

## Malek Bennabi's Definition of Culture: A Conciliatory Attempt to Bridge the Gap Between the Algerian Post-colonial Elite and the State

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### ملخص:

يقدم هذ المقال ثلاثة تعريفات للثقافة لدى النظام الجزائري ما بعد الكولونيالي وكذا لدى طبقة المثقفين الجزائريين ما بعد الكولونيين، ثم يعرض تعريفا لمالك بن نبي. يهدف هذا العرض للتعريفات الثلاثة للثقافة إلى إظهار أوجه التعارض بين تعريف النظام السياسي الجزائري و تعريف طبقة المثقفين الجزائريين. يزعم صاحب المقال أن تعريف مالك بن نبي للثقافة يمثل حلا وسطا لردم الهوة بين الجانبين. إذ يتميز بديناميكية تغطي عيوب التعريفات الأخرى التي يرى صاحب المقال أنها تعريفات جامدة تتعامل مع مفهوم الثقافة في الإطار القانوني والإداري فقط من جانب النظام السياسي كما أنها تتميز بثورية غير مبررة لدى طبقة المثقفين ما بعد الكولونيين.

### Abstract:

Defining culture is an issue at stake in most post-colonial societies. This is due to the delicate moment of regaining national sovereignty, where both individuals and society, on the one hand, and the State, on the other, express the need to start the independence era on safe grounds. One of the contentious issues is national culture and what definition thereof could enjoy unanimous agreement. It is assumed that this controversy stems from the diverse ideological leanings characterizing both the ruling power and the post-colonial intellectual elite. Such that the State delivers what seems to be a static, ideologically colorless definition of culture whereas the post-colonial elite's one suggests a kind

of definition that is partially shot through with Western precepts. If the former's definition lacks clarity, the former marks signs of displacement with regard to the real cultural reality of Algeria. Malek Bennabi's definition seems to enjoy both descriptive and explanatory power in that it links culture to the colonial legacy of underdevelopment and its avatars represented by inefficiency. This linkage renders culture a field where investigation adopts a bottom-up process aimed at unearthing the true characteristics of an endogenous culture: both faithful to reality and projected onto the future because of the safe start, after removing the lethal ideas.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial state; post-colonial elite; culture; Malek Bennabi; underdevelopment; prevailing cultural ambiance.

## Introduction:

In an article published in *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>1</sup>, Samuel Huntington writes “*It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future*”. This is to highlight the importance of culture in the life of nations. The awareness of the pivotal position of culture as a means of defense has hardened on both sides of the divide which was created during the colonial experience between the West and in what is roughly named the southern part of the globe, or the Third World. The battled consciousness of the colony realized that, owing to the misbalance between its material weaponry to militarily save its security and, later in the post-colonial era, to economically preserve its wealth and compete with the ex-colonizing world powers, culture proves to be nearly the last entrenchment behind which world politics would be reasonably tempered to the benefit of the ex-colonized nascent nations.

On the other side of the fence, the ex-colonizing nations, following the waves of independences of the 60s, have kept

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<sup>1</sup> New York: Summer 1993. Vol.72, Iss. 3; page. 22, 28 pgs.

exercising on 'their ex-possession' culturally hued hegemonic policies. The aim thereof is to keep cultural links that would maintain the ex-colony within at least a metropolitan linguistic dependency, thus creating a reliable basis for exclusive economic cooperation. However, this apparently ideology/culture-free economic cooperation is grounded on cultural considerations that have not failed to constitute areas of contention opposing, within post-colonial nations, the elite to the ruling power. The culture-based source of conflict, as conceived of by Huntington, has come to cast on international relations an overarching mantle that almost consistently determines individual governments' behavior in their cultural policies: Cautiously striking a balance between excessively protectionist cultural policies and openness to the world, mainly under the new requirements imposed by Globalization.

Yet, in their wary engagement to adopt particular cultural policies, post-colonial countries face opposition from within the domestic intellectual elite as to the relevance of the choice made and the goals sought. This is due to the different readings of society, history, and culture that both the ruling power and the post-colonial intellectual elite make. Each side values the necessity that cultural policies be built upon the true reality of society but with a Universalist outlook. Post-colonial Algeria, the focus of this article, presents us with a binary opposition between the state's definition of culture and that of the post-colonial elite. A conciliatory third way could be supplied by Malek Bennabi's literature pertaining to the notion, concept and a possible cultural program whose

applicability might bridge the gap between the state and the elite.

### **Defining Culture:**

Given that anthropology is the closest discipline to cultural researches, we suggest three definitions supplied by Matthew Arnold, Edward Tylor, and Franz Boas. In *Culture and anarchy*<sup>1</sup> (2006), Matthew Arnold limits the area of culture to those intellectual and artistic activities and artifacts, as if constraining it to aesthetics only. Edward Tylor lists a series of areas that culture covers: knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and habits that man accumulates in his social life. This definition is flawed by too much inclusivity. Franz Boas' definition stresses the unique characteristics of societies, be they 'primitive' or 'modern', refusing to judgmentally distinguish between what is known by 'high' and 'low' culture. The first definition is elitist, the second one champions mass culture while the third one seems to appeal to nationalist ideologies.

The *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*,<sup>2</sup> (p: 328), defines culture in ways that it covers “*a host of phenomena that mean different things to different people: literate tradition or high culture, level of civilization, way of life, ethnic membership, country of origin, nationality, ideology, religious affiliation, or moral values*”. Owing to the broad range of

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<sup>11)</sup> Oxford University Press 2006

<sup>2)</sup> Published by Elsevier Social Sciences, 2002.

areas it is linked to, culture seems to resist comprehensive definitions that are neither too inclusive nor excessively exclusive. However, a common, agreed-upon sense of what culture is has come up to gather academic unanimity: “*the irreducible, the sacred, that touches the core of who we are – our history and our subjectivity*” (ibid). In Spencer-Oatey<sup>1</sup>, (2008), culture is defined as “*a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior.*” These two definitions share in common the following characteristics:

- *Ideology, religious affiliation, or moral values* in the first definition are reproduced in the second one under the labels of *assumptions and values, beliefs, policies.*
- *way of life* in the first definition becomes *orientations to life, procedures and behavioral conventions*

The only distinction between these two definitions is the inclusion of ethnicity, geography, and nationality in the first one while it is omitted in the second one. What is worthy

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<sup>1)</sup> <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/globalpadintercultural>

of notice is that culture could be best defined from a sociological view. The famous definition supplied by this discipline puts it this way: “*Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.*” The interesting meaning added in this definition is the complex nature of culture seen as a coherent whole. We would like to add that culture is both universal and local, or particular. Universal in that it represents the common principles of human species that essentially have and develop cultures; local (or particular) in that individual human societies each enjoy their own parameters that govern the exercising of their particular cultures. In light of the definitions given earlier, we will explore below the Algerian post-colonial context interaction with the notion of culture. In so doing, three Bennabian<sup>1</sup> questions will orient our exploration:

- 1) How is a culture made?
- 2) What does a culture do?
- 3) How do we make a culture?

### **The Algerian Context:**

During the first two decades following Independence, the general mood of both the state and the intellectuals in Algeria was anti-imperial, anti-colonial. This stance is obvious since exaltation of the Revolution was still the best signifier by which one could sustain his sense of belonging. The notion of culture, therefore, tended to be expressed in anti-elitist terms

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<sup>1</sup>) Malek Bennabi, *Le problème de la culture*, El Borhane.2006.

(refusal of culture as defined by Matthew Arnold above). Again, socialism was the ideological back-up in the process of nation building. The Revolution and Socialism were then the two guidelines within which was regulated the behavior of the State and individuals. The concept of culture was consequently understood as a means and an end at the same time. As a means, it was instrumental in glorifying the Revolution and highlighting its uniqueness among all the other revolutions of the twentieth-century. It also served to argue for the appropriate choice of Socialism as an ideological framework for political action.

As an end, intellectual efforts converged to create a typically Algerian culture, with specific features that contrast with (1) feudal spirit, (2) medieval obscurantism, (2) neocolonial politics, and (4) capitalist ideology. In fact, these four topoi were rather additional guidelines that determined still more the type of cultural production the Algerian intellectuals were expected to furnish. In the concrete act of culture production, this period saw a wealth of cultural artifacts, such as *Chroniques des Années de Braises* that won the Palme d'Or award at the Cannes Festival in 1975, or the literary production in nearly all its genres. The non-exhaustive list<sup>(1)</sup> below may help:

- Poetry: Djamel Amrani; Ana Gerki; Habib Tengour.

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<sup>1)</sup> Christiane ACHOUR, *Anthologie de la littérature algérienne*. ENAP-BORDAS. Paris, 1990.



- Theatre: Kateb Yacine; Hocine Bouzaher; Henri Krea; Mohamed Boudia.
- Essay: Mustapha Lachraf; Malek Bennabi; Jean Senac.
- Novel: Mouloud Mammeri; Azzedine Bounmeur, Rachid Boudjedra, Tahar Ouattar (in Arabic); Abdelhamid Benheddoug (in Arabic); Tahar Djaout; Rachid Mimouni.

This cultural production, in its broad lines, evolved within the limits permitted by the four topoi mentioned earlier: fighting (1) feudal spirit, (2) medieval obscurantism, (2) neocolonial politics, and (4) capitalist ideology. However, a close-up examination of this literary production reveals some attempts at answering question 2 and 3: What does a culture do? How do we make a culture? This article will examine this issue when tackling the definition of culture supplied by the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers. We consider that it is of paramount importance to stress that the context and conditions in which the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers were birthed go back to the pre-independence period; that they partially feed on universally grounded convictions and ideologies. This feature puts them at odds with another class of post-independence intellectual elite that was wrought especially to reproduce the state ideology along with its conception and definition of culture. This article chose to name this class of post-colonial intellectuals “the Algerian Organic Intellectual Elite”.

## **The Algerian Organic Intellectual Elite:**

The intellectual elite is not exclusively limited to the list above; other categories could be included, such as educators, political leaders, journalists or administrative high officials...etc. They could be lumped under one heading, borrowed from Gramsci's category of intellectuals: Organic Intellectuals, who are said to "*exercise "technical" or "directive" capacities in society*"<sup>(1)</sup>. This article relatively focuses much more on the category of writers for they seem to have markedly challenged the ruling power over what it amounts to be defined an Algerian culture. It seems, however, useful to briefly review the most outstanding categories composing the organic intellectual elite past the 70s. Helen Chapin Metz<sup>(2)</sup> singles out five categories: (1) the administrative elite, (2) the FLN high ranking officials, (3) the military, (4) civil society, and (5) journalists. She writes that the administrative elite "*has provided a pool of technocrats for the staff of both the civilian government and the military presidency, which rely heavily on them in modernizing Algeria's economy*". She does not, however, specify the cultural background against which "*modernizing Algeria's*

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<sup>1)</sup> Valeriano Ramos, Jr, *The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci's Marxism*. *Theoretical Review* No. 27, March-April 1982

<sup>2)</sup> *Algeria: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division. Library of Congress, 1994.

*economy*” was envisaged, albeit inserting the mention of “*pool of technocrats*” that could reveal a culture-free outlook.

The FLN high ranking officials and the military are granted the roles of shaping the general policy of the country. Of course, it goes without saying that the general management of the country along the line of a one-party regime is too much telling about the type of culture entertained: a cast of culture that develops within the framework of the Revolution-Socialism, as presented above. Civil society is described in these terms:

*“Through most of Algeria's independent history, civil society and mass organizations have been subordinate to the state-party apparatus and relegated to roles of recruitment and propaganda. From 1968 until 1989, all mass associations were incorporated under the direct administration of the FLN. From the party's perspective, integrating the independent organizations enabled the party to become a true "front," a unique body representing the populace, while simultaneously inhibiting the development of any independent political opposition.”*

This characterization unveils an ideology-tainted type of culture that was the “prevailing ambiance” — to borrow a Bennabian terminology—at that time.

The journalists, the fifth category, are described as having undergone three phases:

- 1) Shortly after Independence, "*Algerian news publications were nationalized*", this turned them "*subject to heavy censorship by the government and the FLN*". A union of journalists was "*formed under FLN auspices but was largely insignificant*". The primary function of the news media "*was not to inform or educate but to indoctrinate—affirming and propagating the socialist tenets of the national government*".
- 2) In the late 1980s, the situation changed, leading to liberalization that resulted in "*the Algerian public having been educated and politicized*" through the explosion of "*local papers, journals, radio and television programs as well as the relaxation of laws inhibiting the international press*".
- 3) After the January 1992 events, "*the news media have been restricted once again. A limited number of newspapers and broadcasts continue to operate, but journalists have been brought in by the hundreds and detained for interrogating. Tens more have been arrested or have simply disappeared, or have been killed by Islamists*".

In light of the characterization of these organic intellectuals, one can naturally expect the emergence of a "prevailing cultural ambiance" thoroughly permeated with the state ideology. This attests to the deep concern of creating a certain type of culture that would reinforce the state ideology, and convince the collectivity of the necessity to homogenize culture for a more cohesive and stable society. The organic

intellectual elite uncomfortably sits at the crossfire of critique conveyed by the novelistic production of the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers.

**Image of the organic intellectual in the literary production of the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers:**

In *Les Vigiles*<sup>(1)</sup>, [The Vigils] of Tahar Djaout, Skander Brik keeps the population under constant watch. He works for a nonofficial police, appointed to report whatever behavior, speech or other undesirable act that a refractory citizen would make. The suspicion that reigns over the village is due to the arrival of a teacher who has just invented a loom but wrestles with the administrative red tape, to be granted a patent for his invention. The inventor feels down and the general impression given to the reader is this: this is a society that—because of a prison-like life, a stagnant political life, a religious and ideological dogmatism, a moribund school— will never accept innovation, scientific reasoning cultural development and discovery. The ruling elite of this village duplicates the role of Big Brother and, likewise, makes use of religious and ideological dogmatism to subdue the population, instead of politics and history, as insinuated by Djaout's novel. School, as an official institution, comes under the critical light of the novel where, in page 66, teachers are said to incite their pupils to outcry those of the parents who drink alcohol. This is a clear indication of what looks, for Djaout, to be a religious dogmatism that, joined to the restrictive measures embedded in

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<sup>1)</sup> Seuil, Paris 1991.

the state ideology, thwarts any *republican* and *secular* ideals to live along. Administrative intellectuals and ideology dispensers are visibly the targets.

Rachid Boudjedra, in *La Répudiation*<sup>(1)</sup>, [The Repudiation] targets the “rites and myths of the tribe”<sup>(2)</sup> through the depiction of the narrator's childhood and youth life at home. The tyrannical power of the father, Zoubir, is unbearable because it weaves relations, among the family members, that are violence-ridden, and sex-stained. Although there is no mention of organic intellectuals, the critique nonetheless ricochets onto them through the exposition of what the narrator thinks is their product: a suffocating, dogmatic family made after the image of the culture disseminated by the State Ideological Apparatus, which is run by the organic intellectuals.

In Mouloud Mammeri's *La Traversée*<sup>(3)</sup> (1982), [The Crossing], the reader lives with Mourad, the main character, the experience of censorship that the ruling power exerts on freedom of thought and speech. The image of the drafting committee personnel (of the newspaper where Mourad works) is summarized by the account made of Boualem, Djamel, and Kamel. Three characters that stand for organic intellectuals whose job is to preside over the order of discourse: selecting

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<sup>1)</sup> (Folio, 1981)

<sup>2)</sup> (C.Achour, p: 134)

<sup>3)</sup> Edition El Othmania, 2005

the discourses that are allowed to be expressed and those that must be hushed down or rejected.

In Rachid Mimouni's, *Le Fleuve détourné*<sup>(1)</sup>, [The Diverted River], there is a sequence in which the hero witnesses, in a police station, a woman who comes in a desperate state, to complain about her husband brutal treatment. She shows bruises on her thighs and blues on the face. The police officer on shift advises her not to complain because, he argues, that would mean a long imprisonment for her husband, in which case, he warns, she would be left stranded, with no one to provide for her and her children. The officer adds as a concluding wisdom: "The law knows only how to punish, but not how to correct men". (P: 76) This sequence shows again how the Algerian social fabric is fundamentally wrong to the extent that even injustice has strong arguments on its side. Although this critique is apparently addressed to a representative of the State Repressive Apparatus, yet the "*Algerian social fabric*" is the intended target for it is, institutionally, i.e. administratively, the product of the organic intellectuals, whose job is to reinforce an already backward culture of the Algerian society.

Again, in *l'Honneur de la tribu*<sup>(2)</sup>, [The Honor of the Tribe] by Rachid Mimouni, Omar El Mebrouk, the prefect of Zitouna, the village where the events of the story take place, and the imam of the village mosque, come under acerbic

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<sup>1)</sup> Editions Sédia, 2007

<sup>2)</sup> Editions Sédia, 2008

critique. The former represents the administrative organic intellectual, the latter the culture provider. Both contribute to perpetuate a backward culture that keeps society under permanent subjugation, leaving next to no difference between the colonial situation and the post-colonial one.

Such is the picture of the organic intellectual as it is depicted through novelistic means. The intellectual agency that the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers exercise through their works succeeds to supersede the role of the organic intellectual in cultural matters. In so doing, they subverted the official discourse as concerns the culture that should be named national, authentic, and therefore become the common ground upon which an agreed-upon social project will be adopted. This critical stance of the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers stems from two characteristics that are inherent to post-colonial discourse worldwide: Resistance and Displacement. This article will develop these two notions when dealing with the role of the Algerian post-colonial elite/writers and their contribution in defining the Algerian culture. Before that, we first start with the definition of culture as it is expressed by the ruling power through the different regulations issued in the official literature since Independence up to the present moment.



## The Algerian State Definition of Culture:

Constitutionally, culture is understood to derive from the ideology of the Constitution Project<sup>1</sup> preamble, promulgated by the National Assembly on August, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1963. It is stipulated therein that the Republic abides by the “*principles of socialism whose executive agents are the peasants, the working mass and the avant-garde revolutionary intellectuals*”. These three agents announce socialist-communist leanings that are supposed to constitute the pillars of the dominant discourse under which culture would be determined and defined. The intended treatment of culture seems to be linked to the Bennabian question of ‘How do we make a culture?’

A social policy is provided for, covering “*women emancipation whose role is to be associated to public management, development, elimination of illiteracy, and development of the national culture*”. Culture, here, is drowned within and by other social actions of the state, with no definition offered as to the outlines of this ‘national culture’. Islam and the Arabic language are mentioned as “*the mobilizing forces that enabled the Algerian people to fight against depersonalization during the colonial period*”. Including Islam and Arabic alongside “*principles of socialism whose executive agents are the peasants, the working mass and the avant-garde revolutionary intellectuals*”, introduced

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<sup>1</sup>) Constitution Project, adopted August, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1963 by the Assembly, approved through referendum on septembre 8<sup>th</sup>, and promulgated on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

earlier, gives us to understand that the projected culture is syncretistic. Again, *“Algeria must firmly assert that Arabic is the national and official language, and that it takes its essential spiritual force from Islam; however, the Republic guarantees respect for everyone's opinions, beliefs, and freedom to practice one's religion”*. This statement contains (1) the State intention to project a monolingual and mono-confessional society, (2) religious freedom that would give off the colors of a semi-secular society. The national culture that would reflect the outlines of such a society looks very hard to draw.

The tenets contained in the Preamble above are reconfirmed in articles 2, 4, 5, 10, 17, 18, 19, and 25 where no clear-cut definition of culture is supplied. The only possible way to read off any definition of culture relies on guesswork; a task that runs the risk of casting too much subjectivity on the operation of interpretation. However, the only thing that one is certain of is that culture is a by-product of the interaction between the vague ‘national culture’ and the ideology that the State was supposedly intent on applying.

The second legal source determining a possible definition of culture is the Constitution of 1996<sup>(1)</sup>, modified in 2006. It brings innovations pertaining to the history of Algeria, where Numidia Kingdom becomes the starting line of the

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<sup>1)</sup> JORADP N°76, 1996, modified by Law n°02-03 passed on April, 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002. JORADP N°25, on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Law n°08-19, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. JORADP n° 63, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

country's recorded history. This is a new dimension, added to the features of the Algerian culture, which is reinforced by naming Amazighness as a third facet of the Algerian culture, alongside Islam and Arabism. These are labeled the foundational tenets of national identity. The National Liberation Front is presented as the frame within which the people dearly purchased his collective destiny in freedom and national cultural identity. Compared to the 1963 Constitution, this one explicitly points to the cultural diversity of Algeria, without attempting to specifically draw clear delimitations of the Algerian culture. Instead, it links it to Algeria being a land of Islam, an integral part of the Maghreb; an Arab, Mediterranean, and African country.

These qualifying labels lend themselves to diverse interpretations and readings. They are not enough safeguards against disputes opposing the State to academics when it comes to defining what it is to be named an Algerian culture. This is not a call for essentializing the Algerian culture; rather, the aim thereof is to bring culture from the world of **presence** into the world of **existence**, as Malek Bennabi suggests<sup>1</sup>. The Algerian culture is present in the Algerians' social practices, but lack of awareness of this presence creates a rift between the signified (culture) and the signifier (a name, or a concept) that refers to it, leaving this un-named thing liable to ideological appropriation. This is detrimental to national identity, unity, and destiny for it conceals the existence of one

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<sup>1</sup> See Bennabi's book *Le problème de la culture*, El Borhane, 2006.

of the most important distinctive and unifying features. The existence of the notion of culture in the national consciousness is essential for this latter to interiorize by means of a concept, a verbalized sign. This verbalization becomes an explicit code, known to all, and accepted as a regulatory device in the social interactions.

There are other sources wherefrom some more explicit definitions of culture could be tapped. One of such sources is *La Politique Culturelle De L'Algérie (Projet)*<sup>1</sup> [Cultural Policy of Algeria] where culture is treated in terms of regulatory measures that reflect the spirit of the articles contained in the 1996/2002 Constitutions. It notices the material and non-material cultural heritage as being memory and expression of the Algerian national identity. Cultural diversity is foregrounded and made guarantor for durable peace and development. Artists and writers are given pride of place, and pledge is engaged to promote artistic and cultural creation. Schools are mentioned as suitable sites for cultivating artistic education in future generations. Democratizing culture and connecting it to tourism through the creation of associations active in the field.

As it is visible from the above, culture is defined in (1) general historical terms, hardly connected to the down-to-earth Algerian reality. (2) Interest seems to be directed to 'high culture', with not enough light shed on the diverse cultural landscape of Algeria. (3) Mention is made of the underlying

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<sup>1</sup> [info@alger-culture.com](mailto:info@alger-culture.com). Ministry of Culture. Algeria. 2013.

assumptions upon which the Algerian culture is built but without stating the means by which a ‘prevailing ambiance’ of culture could be created. (4) Much focus is put on the administrative and legal management of culture. (5) Books and libraries are taken for appropriate means to promote culture, thus conflating literacy promotion with developing a national culture that is based on clear-cut identification and definition.

### **The Algerian Post-Colonial Intellectual Elite (Writers)’ Definition of Culture:**

Post-colonial intellectuals worldwide are said to have shown, upon independence, common features centered around: (a) opposition to the new patriarchy advocated by nationalism, (b) a tendency to champion postnationalism, (c) a concern with identity, (d) raising issues related to feminism, (e) interest in migrancy, and (f) a feeling of alienation. Points (a) through (f) are the consequential product of the encounter of two historical legacies: (1) Westernized education in which most post-colonial intellectuals developed their intellectual, ideological, and political leanings, and (2) the anti-colonial, anti-western nationalistic frame within which evolved the ruling elite. This encounter pitted the ruling elite against the intellectual class over matters dealing with the mode of management of the newly independent country.

In Algeria, points (a) through (f) are reflected in literature and essays, mostly written in French, where ideology marks the fault line setting apart the post-colonial intellectuals with regard to society’s cultural heritage and the ruling class’s

ideology. With regard to society's cultural heritage, the post-colonial intellectual elite displace their discourse in a move to signal the need to bring modernist reforms to the indigenous cultural stock. With regard to the ruling power, this elite engage in a resistance process to guard against the pitfall of neocolonialism or reproduction of the same colonial reflexes toward the people. Resistance and displacement are the two processes that determine the type of definition of culture brewing inside this 'intellectual post-colonial community'.

This elite's ideological motivations underpinning their resistance and displacement draw on universal tenets relative to points (a) through (f). Thus, nationalism is subverted in favor of cosmopolitanism and the extreme version of postnationalism; identity is revisited in light of the new sense of belonging that is challenged by the linguistic divide between the French-speaking Algerian minority and the Arabophone and Amazighophone majority; traditional family code is called into question on the ground that women's participation in the Revolution should upgrade them to socially equal status with men; emigrants claim equal rights to Algerianess, thus their discourse should be positively regarded. Due to their Resistance and Displacement, this elite feel alienated within the state of being social and biologic insiders but intellectual outsiders.

In their attempt to conciliate these two features (outsiders Vs insiders), this class of intellectuals have their fingers in the pie of defining culture. In their literary production, there is a host of references to the type of culture this class cherishes: it

is a hybrid one; one that shows as much reverence to traditional culture as willingness to adopt Western cultural models. It is a type of culture that recognizes its own weaknesses and shows readiness to remedy them by means of Western precepts. These topoi could be easily checked through novels such as *La Traversée* [The Crossing] of Mouloud Mammeri, *L'Honneur de la Tribu* [The Honor of the Tribe], and *Le Fleuve Détourné* [The Diverted River] of Rachid Mimouni, *Le Vent du Sud* [ the Southern Wind] of Abdelhamid Benheddouga.

It should be noticed that, in their cultural and ideological resistance against the cultural policy and practice of the ruling power, this class does not frontally challenge the cultural tenets that enjoy unanimous agreement among the people. Rather, they adopt a strategy that deconstructs the assumptions underpinning these cultural tenets. For example, they don't show opposition to the Islamic tenets inspiring some cultural practices; rather, they call into question the very assumptions that claim connection to Islam. The task of defining culture is then clear to delineate: keeping culture in a status quo, where no option is favored. This class of intellectuals may be in need of intellectual boldness in order to be as courageous as Assia Djebar, who claims a national culture with the following features: (1) A return to the Mediterranean cradle, associated to a remote Latinity of Algeria, (2) Repatriation-appropriation of the French language, which colonialism grafted on the cultural scene of Algeria, and (3) Reference to Albert Camus, as a leading figure of the colonial Algerianist School.

## **Malek Bennabi's Definition of Culture.**

In his *Le problème de la culture* (2006), two models are used as a background against which the definition he suggests is to be exposed. The Western school, faithful to the tradition of the Renaissance, sees in culture the product of the human spirit, i.e. Man, or agency; for the Marxist school, however, culture is the product of society, i.e. structure. Ralph Linton<sup>1</sup> and William Ogburn<sup>2</sup>, represent, respectively, the Western and the Marxist schools. For the former, it's the idea that creates the object, while for the latter, it is the opposite. Bennabi argues that, owing to historical and ideological specificities, culture resists to be uniformly defined; that both Linton's and Ogburn's definitions are based on actual social facts, for the Western society, and on a potentially ingrained fact in Marxist ideology.

In the Arabo-Islamic world, Bennabi argues, defining culture has a totally different significance: it is linked to a social fact that is not yet available. The social fact that is meant here is the resulting output of the interaction between:

- 1) The world of objects.
- 2) The world of ideas.

Given that the world of objects is desperately backward, the interaction that it may entertain with the world of ideas can

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<sup>1</sup>) American anthropologist who marked influence on the development of cultural anthropology. (1893-1953)

<sup>2</sup>) American sociologist, famous for his idea of "cultural lag" in the process of social change( 1886-1959)



only produce a culture fraught with inefficiency. Bennabi sees in inefficiency the symptom of underdevelopment. An underdeveloped society, for Bennabi, needs to engage in an introspective search for its stock of ideas, which are of two sorts:

- 1) Lethal
- 2) Vivifying

The vivifying ideas are to behave in the same way as a catalyst in order to activate productive interactions between (a) Man, (b) Soil, and (c) Time. This is to highlight the necessity to conceive of culture as an immanent, as opposed to transcendental, social fact. In order to pave the way for these productive interactions, society needs to be structurally built on a symbiosis between (1) a common social life style and (2) a corresponding set of behaviors of the individuals. Individuals and society will entertain a critically cooperative relation where the former will keep alert to make sure that society in its development does not divert from the agreed-upon social life style; the latter will sanction individuals' behavior that go against the established life style.

Bennabi, through his schemes, aims at creating what he names 'a prevailing cultural ambiance' that would inculcate to individuals notions of efficiency , which is , as he repeatedly stresses, a natural outcome of society's cohesion around a common life style built on vivifying ideas. Thus construed, culture will become 'like air', freely moving to keep the biosphere alive. As for the lethal ideas, Bennabi compares them to malignant outgrowths that crop up on healthy bodies:

they must be severed. So is the case with charlatanism, unproductive ideas imported from alien environments, or what Edward Said names 'discursive attitudes'. In order not to conflate lethal and vivifying ideas, Bennabi sets a framework that serves as an evaluation grid: civilizations are built on the combination of (1) ethics, (2) aesthetics, (3) techniques, (4) practical logic. This last observation constitutes a research topic that would explore still further the connection between culture and civilization in Bennabi's thought.

### **Conclusion:**

Matthew Arnold, Edward Tylor, and Franz Boas's definitions lay the ground for delimiting the outlines of culture, crossing temporal and geographical borders. Ralph Linton and William Ogburn's definitions' descriptive power is just enough useful to account for Marxist ideology and the Western social context. Both types of definition are, however, necessary to realize that the definition of culture, supplied by the Algerian post-colonial ruling authorities, abides by a too intellectualist conformism in dealing with an Algerian reality that requires rather more concrete, realistic treatments. This is what might be an additional reason for the Algerian post-colonial elite to subvert the assumptions upon which the State definition stands. We notice that while the State definition is static, that of the Algerian post-colonial elite is disruptive. Bennabi's definition stands good chances to be named dynamic for it suggests an interactive scheme engaging a set of social pre-requisite elements and features likely to birth an endogenous culture. Bennabi's status of a post-colonial intellectual makes

of him a mediatory agent between the State static definition and the disruptive definition of the Algerian post-colonial elite. This competence to mediate between these two poles might be due to Bennabi's partial schooling at Ben Badis movement and at the French academia. His basically scientific training might also be an additional reason for his inborn moderate evaluation of intellectual issues, away from the judgmental attitudes that ideology very often gives birth to.

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