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## Literary Aftershocks of the Revolution: Recent Developments in Algerian Literature

### Abstract

Most Algerian Francophone literature has been written since 1950, and thus the development of that literature has been intimately linked to the political events which forged the Algerian nation. Especially influential was the 1954-62 war of independence which for many years was a major contextual element in the literature. With the passage of time, the Revolution has begun to be less and less cognitive in the lives and works of the young writers. For some, Revolution lives on in the oneiric evocations of horrors glimpsed, for others it is something relegated to history, whereas for yet others it has become a political and social device.

The role the Revolution plays in a writer's creativity has tended to dichotomize the literature into a conservative branch of inward- and backward-looking patriotism and a radical branch of outward- and forward-looking experimentation. Both branches present equally fervent defenses of their loyalty to their country based on a variety of arguments, but the radical branch, regardless of its relative worth in terms of internal affairs, certainly is the branch which tends to transcend national idiom and to express itself in terms of wide-spread and universal literary values.

### Keywords

Algerian literature, Algerian Francophone Literature, 1954-62 war of independence, the Revolution, politics, society, creativity, patriotism, experimentation

## LITERARY AFTERSHOCKS OF THE REVOLUTION: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ALGERIAN LITERATURE

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Revolution is not simply a limited period of armed struggle, the armed struggle—if victorious—rather constituting the middle section in the three-part spectrum of Revolution. The three periods are 1) the build-up or preparation, 2) the visible and most traumatic period of overt violence, and 3) the post-war period of stabilization and implementation of the new. Each period has its difficulties and in the case under discussion each period emitted impulses which may be traced into the new Algerian literature.

Revolution, taken in the broadest sense, is the verso of colonization. By this, I mean that the origins of decolonization—the first thrust of the first stage of Revolution—are inherent in colonization itself. Studies of the psychology of colonization and the colonized man have been made by Albert Memmi, O. Mannoni, and Frantz Fanon, and the French-language literature of Algeria has provided a worthy corpus of material for penetrating psycho-sociological analyses by Jean Déjeux, Isaac Yetiv, Bernard Aresu, Charles Bonn and others, not to mention the psycho-novels of Nabile Farès, Rachid Boudjedra, and Mohammed Dib.

The scope of this essay is limited to the more recent manifestations of revolutionary literature vis-à-vis the older ones in the Algerian literature written in French, a literature now barely half a century old. I should like, however, to review briefly the global trends of this literature against the backdrop of political events.

Between 1920 and 1950, nationalistic political clubs began to emerge and there were several heralds of the future literary blossoming, such as Jean Amrouche. Furthermore, World War II and the fall of France caused major cracks to appear in the founda-

tion of the colonial edifice. May 8, 1945, was a most significant date in this period. On that day, demonstrations in Guelma and Sétif turned into massacres when the French army intervened.

1950 saw the publication of Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, the first work in what we can now perceive as a new era; but 1952 is generally taken as the starting date of the new, enriched period of Algerian Francophone literature because first novels by two major writers appeared in that year: *La Grande Maison* by Mohammed Dib and *La Colline oubliée* by Mouloud Mammeri. Critics were later to dub these writers and several others «the generation of '52.» These writers were also sometimes referred to as the «generation of '54» in recognition of the beginning of the armed phase of the war of independence against the French on November 1, 1954. The major literary event during the war years was the publication, in 1956, of Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, considered by many to be the «great Algerian novel.»

In 1962, the Evian negotiations led to a cease-fire in March and independence in July. There followed several months of infighting from which Ben Bella emerged as the leader, with, to be sure, the indulgence of army strongman Colonel Houari Boumediène. In 1965, Boumediène deposed Ben Bella and ruled Algeria with a firm hand until his untimely death in 1978. His successor, Chadli Benjedid, has been attempting to consolidate Algeria's strengths while exploring the relative benefits of greater internal and external *détente*.

During the postwar puritan years of Boumediène's leadership, several literary events occurred which are pertinent to this study. In 1968, we find the first signs of dissent among the younger writers (Youcef Sebti, Rachid Bey, etc) who published a mimeographed manifesto entitled *Mutilation*. Rachid Boudjedra's controversial novel, *La Répudiation*, appeared in 1969. During the same year, Jean Sénac, a poet and mentor of young poets who was murdered under obscure circumstances in 1973, presented a lecture and recital of work by Sebti, Bey, and other young rebels. 1969 also saw the launching of *Promesses*, the literary organ of the Algerian Ministry of Culture.

The modern literary period from the publication of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* in 1950 to the present day may, with what little hindsight we can achieve, be divided into two periods: 1950 to 1968 and 1968 to today. Before 1968, there are the generation-of-'52 authors (Feraoun, Dib, Mammeri, Yacine, etc.), and after the

literary revolt of 1968-69, no doubt inspired in part by the Parisian phenomenon of May, 1968, there is a split between counter-culture and establishment.

The counter-culture consists of 1) the new voices of Boudjedra, Farès, the *Mutilation* poets and others and 2) old voices making new sounds, notably those of Dib and Mammeri. The establishment is made up of sundry writers—amateur and professional—who publish in the official and quasi-official outlets such as *Promesses*, *El Moudjahid*, and *Algérie-Actualité*.

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The violent stage of the Revolution (1954-62) remains a factor in today's literature in various ways or under various guises.

We have direct reminiscences—real or fictionalized. These have become a stock item in *Promesses* and are often ineptly phrased or resemble the «true tales» one encounters in magazines like *Saga* (such as a merchant seaman's recollections of the «Bloody Run to Murmansk»). Some writers, like Noureddine Aba, in his recent poem *Gazelle après minuit* (1979), continue to live and write as though haunted by the Revolution, as though it had happened yesterday:

You understand nothing but his certainty:  
 (...) That it is enough for you to dare(...)  
 In order that one day, one shout, at dawn  
 Tear apart in a single act 130 years of slavery!  
 In the forefront of that first November morning  
 A red torch burns, its mane tossed on the wind.'

It is apparent, however, that the Revolution is rapidly becoming legend and—for the very young—ancient history. Even a novel like Mammeri's *L'Opium et le bâton* (1965), which divides its attention between the war effort and the boudoir, has been «expurgated» in the movie version, suffering a kind of cultural laundering so that it became what Mammeri labeled a «western» with little resemblance to his original text.

On a more serious literary level, episodes of the Revolution

crop up in the novels written during and after the war. A haunting nightmare recurs in Nabile Farès's first novel, *Yahia, pas de chance* (1970), published when Farès was twenty-nine. Farès reveals (I hesitate to use the word «tells») in an impressionistic, oneiric prose the brutal assassination of two men by Yahia's Uncle Saddek and a taxi driver. The young Yahia, who is an innocent and totally unprepared witness to this ghastly event, is deeply affected by the murder although Farès prepares for the event with a harsh prose riddled with explosive and sacrificial words like «explosion,» «burst,» «drown,» and «sheepskin»:

Uncle Saddek offers him a cigarette and a light and passes his pack around to the driver and the two merchants from Algiers. Five tobacco-scented stars illumine the metal and the sheepskin seat cushions inside the taxi. The child closes his eyes against the smoke. He is in a daze from the mad rush of the train, his gaze skimming along the jagged ridge of the mountains, the afternoon, the explosion of the sun in the love between Twilight and Earth, the furrows of the sky in the plow of Shade and Heat which drown and come alive again like furious grass and sketch the bright colors of life...*the close of day resembles a Bearskin and its claw holds the whole moon in the night...*in the courtyard of the garage, the rustle of cicadas and the sea-green voice of the toads perched in the throats of the two cowards evoke in Yahia an acrid odor of figs. Sacrifice! Sacrifice! A sharp *doum-doum* like the steel daggers of the Tuaregs flashes from the burnous. The driver of the taxi takes part in the throat-slashing, his hand red with teeth marks. Yahia vomits bile against the rear window of the Renault. (...) Two men are in their death throes, their throats boiling up, fear everywhere. Uncle Saddek leads Yahia into the street. The song from a mosque crackles the village. Life is on the other side of an endless bloodbath. Two hours later a bomb bursts inside the walls of the courthouse.<sup>2</sup>

There follow the inevitable reprisals for this bombing, and more people die. Yahia continues to have seizures and vomiting fits for several days and the themes of this assassination, of the death of the freedom-fighter Ali-Saïd who had joined the maquis in the Kabyle mountains and of the kidnapping of a relative recur throughout the book.

Farès's generation, which grew up in the midst of the war, simply could not fail to be traumatized—much as psychologists say the children of Northern Ireland are today being psychologically sacrificed. It is difficult to tell to what degree the demented narrations of Boudjedra's protagonists in *La Répudiation* (1969) and *L'Insolation* (1972), not to mention the bewildered Algerian émigré in *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée* (1975), the functionary in *L'Escargot entêté* (1977), and the semi-nameless people of *Les 1001 Années de la nostalgie* (1979), are the result of a willed participation in a trend somewhat in vogue in Europe or the spontaneous expression of a psyche derailed by the trauma of violence. Suffice it to say that virtually no Algerian family—not to mention French families—was spared some death, torture or insanity during the war experience. The best-known examples—though the first is from the preparatory stage of the Revolution—are the insanity of Kateb Yacine's mother after Kateb's arrest and feared loss during the May 8, 1945, riot in Sétif and the assassination of Mouloud Feraoun by a Secret Army Organization (OAS) terrorist squad on March 15, 1962.

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In Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film «The Battle of Algiers»—based on a critical 1957 episode of the hostilities—Larbi Ben M'hidi tells Ali la Pointe that the most difficult stage of the Revolution will occur after the war has been won. Ben M'hidi's solemn words uttered in a moment of respite from hiding when the two men are taking some fresh air on a rooftop in the Casbah are most to the point. If it is easy to be zealous in war, says Ben M'hidi, it is perhaps easier to be complacent in peace. There is inherent in wars of decolonization the perennial danger that a new bureaucracy and a new bourgeoisie will take over, adopting the ways of the previous colonial regime or else substituting for it an inappropriate mold, as Ben Bella did in Algeria. There is also the danger that the goals of the Revolution will give way to self-interest, a pitfall awaiting any regime in any governmental system.

In 1969, in Algiers, I asked the Angolan poet Mario de Andrade how long it would take Angola to achieve independence. After some comments on how American-made arms destined for

NATO use were being illegally funneled to Portugal's troops in Angola and significantly prolonging the fight, Andrade concluded that the real struggle would begin after the Portuguese left and various Angolan factions poised on the border or fighting within would turn against one another in a struggle to see whose ideology would prevail. His prediction came true. Similarly, the temporary alliances of the wartime FLN faltered after the Algerian liberation, and gave way to an internal power struggle in the fall of 1962. After Ben Bella took power, he had to work hard to maintain it against opposition to his disastrous economic policy based on an ill-considered compromise between state- and worker-run enterprises and an emphasis on agricultural development in the fertile crescent. In 1965, Boumediène deposed Ben Bella and launched a new period of programs aimed at developing industry and exploiting natural resources. A new generation of technocrats emerged, and if the «responsables» who ran the country under Ben Bella moved, despite their public postures, away from the illiterate peasants and mountain folk who had fought, died, and ultimately prevailed in the shooting war—while some more educated Algerians sat out the war abroad—the technocrats under Boumediène forgot, to some people's thinking, those martyrs and the land they represent and have actually embraced the very essence of the enemy so recently expelled. This phenomenon has been obliquely condemned by Mouloud Mammeri in his essay «La Mort absurde des Aztèques»:

Henceforth any distinction which we erase—by whatever means—is an absolute crime: nothing will ever replace it, and its death increases the risk of death for others. (...) For it is apparent that as the years pass, more and more vast portions of humanity will scamper onto the royal road to Western technical, materialistic, efficient, programmed civilization. And in that they are probably being led astray, for we are becoming more and more aware of the wants, frustrations, and servitudes of a culture which until recently knew only prestige. (...) Those Third-World men who reject the values of the West, in behalf of an often mythic and sometimes fabricated authenticity, are actually more enslaved by those values than anyone else, for they are subject to the limitations accompanying those values without possessing the means of controlling them.<sup>3</sup>



We are dealing, then, with a confrontation between the puritans preaching the old precolonial values—such as the religious elders, or *Ulema*, and the unassimilated Berbers—and the puritans of the new technocratic regime. He who would be a writer must adopt one of these views, or describe them coolly from above, or possibly hide from both of them as the protagonist Rachid does in Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*.

Several authors have written of this neo-colonial struggle in which the adversaries are no longer the autochthonous elements against the colonial «Autre,» or Other, from abroad, but rather two forces within Algerian society.

Charles Bonn, in his interesting study entitled *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures* ingeniously links the two opposing forces or attitudes to a deep-seated and longstanding animosity (and I mean the words «Anima» and «Animus» to be interpreted as polarization or opposition) between the closed space and the open space, between the City and the Land; and Bonn would make of the Revolution not only a political and economic struggle, but also a paroxysmic bridging of the two poles, much as he discerns symbols of linkage in such concrete things as trees.

Early books, like Dib's *La Grande Maison* and Mammeri's *La Colline oubliée*, tended to be either urban or rural. Since 1968, the serious writers seem to be encompassing both, addressing themselves more squarely to the challenge of the choice between tradition and technocracy. Even if it is sometimes difficult to tell which side the author criticizes—and some prefer to be cautious—the dilemma itself is central.

Boudjedra's dithyrambic novels castigate both sides: tradition and the technocratic bourgeoisie. His tales are not so much parables as visceral explosions, personal vituperations, diatribes apparently born of his private frustrations. Although three novels (*Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, *L'Escargot entêté*, and *Les 1001 Années de la nostalgie*) are, to some extent allegorical, Boudjedra's masterpiece *La Répudiation* and his second novel *L'Insolation* only become parables to the degree that we, the readers and critics, would impose that label upon them.

Perhaps more probing are the recent novels of Mohammed Dib: *Dieu en Barbarie* and *Le Maître de chasse*, the latter rivaling Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* for the laurels won as the greatest novel by an Algerian. *Dieu en Barbarie* and *Le Maître de chasse* sum up the various tensions in post-1968 Algeria much as Dib's earlier trilogy

(*La Grande Maison, L'Incendie, Le Métier à tisser*) recorded the tremors of the pre-Revolution awakening.

The main characters of this second and as yet unfinished trilogy, first introduced in *Dieu en Barbarie* (1970), are Dr. Berchig, comfortably straddling the old and the new; Jean-Marie Aymard, a French *coopérant*; Kamal Waëd, the caricature of a technocrat of the new administration; and Hakim Madjar, a spiritual drifter. In *Le Maître de chasse* (1973), Dib isolates two principal characters in a spiritual and ideological clash: Hakim Madjar, who grows into a mystical symbol of the forces of nature and the infinite, and Kamal Waëd, the technocrat. They clash over a potential water supply in an arid part of the country. Hakim claims he can find water there by divining methods, but Waëd will not permit him to attempt the search since it has been scientifically demonstrated that there can be no water in the area. Hakim goes to the area without permission and the army goes to arrest him. There is a confrontation and Hakim is killed in an absurd misunderstanding reminiscent of the Kent State incident in 1970. When the authorities try to recover the body, they find that Hakim has been secretly buried in an unmarked grave by the local peasants. He thus becomes a martyr, a source of strength in the land from which the peasants may in turn derive the strength with which to resist technocracy's narrow viewpoint. This parable not only reminds us of Mammeri's fears of ethnocide but also is similar to the burial of Ali-Saïd in Farès's *Yahia, pas de chance*. There is much prevarication as to where Ali-Saïd has been buried or if he has actually been buried at all. Nobody has seen him buried and his spirit seems to hover in the air like a haunting and hauntingly unknown song akin to that sung by Tante Aloula by the tomb. Note that we have, here, a parable not unlike the corporeal disappearance from the sepulcher in the Christian resurrection. As Farès writes:

Si Saddek had requested that the body be placed in the garden, on the olive-wood table, after which everyone had left Si Saddek's house and had returned home. Si Mokhtar had come back three days later and it was he who had carried away Ali-Saïd's body, concealed under a large burnous, and brought it here to the cemetery. It was only later, after Si Mokhtar had left, that the people of the village could go up there. The tomb was already closed and cemented shut (p. 142.)

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Since 1968, there have really been, as we have mentioned, two Algerian literatures, one which has evolved freely of itself even as it has kept pace with international literary developments and another which has consistently paid lip service to the cultural prescriptions of the so-called «ongoing Revolution.» This second literature is what Charles Bonn terms «Social Discourse»:

...there are, in fact, two Algerian «literatures» of French expression. The novels by Boudjedra, Boumahdi, Bourboune, Dib (...) are published in France and more or less banished, if not actually forbidden, in their authors' country. This literature of rupture and Differentiation «lives within a scar,» says Mourad Bourboune in *Le Muezzin* (1968). It strives desperately to rejoin the humiliated mother, but it is excluded from the maternal land. The Social Discourse does not allow that which, in this manner, calls it into question, down to its most secret, most painful roots.

But there is a literature of Social Discourse. (...) On the one hand, the Social Discourse provokes and produces generally mediocre texts. On the other hand, it attempts to appropriate to its own ends a more brilliant literature, often produced outside the Social Discourse or simply before it came into being. '4

The serious writers in Algeria are often faced with the dilemma of having to choose between compromise and neglect, or even exile. In a way, they are forced to make a political act out of their simple desire for literary independence.

The implications of decolonization are many and continue to be a source of inspiration—overt or subconscious—in the post-1968 writings. The self-hatred which is a natural by-product of colonization and the so-called «civilizing mission» has been thoroughly analyzed by Fanon, Memmi, and Mannoni and it constitutes the central theme of Mouloud Mammeri's play, *Le Banquet* (1973), about the humiliation of Montezuma and the Aztecs. That his play is intended as a modern parable or lesson is obvious from anachronistic references to Nazism, brain-washing, the «mission civilisatrice,» and passages like the following dialogue with its ap-

parent references to surrealism (notably Breton's psychic automatism, words which make love, and Nadja) and to structuralism (what I take to be an oblique reference to Michel Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*):

### THE IDEOLOGIST

Today the most inconsequential pedant fresh out of school forces words to couple in unnatural ways. And the words, all connections broken, without make-up or clothing, like whores on market day, run about as though crazed, unpredictable, and ineffectual.

### AXAYOTL

When the hard chain of logic no longer holds them together and when they come out of the mouth by the capricious grace of a woman-inspiration or an infantile automatism, the released words swarm like microbes and, like microbes, they undermine the firmest tissue.

### THE IDEOLOGIST

When from the hook of words there is no longer suspended the sure thread of their association with things, the same vertigo ends up sucking both things and words into the abyss...<sup>5</sup>

There is, in addition, a key passage in which Montezuma and the Aztecs are made to repeat humiliating remarks, acknowledging themselves to be abject and dirty. This is a variation on the theme of self-hatred inherent in colonialism and the psychology of the colonized person.

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The need to return to one's roots and thus negate the «altérité,» or otherness, of the colonial experience is inextricably woven into the very fabric of the life and literature of Algeria. The conquest of the Other, which has assumed such perverse forms in literature as the need for domination of European women (French

wives and mistresses abound in the novels of Feraoun, Dib, Mameri, Boudjedra, Haddad, Farès, and others) before culminating in the armed liberation, led naturally to self-analysis. The quest for one's true identity, one's real roots, has opened rifts, some new, some old.

As one seeks to put down roots, one must, indeed, ask what sort of roots are appropriate. Should the roots be the short taproots of the new national identity, disregarding all that preceded the Revolution? Such would appear to be the rationale behind the Social Discourse. As I have already mentioned, this has produced a curious literature of formula and repetition (albeit without the grace of traditional arabesque) which only a few spokesmen have dared criticize. The officially approved attitude is clearly expressed in a passage from a newspaper article by Salah Fellah:

Among the many resolutions, that of the men of letters, the writers, and the poets, is of particular interest to us: it calls for freedom of expression.

In a revolutionary country like ours, such demands are surprising and disconcerting, even scandalous, to the most casual observer.

As for those who remain silent out of sterility, who rebel through alienation or opportunism, who repudiate through despair, who shout exaggeratedly through mimicry, who demand freedom of expression through deviation; well, their withdrawal from the scene will scarcely hinder the ineluctable stride of the Algerian toward his fulfillment nor the inexorable course of history.<sup>6</sup>

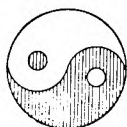
Mostefa Lacheraf challenged this very attitude in a statement sent to the colloquium on Maghreb literature held at Hammamet, Tunisia, in December, 1968:

Now, the exploitation of this vein, well after the end of the war of independence, perpetuates an anachronistic nationalism and turns people away from the new realities and from the struggle necessary if we are to transform society on a sound basis, free of inhibiting myths and epic chants of minimal potential. The pseudo-patriotic exploitation of this vein constitutes a deliberate or near-deliberate diversion of the intellectuals and the workers by the new merchant and ex-

plaitive bourgeoisie towards an inoperative self-gratification, towards a fervent cult of the recent past in which this bourgeoisie, still latent until a very short while ago, took no part and which they now would have the masses cling to like opium.<sup>7</sup>

The group of young poets surrounding Jean Sénac patently rejected the official line and opted for a totally free, even shocking expression. The poetic analogue of Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* is the poetry of Youcef Sebti, Rachid Bey, Djamel Imazitan, Boualem Abdoun, and one or two other poets launched by Sénac.<sup>8</sup>

Powerful, indeed, are the two poems by Sebti which form an incandescent diptych: «La Soleil» and «Le Lune,» in which the reversed gender of these words acts much as the kernel of the opposite element in the center of each half of the yin-yang symbol of Tao:



And beautiful and compelling, indeed, are several of the poems by Rachid Bey. Typical in its blend of searing images and lyrical cadences is Bey's «Destin» which contains one of the most haunting images in the anthology:

et j'ai vu des VIVANTS  
mourir le long du verbe AIMER  
Ce soir-là la vie avait une saison de plus.

(and I saw the LIVING  
die along the verb TO LOVE  
That evening life possessed an extra season.)<sup>9</sup>

However, is there not, as well, another identity to be sought? Are there not deeper roots to be planted, in a return to the primal sources and to the earth, the arid eternity of the age-old *hauts-plateaux* where Dib's mystic, Hakim Madjar, lies buried somewhere? This return—from the enclosure of city room or prison cell to enclosure of the maternal earth (womb, grave, or Mother Ogress of animistic lore)—is much more far-reaching than the one limited to Third-World rhetoric. There is, in this instance, a

rift some might not have foreseen. About half of the recognized Algerian writers using French are Kabyles. Now, the breaking asunder of the matrix of the French colonial collectivity and the seeking out of new and fresh self-definitions had the effect of widening the old schism between the Berber and the Arab-Muslim factions. This has been a significant literary aftershock of the Revolution and concomitant decolonization.

Nabile Farès recorded immediate traumatic material in *Yahia, pas de chance* with the recollection of the assassination of the two men in the taxi, but he has also reflected on the question of cultural roots and has suggested that decolonization has only been partially achieved. The Arab-Muslim colonial wave which preceded the French one has not been neutralized as had the Punic, Roman and Turkish ones before it, and the French one in the recent instance. With petulant pride, Farès writes, in *Un Passager de l'occident* (1971):

After the French decolonization of Algeria, there will be the Islamic decolonization of Algeria. For regardless of what our Mohammedan brothers would think and try to make us think, the Islamization of Algeria is not a divine phenomenon, but, as in the case of any phenomenon, historical.<sup>10</sup>

Farès takes up this theme once again in *Le Champ des oliviers* (1972):

Algeria is looking for men and women who will acknowledge her to have emerged *sui generis* and not from some Islamic Arab country. Algeria is made in such a way that she has not received full satisfaction from those who claim to be her current masters.<sup>11</sup>

And he is scathingly sarcastic when he speaks directly of the Berber's fate in the new era:

Today there are no more kingdoms and every Berber tries to look out for himself as best he can since he has been too severely stricken collectively ever to become that which he has never been: a single people. Either he opens a café. Or he lets himself be Arabized. (p. 213)



A by-product of the return to one's sources, precipitated by the Revolution which had removed the false identity and/or self-hatred prevalent under the colonial regime, was a renewed interest in accounts of daily traditional life. What may have once seemed exotic and for exportation was perhaps now perceived as a matter of ethnic survival. Two very moving accounts—moving for their candor and their admirable attention to detail—document a «self» relatively unaffected by the «Other.»

Ali Boumahdi's *Le Village des Asphodèles* (1970) is billed as a novel, but it is more plainly an autobiographical account of growing up in a small city on the threshold of the Sahara, Berrouaghia. The other book is a delightful account, *Histoire de ma vie* (1968), in which Fadhma Aït Mansour Amrouche, the mother of Jean Amrouche and Marguerite Taos-Amrouche, tells her life story. These works also serve as a kind of link with the «ethnographic» novels of the 1950's such as Feraoun's novel *Le Fils du pauvre*, and Dib's novels on growing up in Tlemcen and Bni Boublen.

The flat, self-effacing style of the books by Boumahdi and Fadhma Aït Mansour Amrouche highlights by contrast a major characteristic of the majority of the more recent novels. The first stage of colonial autochthonous creative writing tends to be ethnographic. The principal purpose of these novels seems to be to depict ordinary indigenous life for readers in the colonial metropole (this was true of the literature south of the Sahara, as well, witness Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*). The novels by Feraoun, Dib, Malek Ouary, Mammeri, and others which were published between 1950 and 1956 fall into this category. Liberation is implicit in a departure from this ethnographic phase of writing. In most works published since Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* appeared in 1956, the emphasis has progressively shifted from content to form, especially since 1968.

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Kateb Yacine remained a unique and brilliant beacon for almost a decade after the publication of *Nedjma*, but the works of several new writers have now established a trend. It is difficult to determine to what degree a violent and explosive style is a spontaneous symptom of decolonization and the Revolution or to what



degree it might rather be a learned technique. No doubt there is a mixture of motives and influences.

In any event, the recent works of Boudjedra, Farès, Sebti, Bey, and Moroccans Mohammed Khair-Eddine and Abdelkébir Khatibi are characterized by 1) a disregard for the well-made text, 2) authorial intervention and a self-conscious awareness of one's role as creator of the surface words in question, and 3) a stammering, confessional tone.

The piling up of words in the novels of Boudjedra and Khair-Eddine seems to be the result of near-automatic writing, but there are some indications that Farès's later highly-contorted prose is less than spontaneous. There are repeated references to the narrator/author's private struggle with his text. There are such highly-contrived devices as the multiple progression from page to page in *Le Champ des oliviers* where one can read, say, from page 178 on to page 179 or jump without syntactical difficulty straight from page 178 to page 181.

There are indications that Farès has on occasion resorted not to textual pyrotechnics of the surrealist-futurist variety of «parole in liberté» (words in freedom) but rather adopted a method much like that which Raymond Roussel admitted to using when composing his works. In other words, the flow of words begins to dictate its own lateral direction or thrust according to the surface value of the words, ignoring what Roland Barthes called the vertical geology underneath the words. Roussel developed his texts by punning and rhyming on words already put down on his paper or even selected from billboards and the like. It looks as though Farès has employed some of the Rousselian dynamics when he writes such things as:

Ainsi. La liberté de la mère. De la mer. Qui surgit en moi. Du fond d'une prière. Adéquatement. Que je vis. Ma première jouissance d'un règne aquatique.

(Thus. The liberty of the mother. Of the sea. Which swells up in me. From the depths of a prayer. Adequately. Which I live. My first rapture in an aquatic reign.) (p. 46.)

And one cannot help but notice, in the following passage from the same book, the rhymes of «grives» (viz. «ivre,» «suivre») and the pun on the word «accord» which in the first instance means «chord,» in the second, «agreement,» and in this case the Evian

Accords:

Grives. Jeunes Grives. Je vais certainement mourir en ce monde. Mais Grives. Jeunes Grives. Le jeune homme continuait de danser sur la route goudronnée. Je suis ivre Ivre IVRE de ce monde. On pouvait suivre les trajectoires. Oui. Lumineuses. Depuis la sortie du blockhaus.

Les hommes couraient après leur indépendance, sur la limite aiguë de l'accord, pendant ces trois jours où allait se conclure l'accord

nuits du 16/17  
19 mars  
62

(Thrushes. Young Thrushes. I am certainly going to die in this world. But Thrushes. Young Thrushes. The young man went on dancing on the blacktop. I'm drunk Drunk DRUNK from this world. You could follow the trajectories. Yes. Luminous. From the exit of the block-house.

The men were running after their independence, on the shrill limit of the chord, during those three days when the accords would be settled

nights of the 16/17  
19 March  
62 (p. 182.)

It is true, however, that Farès claims to have adopted this «lateral» evolution in an effort to combat his penchant for observing and documenting minutiae of daily life. On the flyleaf of the book we have been discussing (*Le Champ des oliviers*), there is an author's note which mentions the book's «most rigorous attention to the objectivity of the world we live in,» and in the text itself Farès writes as follows:

I arrived in that manner at this notion. That instead of sustaining an historical and psychological form of the *I*. I rather had to activate the *lateral* form of an *I* which thereby was no longer the origin of something but rather the moment of passage of an entity greater than it. (p. 188.)

Farès has, as it were, fought his tendency toward casual obser-  
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vation of the manifest (found in *Yahia, pas de chance* and, especially, in *Un Passager de l'occident*) by adopting a willed concretion based on the text itself. Thus Bonn's characterization of Farès's work as «nonchalant» is true of the early works, but only superficially true of the later works.

\*

In summary, the Revolution continues to be a major shaping force—through both affirmative and negative reaction—in the Algerian literary experience, on the one hand by virtue of having liberated the writers' psyches and, on the other, by lingering on as a national legend whose description is a sure-fire success in the editorial offices of the official press. On the one hand, the liberation of those psyches brought on tensions and confrontations which may be considered «counter-revolutionary» but conducive to good writing; while on the other hand, the approved idiom is monolithic and harmonious in nature but has yielded little other than clichés. Looking to the future, it seems to me that the next decade *must* see a more accommodating attitude on the part of the Algerian press and distribution system if this corpus of literature is to remain a vital entity on the international literary scene. Otherwise, the best talents—eager to keep abreast of literary goings-on in other parts of the world—will stay abroad and drift farther and farther from their origins until we will have either French writers of Algerian origin assimilated into the French literary mode or, possibly, a curious little group of *émigrés* struggling with all their might to hold on to an identity which, in another twenty or thirty years, the majority of Algerians continuing to reside at home will no longer recognize as consistent with their own.

#### NOTES

1. Aba, *Gazelle après minuit* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), p. 10.

All translations in this essay are by me and further references to works cited are made parenthetically in the body of the essay.

2. Farès, *Yahia, pas de chance* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), pp. 20-21.
3. Mammeri, *La Mort absurde des Aztèques et le Banquet* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1973), p. 16.
4. Charles Bonn, *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures* (Ottawa: Editions Naaman, 1974), pp. 98-99.
5. In Mammeri, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
6. Quoted in Charles Bonn, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
7. Quoted in Bonn, p. 227.
8. The material first appeared in Sénac's *Petite Anthologie de la jeune poésie algérienne (1964-69)*, published by the Centre Culturel Français in Algiers in 1969 in connection with the poetry reading mentioned in my essay, material made more readily available to readers in 1971 as Number 14 of *Poésie 1* under the title *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie algérienne*.
9. In Sénac, *Anthologie, op. cit.*, pp. 47, 49.
10. Farès, *Un Passager de l'occident* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), p. 75.
11. Farès, *Le Champ des oliviers* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), p. 212.