact on the relations between history and memory, national and colonial history, between historiography and practice, and teaching of other social science disciplines. We do not ignore the view that the practice of historiography in the Arab-Muslim world is of an origin which goes back to the beginning of the Islamic era.

Historiography as social practice and critical knowledge in relation to academic freedoms.

Thought and critical learning have, since the emergence of Universitas in Europe in the XIII century, been confronted with shortcomings due to the absence of academic freedoms, whether caused by direct intervention by the state, religious institution or society itself. Much progress was certainly accomplished as centuries and decades went by but this remained unequally spread according to disciplines, civilizational Aures as well as geopolitical considerations. In numerous countries the question can be sometimes posed for natural sciences (for example the Darwinian paradigm), even more so for all that concerns demystified knowledge of society: socio-anthropology, hermeneutics and linguistics, and of course the discipline of history both in its teaching practices and in research. Politics (or politico - religious) forcefully intervenes here, above all by orchestrating confusion, often cultivated, between historical critiques, memory (memories) in general and national history in particular.

It is commonly admitted that if 'memory' and 'history' are both related to the past, they are far from covering the same realities. It is Maurice HALBWACHS who noted that "all collective memory has as its support a group limited in space and in time. When looking upon its past, the group feels that it has remained as such and takes cognizance of its identity throughout the passage of time."

On the other hand, “history is the collection of events which have occupied the largest space in the memory of men. But read in books, taught and learned in schools, past events are selected, reported and classified according to necessities or rules that were not imposed on groups of men who have kept this heritage alive. In general, history only commences at a moment when tradition ends, a moment when social memory decomposes or flickers out.”(1)

The problem is that with upheavals sweeping across the contemporary world: international restructuring, crises, proliferation of publication and audio-visual techniques, emergence in the past decades of dozens of new States who are already in a stage of ‘*national discontent*’, identity reversion and the will of many social categories to avoid abandonment by history. One can see an abundance of writings, films and other manifestations, commemorations and documents that pertain to what has become ethno – history, or rather the ‘duty’ of memory.

With the concerns highlighted by what will be broadly called New history and historic anthropology, researchers seem to want to gain from this demand for memory, even if it means critically looking at their own practice (2), and fine-tuning their methodological approach, while bearing in mind that:

“Because it is affective and magical, memory accommodates itself only with details that comfort it. It nourishes itself with blurred, telescopic, global or drifting recollections, specific or symbolic, sensitive to all transfers, screens, censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular operation, calls for analysis and critical discourse. Memory situates remembrance in the realm of the sacred, while history banishes it, and always renders it prosaic” (3).

The problem however is that academic historiography is not always ‘critical and secular’ and its institutional nature could also legitimize, which in turn give rise to ‘counter histories’ according to Marc Ferro (4), often functioning in fact on the same model. Universal history has long been marked by the preeminence of Europe and its western-centrist imprint, a situation that is was bound to produce a turnaround in the shape of decolonization and emergence of the Third World. The ongoing decolonization of history since independence is confused with the fabrication of national histories, on the same model as that witnessed in Europe as of XVIII and XIX centuries and compounded by the fragility of the university institution in nascent States. This could inspire governing leaders and official ideologues to impose their own discourse on professional historians. The study of the case of the Arab World in general and Algeria in particular, can, from this perspective, help us to better define the problem.

1) Colonialism, nationalism and history in Algeria

Similar to every state fighting for independence, the Algerian state conceived on 5 July 1962 sought to draw its legitimacy from history and above all, from what is called by the Algerian side, the War of Liberation. However, such attempt by a State to undertake historic discourse as a means for legitimization has handicapped historiographic research.

Until recently, official discourse differentiated between ‘Rewriting history’, which concerns the critique of colonial historiography and more generally the history of events prior to 1954, and Writing history which concerns the period of the War of National Liberation. Certainly, the aspect of “Writing history” aroused more attention from the regime due to its consequences on political life in Algeria. In this domain, the stakes in terms of the ideological- political control of the census or diffusion within society of the events that marked the revolutionary war constitute the major preoccupation of the powers that be.

In Algerian history, the stake represented by the War of Liberation is all the more important because the shock that led to the break with the colonial order was particularly brutal and left its mark on the memories of several generations of women and men who are still alive. Moreover, in the context of the struggle for political power by different groups, which heightened shortly after independence was attained, the best for each group was to find historic reasons proving that it was the most representative and deserving during the war against the occupier.

With regard to the period prior to the war, official Algerian discourse resorted to what it called Rewriting of history, namely to the redundant theme of falsification of history by colonialism. This accusation is specified in the Algerian Charter of 1964 (on the first page), and in the National Charter of 1976 (the first lines of the chapter on Cultural Revolution). This was also mentioned in dealing with the history of the War of Liberation, for example, by President Houari Boumediene. He declared in May 1968 that: "Writings on the Algerian revolution by foreigners have not reflected reality. Algerian intellectuals have not played the expected role in this domain." Once this accusation was addressed without nuance, the State considered that it was its duty to remedy this situation by inviting historians and educators to play a political role, and "to consider the prospects of national development in Algeria, beginning with the interests of the most disadvantaged categories of the Algerian people" (Charter of Algiers). Moreover, to teach "the historic and revolutionary experience of a nation that has come a long way in time as well as covering the stages of a long and resolute turbulent process that culminated today in institutional independence and socialist democracy." (National Charter)

In the face of the apology for French domination (illustrated by Gustave Mercier, Stephane Gsell or Emile-Felix Gautier), Algerian historians, well versed in Arabic and close to the National Movement, more particularly the reformist *ulemas*, such as Mubarek El Mili, Tewfik El Madani and Abderrahmane El Djilali, have, since the 1930s, forged a counter discourse in favour of nationalism. They proposed a history "that stands as proof of peoples' existence, the book where their power is inscribed, where the resurrection of their conscience takes place, the road to their unity, the springboard of their progress..." The Algerian is invited "to venerate his country, to glorify its radiant and glorious history, to have confidence in its brilliant and spectacular future". In the 1950s and 1960s, nationalist history gained even more stringent methodology at the hands of authors such as Mohamed Sherif Sahli, Mahiedine Djender and above all Mostefa Lacheraf (5).

If national ideology has had to draw massively on historic discourse, the national State, ultimate avatar of nationalism marked by its origins, attended to the practice of historiography with the greatest attention. Certainly, it took upon itself to attack the stigmas of colonial ideology in order to better entrench the bases of recently won independence. However, it was also the area for all types of antagonisms between diverse sensitivities within the National Movement – each striving to demonstrate that it can best express national concept and was therefore worthy of holding the reins of political power. These antagonisms intensified in the wake of independence for the common enemy, the colonizer, was no longer there to stimulate a unanimous and consensual behaviour. The colonizer though was always absent-present, in the sense that independence could only be of a formal nature, concealing neo-colonial machinations. This is all the more so because the clash of interests in post-colonial society is often marked by an absence of transparency, hiding behind the long concluded confrontation. In fact, the concealment of the different stakes in the course of a long period prompts others to delve as much as possible into the ideological discourse stemming from anti-colonial resistance, nationalism and populism in particular.

The armed struggle and the establishment of the National liberation front (FLN) certainly marked a rupture with what had preceded, but they come within the scope of continuity in the overall tradition of National Movement, with all its constituent organizations and political parties. Furthermore, marginalizing and devaluing the period preceding 1954 through Mohamed Harbi calls the "myth of the *tabula rasa*)(6)", aims at justifying a posteriori the single post-independence party. This trend also spread within

the Arab World since the Egyptian revolution of July 1952. It all seems to occur as if populism, which gained political power in various Arab countries, wanted to rid itself of this intense intellectual upheaval (visible in theatre, cinema, literature, music, clubs, etc.), social (in trade union activity, strikes, nascent feminism, etc.), and politics (in parties, newspapers, associations, petitions, etc.) which evokes the beginnings of a civil society (7).

Demographic pressure and the policy linguistic Arabization have in fact largely contributed to changing the cultural physiognomy of Algerian society in thirty years. The desire to exorcise and the identity crisis inherited from colonial times, accentuated after independence, have undoubtedly lead to excessive idealization of the pre-colonial past and over-representation in cultural and ideological diffusion of everything emanating from the Arab and Islamic East. An analysis of history textbooks utilized in Algerian schools indicate that in 1992, the space (in pages and chapters) allocated for the Middle East is three times that given to Algeria and the entire Maghreb region (8). The massive call for Middle Eastern cooperation to respond to the imperative of Arabization (9), and this in all school stages (from primary to higher education) has profoundly affected the content conveyed by teachers, particularly those of history, literature, philosophy and civic and religious instruction. Islamic seminars and meetings were highlighted by the media while sermons and speeches of others completed the rest. It was not only the history of the War of Liberation that was censored, but entire tracts of Algerian past (and present) were reinterpreted or reshaped through the use of screens and ideological criteria elaborated in other Arab and Muslim societies. Hence, the Algerian revolution confined to anonymity, cedes its place to fabricated "heroes" of all sorts introduced to youth as role models. In this game, only a fraction of what was *ulema* Movement, allied to those in power, appear to have saved their skin. However, did they save their soul?

2) Restructuring the fields of social disciplines and new social paradigms

Utilization of the university is accompanied by restructuring academic disciplines. The old division between the sectors of literature and human sciences on the one hand and the sectors of natural sciences on the other is surpassed and replaced by a new division. Certain old disciplines of social sciences and humanities (economics, sociology... but also foreign literature is reduced to translation) are integrated with natural sciences and technology in the group of disciplines of development and edification, whereas a second group (history, anthropology, philosophy, theology, languages and Arab culture) were assigned above all the task of ideological legitimization of the socio-political system in place.

In fact, the restructuring within internal social disciplines is justified inside the education system (beginning with the primary stage) and at the level of the Arab world at large by an arbitrary division between neutral disciplines with universal vocation and somehow susceptible to technology transfer, and that which we had the occasion to call: disciplines governed by a sovereignty clause. The first of these categories has as its model or paradigm economic sciences. The second, history, the paradigms here considered being more of a social nature than an epistemological making.

How can the divorce between functions be explained, functions that are assigned to these two categories of disciplines at a time when progress of social sciences in the multi-disciplinary domain in particular requires equal treatment and greater rapprochement between them?

This redeployment corresponds to the division of functions and powers within the national State between technocratic factions or technophiles charged with undertaking socio-economic development in the country and populist factions who are more interested in ideological management.

Hence, the institutional imperative can only dominate the epistemological imperative and this will have a direct impact on the crisis of social disciplines in Algeria and the world.

The crisis of social sciences in the Arab world expresses in its own way the crisis of dominant socio-political categories which, ideologically marked as they are by populism or infatuation with technology, have proven incapable of stimulating knowledge in society. These two currents and institutions that they permeate are moreover linked to strategic interests that are not always furthered by knowledge requirements.(10) The sole remedy for this situation is a university itself constituted as an institution with knowledge as its ultimate objective, even if, let us not be misled, neutral knowledge is difficult if not impossible to find because as elsewhere we are in the realm of social production. University surely must respond to social demand but at its own rhythm, a rhythm dictated by epistemological imperative.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to take account of the state of maturation within social and institutional forces capable of carrying out such a project in the Arab world.

3) Historiography and populism in Algeria and the Arab world

Ever since its eruption between the two wars, populism went on to impose itself as a socio-political current present in the main hotbeds of struggle in the Arab world, organizing itself here and there as the party of the people or of the nation. Helped by the colonial system's crisis, it succeeded in becoming the principal national component in numerous countries. It was during the post-war period however, that its ascension became clear since it would progressively constitute the essential instruments of exclusive power, the army, the national State and the sole party, with characteristics to be found all over the Third World.

The political parties, which led the national movement between the two wars, are purely and simply considered as assimilated to the colonial system or as agents of its monarchical instrument. The Egyptian and Algerian Revolutions of 1952 and 1954 respectively, the rise of the Baath in Syria and Iraq, have been undertaken both in the name of the nation and against pre-existing parties. Indeed, the trend will accelerate as of the 1960s and there will be dozens of Arab countries which will allow themselves to be tempted by the one party experiment. What interests us though are the type of concepts that populism will help disseminate in the Arab world.

Early on, it will be influenced by new ideas (nationalism, Jacobinism, progressiveness, socialism...) even while drawing on certain perceptions, secular or religious, held by Arab societies of their past.

In fact, the academic references which at the beginning they could parade will gradually give way to a discourse of originality or specificity which, relying on the official monopoly of socio-political life will attack critique tradition that had began to gain ground between the two wars. Moreover, we will witness a real "Debarment of politics" (Gilles Kepel) of which religious fundamentalism (with the help of the discourse of originality) will become the main beneficiary in the medium term. (11).

To be credible and legitimate, the ideology of specificity should as we have seen, be founded as much as possible by a historian. Hence, the credo of writing history is born!

We sufficiently understand why history is particularly appreciated by the populist. Interest in the discipline resurged in the Arab world with the birth of the National Movement in its modern form and with the emergence of nationalism. In the face of colonial discourse, it was necessary to shape a counter discourse that can entrench the everlastingness of national existence by drawing from the Islamic past and sometimes from ancient pre-Islamic antiquity (12). With the emergence of the national State, there is

certain interest among officials for contemporary history, even more so for the period immediately preceding political independence (13).

After independence, the task of the Writing and Rewriting national history will aim at legitimizing the national State and through it the action of different political groups and social forces competing for power. Moreover, the exploitation of historiography and utilization of the past for current objectives undoubtedly is not restricted to the Arab world, and examples are not lacking in this respect. (14).

Here however, the national State is too young and modern and academic practice of historiography has difficulty in imposing itself despite efforts here and there, and sometimes with positive results (15). Even in countries with a contemporary social context in many respects, similar to that which prevails at home, a major difference is apparent. The existence of a strong historiographic tradition in the Arab world, going back to the classic period, and sometimes absent in other cultural areas (16). In fact, historiography has early on played a primary ideological role in the Arab-Islamic sphere and this in two aspects at least:

- In a juridical-religious objective since it has been called upon to authenticate the Sunnah, or acts, gestures and words of the Prophet and this with a view to elaborating Fiqh. (Islamic law)
- With the aim to provide reparation of honours, functions and privileges since historiography must also contribute to the composition of tribal and family genealogies in order to know the position adopted by different groups and individuals vis à vis the Prophet as well as their family ties if any, as well as their role in Islamic expansion (17).

Hence, an old habit exists in the Arab-Muslim world to use historic research in order to justify and confirm. That goes hand in hand with the practice of omissions by censorship or neglect and with situations where the truth is pointless if it is not official.

Glorification of the past evidently permits easier recourse to this method of using history. Nevertheless, one should take into account all methodological accomplishments amassed through the centuries when contact with what takes place elsewhere was appreciated so as to encourage the emergence also here of an epistemological practice based on historiography. To achieve this, two conditions need to be fulfilled:

- to go beyond populism as an ideological horizon,
- to reconnect with the critical spirit without losing sight of history's intrinsic objective and specificity in the spectrum of social disciplines (18).

4) By way of conclusion: is history a dangerous science or a space for freedom?

It is not a distinctive feature of the Arab world or even the Third World to apprehend history as a dangerous science in the sense understood by Paul Valery.

All societies including the most modern have had an instrumental relationship with their past. The recent law voted in France (February 2005) stipulates that colonization was positive for the dominated who also gained from the benefits of western civilization, or even the silence that reigns in Japanese history books about the atrocities committed during the imperial year in all East Asia are eloquent in this regard. Different works devoted to the manipulation of the past by those still alive, indicate how this phenomenon is more or less generalized.

There is however a graded impact of the effects of memory, and certain lapses or amnesias, such as the tendency to exaggerate and generalize could break out in an extremely violent manner, provoke dissention and tragic confrontation in a fragile society, and even prompt wars between states, exacerbating introversion and ignorance, if not contempt for one another.

In fact, it is not history that is on trial, but the absence of history in terms of a critical outlook directed at the past. True historiography does not imply this narcissist view that each one has about himself, but rather consists of a sustained effort to better understand the past in order to act for the future through the present.

History is fundamentally the quest for freedom and it is only in this sense that it can bear lessons that help establish the critical spirit and demand for citizenship. It is not a coincidence if the question of the function of historiographic practice of this discipline is today forcefully posed in societies emerging from violent crises as in Algeria, South Africa or Rwanda (20).

The existence of academic freedom, while insufficient in itself, is indispensable to de-dramatize this relationship with the past. These however, assume the existence of academic institutions that took years to emerge in the West, since the first steps of Universitas.

One of the stakes of globalization which is but an enlarged reproduction of ancient structures of North-South domination, is precisely to see to it that this history of Universitas becomes a common acquisition of humanity: Let us remember that the foundation of Universitas in the XIII century was at the heart of dynamics that largely surpassed the frontiers and the framework of thinking in Europe at the time.