

## Learning and Reason in the Muslim West: The Case of Algeria

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It may seem strange, at the dawning of the 21st century, to reflect upon the legal aspects of learning based on reason in a given culture, in this case the Muslim worlds. Obviously, I have no wish to raise that question here. It would amount to asking a new one: 'Are Muslims capable of reason?'. (By Muslim, I mean those who take the Book – the Koran – as their guide.)<sup>1</sup>

Yet, beneath the wholesale strikes in Afghanistan and in the comments at the sight of young men plunging to their deaths, that very question is put to Muslims. Likewise, the aptitude of Western culture to recognize the exercise of reason by Muslims is the new question put to the West.

At the same time, the West has noted that it has failed to assimilate – in the sense of accepting – cultures as rich as Muslim culture.

There is no Muslim reason as such, merely conditions for the exercise of reason as a category of thought in Muslim societies. Those societies globally have not given their assent to a 'world' culture. It is a matter not of Islam but of Muslims, of the communities in which they live and the relations they entertain within the categories of learning and reason.

First of all, I should like to describe the definitions and methodologies of learning which have exerted most influence on the Muslim West. Then I shall try to understand their social impact and the way they are handed down through systems of education.

These aspects are of special concern in a country like Algeria, which I shall take as my point of departure.

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## Methodology of learning: assent and controversy

The history of Muslim thought mentions at least three main stages in the acquisition of knowledge, which may be outlined as follows:

1. The commentary, paying particular attention to the work of Ibn Taymiya (661–728): *Epistle on the Meaning of Analogy* [*rissâlatun fi ma'na-l-qiyass*] (1996). Analogy, *qiyass*, was used in the commentary by the early thinkers. It is learned by definition because it requires a higher than average level of acquaintance with the language and the tradition of the commentators.

2. Rational argument as explained in the *Decisive Discourse* [*fasl el maqal*] (1997) of Ibn Rochd (1126–98) better known in the West as Averroës, a law expert who belonged to the Malekite rite. He based his analyses on demonstration and accounted for diversity in modes of learning according to the following distinction: 'There is a hierarchy of human nature where assent is concerned: some men assent under the effect of demonstration, others assent under the effect of dialectics, a form of assent not unlike that of the man of demonstration' (paragraphs 14 and 15).

3. That which links mysticism and rationalism, set out in the book *The Living Son of the Awakened* [*Hayi ibn Yaqzan*] of Ibn Tufâil, a contemporary of Ibn Rochd (1100–81) who applies the reference to sensitive intuition.

We can conclude that accession to learning takes the form of assent and the ability to know signifies the employment of various intellectual powers, including dialectics, intuition and controversy.

Assent and controversy afford us two orders which tell of societies and conditions of access and the exercise of thought: the one reverts to deference with regard to learning and perhaps to the scholar who possesses that learning, and the other to the implementation of abilities and hence freedom of thought.

## The state of controversy

*Controversy is a prior condition for assent*

The remarks of Ibn Rochd were expressed in an intellectual context where debate, or more exactly controversy, has been established for a very long time between the exercise of reason, commentary and the adoption of categories of the sensible. The concept of learning advocated in this case demanded superiority in knowledge and even an ascension, in practice eliminating the notions of *rai*, ordinary opinion.

Today, however, determining a *rai*, a common law, is at the forefront in references to knowledge in Islam: assent then becomes the expression of a renunciation of the exercise of individual thought. Resorting to the *rai jama'i*, ordinary opinion, would mean the intellectual face of democracy.

I should like to show how the application of such a definition of assent to the *rai jama'i* on the part of Muslims in actual fact means forgoing a long tradition of debate and controversy over the course of time owing to the social and political impediments to exercising them.

It would seem that the best way to discuss what unites law and faith in respect of the world is by turning to legal practice. I shall therefore try to examine the teaching and the practice of the law in Islam from the standpoint of assent and of controversy as a preparatory stage for assent.

From the very beginnings of Islam, learning has been part of religion, a culture the fabric of which is woven by and through controversy, which reveals the barriers raised to freedom of thought.

*The Battle of Sifin (Ma'raket Sif-fin) and the Koufa debates*

Thirty years after the death of the Prophet, the battle for the succession, which Sifin was to become, determined 'a sociology of the Muslim world', according to the words of Burhan Ghalioun. The advent of a structured world was established throughout from the moment in the battle when Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, agreed to a cease-fire in order to debate with his adversaries although he had the advantage in battle and many of his men thought that only God could decide the outcome of the combat. Refusing the idea of human arbitration, a section of the troops left Sifin for Koufa in Iraq: they were the Kharijis, 'those who have left', from the verb *kharaja*. Another faction, refusing to accept the defeat of Ali after fighting resumed, became the Shias.

The two schools of Muslim thought which were to emerge as a result bore the mark of diversity from the very start. They were to know varied fortunes depending on the societies where they were introduced and the issues at stake. In each case the freedom to learn became a matter of power because the communities and the rules of succession to power rested on the religious rite observed. Consequently, absolute rule was exercised only in a field already marked by the diversity inherited from the confrontation and the controversy between doctrinal schools.

The Muslim world has since been divided into separate and distinct schools, the Sunnis who form the large majority (Malekite, Hanefite, Chafaite, Hanbalite), the Shias and the Kharijis. This together with other circumstances (namely the extent and nature of the populations involved) makes it legitimate to speak of Muslim worlds. Here, it is chiefly a matter of Algeria situated in a Muslim West peopled with Mediterranean Berbers, Arabs, Turks, Spaniards and so on who have lived and still live out their view of the world by means of their Hanefite, Malekite, Ibadite and Sufi readings.

*Muslim rationalism: the mu'tazilis*

This school of so-called rationalist *kalam* (theological commentary) dates from the 8th century. It became the official doctrine of the Abbasid caliphate under the reign of the Caliph al-Maimoun (in 827) but was subsequently repressed and deemed heterodox by most.

While in power, the caliphate also justified the repression of adversaries. The doctrine, said to be founded on the use of reason, laid down in law – *el'adl* – the freedom

and responsibilities of humans. The school is of interest to us today in so far as it introduced the study of the Book and the sacred character of the Book. It marks all the attempts to reform thinking in the Muslim world. The great debate fomented by the Mu'tazilis concerns the nature of the Koran: created or uncreated, *makhluq* or else *ghair makhluq*. This question imbues the entire approach to the text.

The classification of the verses (*surahs*) has indeed altered. For Muslims, the Koran is a text revealed verbally by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed. There is no review of the verses by the Prophet or under his authority. Despite countless debates and discussions, it is agreed that the first review was drawn up by 'Othman in 653. Malik ibn Nes, the commentator, whose reading was pre-eminent in the Maghreb, died in 710. The text was fully vocalized in the 10th century. During those years, it underwent a series of variations.

Certainly there is a hiatus which opens the way for query because, while for Muslims revelation is a means of passing from ignorance to learning, that same revelation was and remains a conquest since, as just said, there is nothing to verify the order of the *surahs* dictated by the Angel Gabriel. Only after due interrogation can there be assent.

This leads on to the debate on the sacred character of the language of the Koran.

### *The dominant school in Algeria: Malekism*

The Malekis perceive the reference contained in the Koran as a series of strict rules drawn from the Koranic text, the tradition related by the Prophet's companions (*hadith*), the acts of his daily life (*sunna*) plus two essential rules of religious law which allot ample space to the opinions of the doctors of the faith: *el ijtilhad* and *el ijmah*. Both correspond to a moment of apparent consultation, the entire issue resting on the nature of the participant in the process. Until the second century of the Hegira, *el ijmah* was the result of a consensus in the Muslim community. From the third century onwards, the *ulemas*, or doctors of the faith, organized their power and *el ijmah* became a consensus *bayn el ulema*, among scholars. The same may be observed in connection with a similar notion: *el ithifaq* or harmonious concord; should it be sought among the 'best' or among the majority? *El ijtilhad* allows interpretation and adaptation by scholars – *el moujtahidoun* – of reference texts for use in contemporary situations dealing with contemporary issues.

This school opened the way for the establishment of a body of scholars who derived their legitimacy from learning not based solely on the reading of the text.

### **The depositaries of learning, or the ability to resort to controversy**

#### *The figure of the cleric, the body of ulemas*

In the Muslim world, the term 'cleric' was used to refer to one worthy to be deemed a scholar. His aptitude for knowledge springs from his ability to interpret the commentary. However, in Cordoba and elsewhere the commentary required *el ijtilhad*

and *el ijmah, el instintej*. Thus, the exercise of thought became integrated in that of analogy, *el qiyass*, which was the principal method. According to that definition, learning was an inherited process, a genealogical testimony.

The traditional law expert most quoted is Ibn Taymiya. For him, analogy is one of the noblest sciences. Only those who have penetrated the hidden purposes of the Law, who are conscious of its infinite beauty, who have understood its supreme usefulness for humans both in this world and in the next can discover its veracity. He advocates the application of the orthodox method through knowledge of the tradition. Everything, including the method of thought, must be justified by the Koran, the Sunna and the tradition of the best ancients.

These rules nevertheless provide protection against blind obedience to those who are powerful, first of all by the Book itself, the ultimate guarantor of learning.

When we know that a text contradicts a reasoned argument, we know without a shadow of doubt that the analogy is wrong: in other words, the cases envisaged are unlike those with which it seemed possible for them to be assimilated and display a quality considered in law to involve a different legal status.

Science, in that context, neither has meaning nor leads to the 'truth' if it is not infused with the infinite wisdom of God.

Ibn Taymiya writes more precisely:

Only those who have plumbed the last and hidden depths . . . of the *Shari'a* [the Law], who are aware of its infinite beauty, who have understood its supreme usefulness for men in this world and the next can discover the truth therein (in Science) . . . From God all proceeds and to him all returns.

By these words and by defending an analogy based on certain fact, as it were, the Koran, the Sunna and the tradition of the best ancients, Ibn Taymiya created a school of thought which is still alive today. We shall see the quasi-protectionist role that can be played by a notion of 'measure' like *qiyass* in a context of vulnerability in a given social group.

But from the outset it allowed objection or alliance, even affecting the representatives of those in power, based on reference to the text. It also created a powerful social category: 'those who have plumbed the last and hidden depths of the *Shari'a*'. Today, it is fair to say that in Sunni Islam such individuals are the *ulemas*.

#### *Constitution of a body of ulemas*

For Muslims, accustomed to the structures of doctrinal schools, the first science is what might be called canon law. According to the expression used by Yadh Ben Achour, its status means that faith and the message are not only poetry but a challenge to the mind. Although there is no clergy in Islam, since the Abbasid caliphs (10th century AD) the ulemas alone have been endowed with the power to interpret, holding their legislative authority by virtue of their knowledge of the founding texts of Islam as well as of the religious school to which they belonged. They were in duty bound by their high position to declare the law in the silence of God, meaning the

absence of any reference text. According to Hichem Jait, they enjoyed that faculty on account of their relations to the ruling classes whose legitimacy they then recognized.

A framework for legal practice was taking shape and judicial powers were granted to the qadis to apply the law.

### *Scholars who practise law: jurists*

After Malik ibn Nes, the avowed figure of a scholar for the Malekis is, of course, Ibn Rochd. The term scholar, *'alim*, is an old one in this cultural region; it engages the exercise of reason. Learning engages the one who knows or who seeks and has the means to seek to know. This category also engages the object in so far as it is always a matter of knowing something or about something and its opposite; in Arabic, the nearest category is the *'alim*, the one in a position to decipher signs in a given discipline: *'alim fi mada mu'ayana*.

There is therefore a possibility of a form of human discourse which would draw its authenticity from within rather than from revelation and the reports handed down by tradition. It may fill a pedagogical purpose in one declension, *'alama*, as opposed to the *hafadha* of strict observance meaning at once learn-repeat and protect. *Hafadha* is merely the first rung on the ladder of knowledge which will place the future scholar or pupil more firmly in a area of civilization. Reason here derives from practice with a view to acquiring specific learning. One might quote *'ilm el qanoun* (law) and note the methodological importance of demonstration in that discipline, *manahij al 'adilla*, authorized by the notion of *bayan* (the sign) in the Koran. Where the legal character of philosophy is concerned, Ibn Rochd writes, ' the act of philosophizing is none other than the rational study of facts and reflecting on them in so far as they are proof of the existence of the Maker'.

Ibn Rochd's references are: analogy, the Koran and what the ancients said and did with regard to judicial syllogism. It is the duty of the scholar – here, Ibn Rochd – to accept what proves right and to point to what is not. Consequently, there is the possibility of a debate on freedom by the perception of opposition, error and divergence in respect of the text within Islam.

Law experts must act according to the law and to the foundations of the law in the same way as mathematicians do with regard to their science.

Demonstration, dialectics and rhetoric offer three kinds of argument which are accessible to three ways of thinking. This approach has led to the shaping of a powerful body of lawyers and also legal practitioners. During the Ottoman period, in Tunisia and Algeria, the Koran was the only code of law but alongside the ulemas who were in a position to legislate, other categories also applied the law:

- a judge for civil and military affairs, the qadi (one for the Turks, who mainly obeyed the Hanefite rite, one for the other Muslims, generally of the Malekite rite, an Ibadite qadi);
- an Agha who dispensed justice in country villages to those who requested it: Berbers, Ottomans and so on;

- a mufti assisted the qadi when the cases were very complicated (one for the Turks, one for the other Muslims);
- the Minister for Maritime Affairs administered justice to seamen; his judgment was without appeal;
- Jews were judged by a court composed of several rabbis when it was a matter between Jews. In other cases they were referred to Muslim judges;
- Foreigners were judged by the consuls of their countries.

Until the early 19th century, in the Maghreb different sources of law existed side by side: Islam, Berber rules, Hebrew, Christian and the maritime code, or professional code, as one might say.

In the late 19th century, shaken by the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt, which allowed them to take stock and become aware of how far their society lagged behind in the scientific field, Muslim thinkers were to create a movement of reflection, the *'nahda*, with the aim of renewing the doctrine by turning to scientific achievements. A large number travelled to Europe, some sent by their institution, *El Azhar*, the largest university in the Muslim world. In the field of law, the introduction of the Napoleonic code was to lead to the foundation of a body of law experts who had studied at French universities. Everywhere this code encountered and took into account religious standards and customs. In Algeria, up to five codes were in use at one and the same time: Kabyle, Mozabite, Malekite, Jewish and civil.

#### *The master and the elective community*

Under this heading I should like to mention a work by Ibn Tufail, *Hayi ibn Yaqzan, The Living Son of the Awakened*. Writing at the time of Ibn Rochd, he is the author of the first educational, philosophical and initiatory novel. The interest of this work for present purposes is the division of the life of knowledge into stages. There are seven stages which may be likened to the stations of Sufism:

- From 1 to 7 years of age: the hero, 'Hayi'. the living, develops an intelligence based on sensibility through awareness of animals and his surroundings;
- From 7 to 14 Hayi encounters the experience and observation of death;
- From 14 to 21 he constructs, produces and uses things and beasts. He invents;
- From 21 to 28 Hayi leaves the pragmatic stage for theory;
- From 28 to 35 he devotes his time to metaphysical meditation, then wisdom;
- He embraces mystical ecstasy, asceticism, intuition and union.

At the final stage of learning, Hayi finds civilization through a 'Man Friday' who, however, is no savage. The most outwardly civilized being finds in the solitary Hayi a mentor in intelligence and goodness. This station introduces complexity and choice in relation to the world. Learning, were it of a single fact, is not a condition to be attained but a conquest brought about by the encounter of at least two differences. Together they form an elective community, far from the crowd stifled by a formal interpretation of revealed religion. The notion of election traces and authorizes limits, hence differences, in knowledge.

These few considerations on the struggles engaged since the beginnings of Islam allow us to reflect on the way 'individual thought' can be taken into account in the religious analyses of a Muslim code, and therefore how empowerment can be evolved in a doctrine on the basis of a given category of learning. There is a place for individual reflection in the distinction between the conscience or innermost being (*el batin*) and the outermost. This has occasioned famous controversies such as those found in the writings of the Sunni El Ghazali in his critique of Sufism and in those of Ibn Taymiya on Ibn 'Arabi (a 12th-century Andalusian mystic).

The innermost being expresses a possible freedom of thought for the individual in the face of Sunnite Islam which only recognizes learning to the Prophet's companions (by the hadith) and the ulemas. But it also provides a field for what is irreducible.

The innermost being might be described thus:

- All previous Books are contained in the Koran;
- All the Koran is contained in the *fatihah*;
- All the *fatihah* is contained in *bismallah*;
- All *bismallah* is in the letter *ba*, and all that is in the *ba* is in the diacritical point which sets it forth in writing.

This outline helps us to grasp the linkage between assent, based on analogy, and co-existence but also controversy among several assents and an area of the innermost being. Recognition of such categories of learning and of those who put them into practice emerges in the importance of the controversies and theological traditions which they inspired in Muslim thought.

Where there are controversies, they correspond to competing but authorized modes of scrutinizing the texts and also the real world. In national states, that capacity is filled legally by the systems of education. At the same time, the very idea of a national system represses different, divergent and autonomous readings. In independent Algeria, the authorized ulemas form an Islamic High Council organized by the state.

The legitimacy of controversy, which we met in the different forms of learning, conflicts with that of the exercise of power and an attack on freedom in general within Muslim societies. Competition among the various Islamic scholars has altered with the historical period and the issues. But an absence of controversy has invariably signified a return to authoritarian and absolute rule.

## **The production and transmission of learning: extinction of controversy**

### *Doctrinal schools*

Today, structuring by doctrinal schools covers homogeneous geographical groups. Debates between schools have all but disappeared in these areas, except in integrist movements where the idea of *Umma*, a wholly Muslim nation, contravenes the primacy of doctrinal schools. Accordingly, in recent years North Africans could become Shia or Wahabi.



Within these homogeneous groups, learning in Islam is going through a period which reflects the state of education in Muslim countries.

### *The formation of an elite in Cordoba*

I have chosen Cordoba because Ibn Rochd, who was brought up and lived there, is one of the rare scholars to have won recognition in the West. That raises another question: by choosing Ibn Rochd as a scholar, Western countries were recognizing the peculiar position of Andalusia which allowed a reappropriation from the northern shore of the Mediterranean. But the status of Ibn Rochd may also be explained by the reference to Greek thought, thus allowing a new reappropriation.

The system of education in Cordoba may be described as follows.

First, the Arabic language was taught through the Koran, poetry and epistolary writings. It might be said that this was the stage in apprenticeship where traditional learning, *hafadha*, is handed down intact.

Next came literacy, religion and numeracy. The introduction of numeracy indicates a pedagogical method which departs from simple transmission.

Then came the teaching of religious sciences through the *hadith* and law according to the master's dominant tradition: grammar, lexicography, belles-lettres, history, poetry and genealogy. Grammar is an introduction to exegesis (*tafsir*) since the work written by Abu 'Ubayda in the mid-8th century (Gilliot, 1990). The *tafsir* was to lay the foundations for those considered as rationalists, the *mu'tazilis*. This tradition, still observed today, has given rise to two recent movements, the *nahda* and the trend of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The *fiqh*, which allows the study and the *tafsir* of law, was conducted according to the categories of reasoning already described: *qiyass* (analogy) and the *ijmah* (consensus) acquired by the *mujtahidun*, or doctors authorized to practise *el ijtihaad*. *El ijtihaad* was practised by abrogation (*el naskh*) and contradiction (*ta'arud*) with a view to establishing a legal framework (Abdelwahab Khallaf, 1997). The *tafsir* and the *fiqh* were based on the Law (the *shar'ia*), custom (*el 'urf*) and methods promoted by the doctrinal schools, for example, *el istihsan* (legal preference) by the Hanefis, *el istislah* (common interest) by the Malekis, *el istihsab* (presumption of continuity) by the Chafais (Mervin, 2000).

Law experts can also draw rules (*el istinbat*) from four sources which deal with the ambiguous and the clarifying, the obvious and the implicit, order and forgiveness, the general and the particular.

The last stage was science and philosophy.

Science was taught by a small group with the authority to do so. At the time of Ibn Rochd, there were six prominent scholars and 17 of lower rank. Although they belonged to different schools, Ibn Rochd and Ibn Tufail were colleagues and respected each other's work.

Andalusia was an area where ideas were shared, exchanged, handed down and put to debate. Scholars travelled across a *dar el islam* which stretched from the boundaries of Asia to Africa and were therefore able to apply their discussions to a variety of real situations. Consequently, an elite was produced in a system which authorized

controversy. This small number of men was sometimes the object of repression by the authorities they dared to oppose.

*Muslim elites in the Maghreb*

An analysis of this point allows us to sketch out hypotheses with a view to understanding why a civilization which possessed so much learning continued to obey the repetition of the *hafadha* and witnessed the loss of its ability to produce 'alam.<sup>2</sup>

The work of Fernand Braudel explains the circumstances of the loss of naval supremacy by the Algerian fleet in the Mediterranean; this event accompanied and largely accounted for the fall of the Ottoman Empire, then its occupation by national forces. The period was also marked by the restrictions placed on the movement of the elites who travelled throughout the Muslim world.

Before the arrival of the French, teaching was ensured by the *zaouias*; there were also a large number of madrasas associated with places of worship, institutions of the doctrine of the *murabitun*, the Almoravides, and institutions led by Ibadite and Hanefite teachers as well as Hebrew schools. In Laghouat, a Torah in Arabic where Eloim is Allah and a Koran in Hebrew where Allah is Eloim were still in circulation during the first half of the 20th century.

So there were internal controversies in Islamic countries and with real individuals in everyday relations. But the system of education within a *zaouia* is based on the first stage, the *hafadha*. Those who are expected to advance in their studies do so within large institutions like the Qarouania (Morocco), the Zitouna (Tunisia) and el Azhar (Egypt). They become 'alam.

In the 19th century, under the pressure of the Muslim elites, the Bey of Tunis modernized the Sadiki college in Tunisia, adding scientific subjects, departing from the pedagogical methods based on the *hafadha* which was steadily dominating the Zitouna.

The Zitouna, as a reference institution, and the Sadiki college gave an impetus to Tunisian society which was lacking in Algeria, where there had been a sudden break. The same occurred in Morocco, which benefited from the Qarouania.

Under the French occupation, school institutions in Algeria were destroyed (see Turin, 1977), with the exception of the M'zab valley, where the Ibadite rite was preserved, and the southern territories. In the 1940s, the Ibadis founded a reformed school on a model which allowed the pupils entrance to the Sadiki college. Colonization in Algeria set up Franco-Muslim establishments or sections.

At the turn of the 19th century, the *nadha*, a reformist movement, was introduced after the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt by those who asked why the Muslim world lagged so far behind.

The movement, which also succeeded in rehabilitating the *mu'tazilis*, spread widely throughout the Muslim world; in the Maghreb, it developed alongside the encounter with Europe, with France in particular, through the colonization process.

Reformist *medersas*, the Zitouna, and the central institution of el Azhar all acknowledged the movement.

In Algeria, during the colonial period and afterwards, the doctrine was summed

up in the formula 'Islam is my religion, Arabic my language and Algeria my country'. The reading of Islam was one and based on the reading of the ulemas of the reform. Over the years it was targeted by nationalist ideology for its Jacobin leanings.

There is no doubt, even so, that this period was interesting because it brought to the Maghreb what has been called a Franco-Muslim elite who benefited from the harmonious introduction of recent subjects and teaching methods into the programmes.

Algerian Jews became French by virtue of the Crémieux Decree. The Hanafite rite, practised mainly by the Turks, fell into disuse; the more society moved towards the national idea the more the Malekite rite gained hegemony.

Muslim law and the Berber tradition, recognized and continued by the colonial state as forms of organization, had already been applied during the Ottoman period. The teaching of law as practice linked these traditions to that of the Napoleonic code.

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Today, the three North African countries are running out of steam. Tunisia, where the educational system remains a reference, particularly after the reforms of Mohammed Charfi, still lags behind Spain and Portugal, in spite of its good economic record. The relation to the Prince still marks the exercise of reason. In Turkey, the creation of an elite has remained within the bounds of Istanbul and the suburbs, although the country is heir to the Ottoman Empire.

In Algeria, the creation of a learned elite has been thwarted by the following factors.

1. The nationalization of the syllabus (the Faculty of Law was the first affected). Independence witnessed the collapse of the processes of creating a national elite. The idea of an earlier elite was rejected on the grounds that it contained persons educated under French colonization. However, nationalization of schools began with solid schooling in French but a weak teaching staff owing to the many departures. Arabization in turn was weakened by low recruitment of Algerian staff, which opened the way for co-operation with Egypt. The least one can say is that it was not convincing. Some Arabic-speaking co-operation workers whose approach might have embarrassed the political authorities were invited to leave the country. At the same time the government organized its power structure by first relying on French-speaking teachers, then proceeding to set them ideologically against the Arabic-speaking staff who met with serious problems of employment or social recognition. The linguistic war which ensued masked the conflicts of social status and relations with the authorities.

2. The ever-recurring departure of the elite. The state of the system of education at independence echoed a constant feature of Algerian society: the departure of the educated elite. This phenomenon appeared in 1830, when the Turks left Algeria, and reappeared again under French occupation. The movement was repeated with independence and has been occurring again since the early 1990s. The loss of reference institutions and interlocutors has been a feature of the country since the second half of the 19th century.

3. The national system of education was marked by ideas of nationalism and revolution; there was strong defiance where the West and Western culture were concerned, which amounted to the refusal of controversy. It was a matter of producing autonomous 'disconnected' learning about the world. Such a situation could only be remedied by a critique embraced by those whom divisions such as faith/reason, Arabic/French and Arabic-speaking/Berber-speaking inhibited. Today, it is clear that there are two categories which contest this system of education:

- the integrists who deny any control of religious matters by the authorities. They demand the assent of reason by virtue of *one* reading of the text, cast in stone, so to speak, and exert a radical critique of political power;
- a section of the middle classes, who have set up their own schools and fight their battles on the level of linguistic claims and syllabus requirements concerning the separation of learning and religion.

4. The critique of the West is conducted under even more vulnerable circumstances in so far as there are no longer any true intellectual centres in the Muslim world: Cairo and other centres have declined to the benefit of the great Western universities. El Azhar has failed to achieve a mutation, Zitouna is gradually fading from the scene. Princeton, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge alone predominate. The *nahda* did not bear fruit although in that context el Azhar had made the effort to send thinkers to Paris in the early 20th century. Finding itself confronted with dominant forces, Muslim culture has not given its assent to European rationalism. Nor has it not succeeded in engaging in a controversy based on reason. It resists through the *hafadha*.

5. Analogy is no longer an offshoot of reasoning, it is used instead of reason. *El qiyass*, erected as a measure, an unmoveable standard, provides a protection by being the guarantor of a genealogy. Ibn Taymiya is a necessary bibliographical reference but through impoverished reading. We are in the *hafadha* of what we must be with no means of finding a framework or accommodating the tradition. This is why Ibn Taymiya has become a reference for the Salafis.

The first step, then, is to find oneself, to turn to the West to see oneself in the Other's eyes. That Other acknowledges only clerics among Muslims and admits of no question in that culture, at the heart of which some now raise the question of a way out of the current petrification.

Multiculturalism has even more difficulty in so far as it is at pains to identify:

- interlocutors who are not confined to the commentary or who are not clones;
- places for exchange and reflection which are not in the wake of the Prince.

Universities, the press and publishing in these countries do not benefit from the right to freedom of thought. Thus, an Egyptian writer, Salah Eddine Mohsen, was sentenced in January 2001 to three years in jail for having 'invoked heresy and having propagated atheism' in his novels – one of his characters says he 'does not believe in God'. Those words demonstrate the resistance of a way of thinking which can be aligned with European thought: breath, energy capable of compensating for the weaknesses and burdens of the here-below. The religious system serves to replace a mythology which creates its own space precisely so as not to think of reality.

Intellectuals, ready to forgo that mythical and religious universe, arrive in European countries and note with stupefaction that those countries have no strategy and even less interest in Muslim countries, including those closest to them. Thus no strategy for Turkey, which is sinking, for a Maghreb that a few academics would like to see managed like the Arab offices, Lyautey-style. The best example of this observation is the standstill seen since the Barcelona Conference with a south bank being constantly rediscovered.

But it is fair to be anxious and to broaden the debate espoused here to more than the Muslim world by referring to the steps taken in tightening security since 11 September 2001. There is no doubt that there are restrictions on freedom, such as travelling for Westerners, but even more so for all those who are *different*.

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### Notes

1. In Islam, the believers in the other two monotheistic religions are spoken of as the 'people of the Book', *ahl el kitab*. Reference to the Book provides a definition of Self, with the Koran, and also determines the content of the status of the Others (who are more or less close depending upon their relation to the Book).
2. Since the 15th or the 18th century, depending on whether one takes the departure from Granada or the loss of influence in the Mediterranean as marking the decline.

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