On Revolutions and Revolutionaries: Two Novelists' Perspective

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من خلال معالجة نصين أدبيين لروائيين مختلفين، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى كشف العلاقة بين الفقر والثورات المسلحة في البلدان النامية، والجزائر على وجه الخصوص0 الهدف حسب ما يتضح من خلال الكاتبين(مولود معمري، آي كواي آرما) هو الكشف عن الجانب السلبي في الثورات0 كلا الكاتبين يتخذ من الثورة الجزائرية (1954–1962) كمثال لتوضيح هذه الفكرة0التطور الاقتصادي والتحول الاجتماعي، كباقي وعود الثورات، لم يعدو أكثر من شعار براق يخفي فقرا مدقعا وواقعا اجتماعيا واقتصاديا مزريا0 الحل الذي يقترحه كلا الروائيين هو محو فكرة البطل نهائيا في المقررات المدرسية على أمل الحصول على جيل جديد غير قابل لتلقي أديولجية "تقديس البطل" والتي يحملها الكاتبين المسؤولية على ظاهرة الفقر في الجزائر0

Abstract in English:

Based on two literary texts from two linguistic traditions, the article suggests a connection between poverty and revolution. What is intertwined inside the drama of the two novels is the two writers' firm belief in the impracticality of armed revolutions. Both novelists, Armah and Mammeri, have the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962) as a case in point. True, the military battle was won. Economic development and social transformation have, however, barely altered, (if not still the same) since colonial times. Eventually, the present massive poverty induces those interested to think of alternatives other than armed revolutions. What is interesting, however, is that both writers envision a way out in a sound educational system.

Introduction:

Instead of limiting perspectives and studying poverty as an Algerian phenomenon, one has to widen one's intellectual scope and approach poverty in Algeria as part and parcel of an African and Third World eventuality. Only in this larger context can we situate the poverty issue as a historical consequence, not a natural or metaphysical misfortune. This perspective helps us be in a position to initiate sound procedures for poverty's cultural, social and political removal. The Algerian colonial past has long drained the sources of wealth and was responsible in constructing an economy that has made Algeria primarily a colony. Despite all the good will, post-independence recovery programs have been largely unfortunate in helping out with poverty. The primary reason behind this is the fact that it is rare when nationalistic policy-makers seriously consider the colonial legacy and its long term devastating economic mapping. In order to keep up with England, Germany, USA and other rising powers, France

structured the Algerian resources as a price for its deadly competition. In this paper, literature (particularly some texts from modern African fiction) helps us to shed light on poverty in Algeria as one legacy of colonization, even after decades of political independence.

Ayi Kwei Armah is a Ghanaian novelist who happened to work as a translator for *Jeune Afrique* (a magazine) in the early days of 1963 in Algiers. The setting of Armah's third novel, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) is shared between Algiers (Lacryville) and the Algerian desert, a hinterland oil refinery station still policed by French soldiers. Poverty is everywhere looming the newly independent nation, Solo, the protagonist, observes. Instead of leaving for school, children roam the streets looking for charity. They seem to know their target, since they mostly address foreigners who are generally well-paid. Solo nearly always helps them with what he can from the change in his pocket! The scene is that obscene and humiliating to the extent that it sends him into sleeplessness and states of nausea.

Similarly, Mouloud Mammeri, in *La Traversée* (1982), proposes to probe into the mother source behind the poverty issue in Algeria. Mourad, the main character, being fed up with the ideology of the single party then (FLN), tours the desert before deciding finally to quit for France and together with a foreign woman journalist meets some Touareg children at school. In addition to his individual disappointment, he finds that these children are simply reduced to the state of paupers. Consequently, they show no interest whatsoever in learning because, for them, formal education, the one they receive at school, does not ensure a decent career. When asked what they want to be when they grow up, each answers that his ultimate dream in life is becoming a TOYOTA-Station driver. In other words, all they dream of is becoming agents of fraud, cheating the economy of the nation in which they do not feel part of!

This paper tries to probe into some of the causes for the poverty phenomenon in Algeria. While reading the two literary texts at hand (that of Armah and Mammeri), one is likely to be in a position in answering some of the following questions: is massive poverty in Algeria like elsewhere in Africa and the rest of the Third World some identifiable or esoteric event? Is poverty that mysterious and difficult to grasp so much so that one can never seriously observe it with the help of scientific scrutiny? In other words, can't we ever, as academics, have a chance to shed light on it and study it with the help of rational analysis? Is poverty an actuality that does not intersect with other social phenomena? How is it linked with individual, social and political corruption? Better still, in what way(s) poverty is related with politics and a particular kind of political institutions? And last, but not least, how does poverty generate a culture all of its own, accountable for many social ills like destitution, drug and arm-trafficking, illegal immigration and further still, state-collapse status?

Poverty & the Armed Revolution:

In the early part of *Why Are We So Blest?* Solo is disgusted with the amount of beggars and cripples roaming the city of Lacryville (Algiers) soon after independence. Children seem to constitute the largest figure among this unfortunate section of society. Each day, and even before starting with each day of his, Solo hears the roaring voices of the hungry asking for anything of value to quench their need.

There are the children. Every morning, even before I am up, they are waiting for me to open my window, waiting to receive anything I may care to give them… I gave them money and biscuits, and since then they have been bringing their brothers and sisters, so that at times I find about a dozen faces smiling expectantly at me when I go to open my window. Money makes them very happy. There is no doubt at all about that. (1973:15)

The fact of having children reiterating their begging activity on a daily basis and bringing in large numbers (brothers and sisters with them) indicates that poverty had largely marked the Algerian society soon after independence. So, instead of joining schools in the hope having some viable options in the future, Lacryville's children are robbed in their innocence and forced, like adults, to provide for themselves means of livelihood, mainly in petty activities like shining shoes. Later, we understand from Solo that these children beggars are just a façade for the real beggars: "…the grown up ones. I do not know, and I do not think anyone knows, how many there are in all. There must be at least one for every block, and there are thicker concentrations of them in front of larger shops and around busy places…" (1973:16)

These dismal scenes from around a poverty-stricken community send Solo to a state of sickness. He finally ends up in a hospital ward. Solo feels he is part of these people's misery: "All I am aware of when I walk past them is a general feeling of guilt, as if somehow I were responsible for their having been reduced to this state, or at least for their remaining in this condition. The feeling is acute whenever I had money on me." (1973:17) But it is there, inside the hospital, where he gets sure about the reasons for the massive dejection and misery. True, it is before being allowed inside the hospital for treatment, Solo has already formed some preliminary remarks of his own about the nature as well as the reasons of the poverty phenomenon. First, while approaching the children and trying to learn from them where their fathers, the ones who should save them the harshness of living are, all Solo receives in a way of an answer: *"Mon père? Il est mort."* In fact, the beggars are orphans. Solo heard from them their own little stories about their fathers' sudden and brutal disappearance: "They have mentioned the French and told me in a strangely summary way how they come and killed their fathers. One girl told me, the first time I saw her, that million of her people had died in the war. An adult would have said the revolution, not the war." (1973:16).

It is both shocking and somehow gruesome, particularly for Algerians, to directly point the finger of blame at the revolution (1954-1962) for the massive

poverty Algerians live under today. The fact of condemning a process that ended up 132 years of colonial bandage as impoverishing calls at first for resentment. Nevertheless, and after the primary shock and in the quietness of the peace of mind that follows, one has to consider how earnest this theory is. Being serious about finding reasons and means of ending poverty in this country and in the name of intellectual honesty too, one has to see the full fledge and entire bearings of this bold argument. For Armah, it is quite clear, the connection between poverty and revolution, in Algeria, as well as in the entire continent of Africa, is almost binding. In an ironic twist, Solo writes: "It is impossible to tell who among these were beggars before the revolution, and who were beggared by the hemorrhage itself." (1973:17)

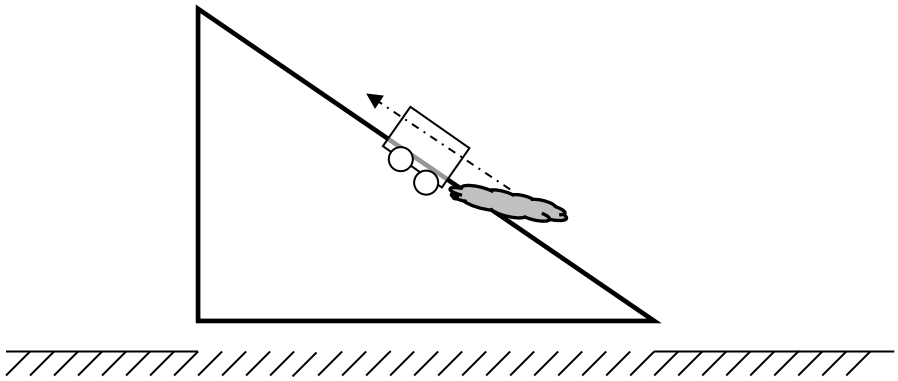
Here revolution is understood as a bleeding process equated with medical 'hemorrhage' and ending up in countless and unnecessary deaths. However daring and liberating, one cannot deny that such a process goes with causing large numbers of orphans, widows, cripples and socially-dysfunctional people. The logical consequence from revolutionary process is massive poverty and misery. In fact, Solo first remarks can be said to be prefaced on a comparison he draws between artists and revolutionaries.

…Their entrails have an iron toughness mine do not have. If they were ignorant, if they had no knowledge of what it is people come to call a revolution, or if they were all so young and romantic as to know nothing of cracked promises and the maimed bodies of lost believers, but only about the adventure, then I could also say of them: "They will learn." But they are not ignorant. They have learned as much about the things that have gone on and the things still going on as seeing eyes and hearing ears can teach anybody. Yet after all this knowledge, from somewhere within they find the enthusiasm to continue answering to the name of militants. *Their entrails are hard*, that I must say in justice, since they have not accused me of anything worse than cowardice. (1973:13, Emphasis added)

For Armah, revolutionaries are romantics who throw off reason and logic and pursue some lofty ideals in disregard to all evidence to the contrary. The sacrifices they make along their way destroy some of the symmetry of human nature and its beauty. Revolutionaries, according to the same logic, are too swollen in their dreams to the extent that they risk turning careless about the 'cracked promises and the maimed bodies of lost believers'. They make victims and with such a scale that questions their entire objective. By force of habit, the first ideals, those of having justice in society, are little by little departed from once the adventure side in their work becomes almost all that matters. Unlike the self-doubting writer, who 'before I can put one word a thousand objections rise up in my mind…', revolutionaries do not at all give people the chance of second thoughts or the benefits of the doubt. 'Their entrails are hard' and quite logically, it is expected that they are incapable of assessing the full cost of their 'toughness' in human terms. Look at **Fig.1** below:

Fig.1 *Solo's illustration of revolutions and the militants' part in revolutionary work*

- The van stands for a society undergoing a revolutionary process
- The energy consumed (the cloud of wasted petrol or *l'essence*) in order to lift the van upward stands for the militants' sacrifices to the cause of revolution. In Solo's assessment these massive sacrifices cannot be all necessary. Witness his emphasis on sheer number when saying: "One girl told me, the first time I saw her, that *a million of her people had died* in the war." (1972:16, Emphasis added) Therefore, all these deaths are processed as unjustified. Solo looked at these deaths as quite wasteful because they soon are forgotten, very much like the cloud they make!
- The steep incline itself may refer to the challenges a society faces at a particular historical juncture. One still can call it a transition period.



Inside the hospital library, Solo meets an ex-militant in the revolution, 'the one-legged man'. In the short exchanges between them, the ex-warrior conceives of himself and those like him, fighters and victims as '*l'essence*'. As it comes in his cryptic phrasing: "*L'essence de la révolution, c'est les militants*", the word *l'essence* is a pun, as Solo later finds out. It stands both for "that which is essential; and *l'essence*, petrol." (1973:26) To come up with what he has in mind, he draws 'a diagram of a vehicle moving up a steep incline from one level stretch to another.' The ex-militant adds to the meaning of that image by saying: "The militants are the essence. But you know, that also means they are the fuel for the revolution. And the nature of fuel…you know, something pure, light even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself." (1973:27) When it comes to matching this understanding with Solo's drawing**,** the ex-militant proceeds that "The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants… But they themselves are destroyed in the process." (1973:27)

By categorizing the revolutionary dynamics as a process that consumes its energy, Armah decides that revolutions are not as liberating as most people

think of them. For him, the amount of waste and the expensive cost in human terms both immediately and in the long run works against the logic that justifies revolutionary work. Armah keeps refusing any counter arguments because for him revolutionary work lives out its utility and in later phases moves from being a means to an end to an end in itself. That is why the ex-militant's very first words to Solo were a three time repetition of the phrase: '*Who gained?*', emphasizing the ex-militant's deep concern, if not, delirium and perhaps regret for taking part in a revolutionary process! What is certain is that the question is more rhetorical and ironic than informative. Neither the ex-militant nor his likes of simple warriors are enjoying the spoils naturally expected from the sacrifices they made. Hence, why the image of a truck that consumes petrol (as militants) in order to ascend the steep incline which can be positions of privilege and leadership.

The Beauty that is Gone:

Again the steep incline once followed up to the top by the people riding the truck—the way Solo's drawing tries to approximate meaning (See **Fig.1**)—represents undeserved privileges. The fact of having some select people making it to the top at the expense of the wasting other people, the militants, questions the ethicality of such a success. According to Armah, if a revolution is presumed and first launched to end up injustice, be it colonial or otherwise, then it should never defeat it its own objectives by consuming none but its own 'essence' (for practically, they are reduced to mere objects) and consequently destroyed just like any other consumables. Armah's presupposition is the following: if it is in the very nature of revolution to destroy its very fabric (the militants), then it is clearly pointless to proceed and ask about future poverty alleviation or economic recovery programs and presume that they can be effectively carried on by revolutions. This opinion holds that surely one absence of ethicality calls for another. Therefore, revolutions are doomed and poverty settles quite evidently as a result. Poverty here is understood as some absent beauty which can reveal poverty of mind and spirit. Since no one in his right mind shuns at the essence that makes one possible, then surely revolutions are understood as some deep manifestations in self-denial; an indication, however loose or nascent but there all the same, to poor imagination and pitiable mental-processing.

Advancing this opinion, however, may sound judgmental and unsupported by facts. But one at least should think to whom and in which context Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) was addressed in the first place! Reading these reflections, we understand that Fanon blames greedy colonial governments entirely for the colonized people's misfortune. Poverty, as a Third World and post independence phenomenon, is processed as a natural result issuing whenever unprepared, unmindful and corrupt national bourgeoise takes power. The elite that took over power after independence, Fanon thinks, is short of the very important components that make a bourgeoisie: a responsible, dedicated and determined elite. Since

La bourgeoisie nationale, qui prend le pouvoir à la fin du régime colonial est une bourgeoisie sous-developée. Sa puissance économique est presque nulle, et en tout cas, sans commune mesure avec celle de la bourgeoisie métropolitaine à laquelle elle entend se substituer… Elle est tout entière canalisée vers des activités de type intermédiaire. Etre dans le circuit, dans la combine, telle semble être sa vocation profonde…cette absence d'ambition symbolisent l'incapacité de la bourgeoisie national à remplir sone rôle historique de bourgeoisie. L'aspect inventeur et découvreur de monde que l'on trouve chez toute bourgeoisie national est ici lamentablement absent[Ψ].

Unproductive national bourgeoises are responsible, according to Fanon, in ending with material underdevelopment or poverty. One understands from this analysis that the real challenge facing any revolutionary bourgeoisie after independence is to find bold mechanisms of generating wealth beyond the syndrome of metropolitan bourgeoisie. To satisfy oneself with the intermediary role between western industrial capital and the local consumer market is to betray the future of the people since this strategy keeps the entire nation dependent on this foreign capital. One can with Fanon conceptualizes this tight economic dependency and the inability to break the old colonial habits in organizations as some poverty of imagination. It is that abject inability, from the part of national bourgeoisie, to work for the long term while having the discipline of following its decisions for these long term strategies. For no one denies that there were, along Algeria's long post-independence era, serious efforts at dismantling what can be termed as 'imagination deficiency'. Nevertheless, the massive destitution lived and observed ever since independence speaks of the prevalence of poverty both material and imaginative.

One consequence from this poverty of imagination is abject massive destitution of the majority of Algerians, Solo witnessed as part of his brief experience in Lacryville (Algiers). True, the independence ticket has been won, but the children of those who made that independence possible stand in dire need to what can save them their dignity. If man is a totality and can't be processed in parts, then for sure his dignity is one commanding definition of what he/she is. Man cannot be a man when he/she is short of his/her self-esteem. Self-esteem and self-respect cannot be matched while man is practically reduced or forced to beggary. It becomes a top priority target for the revolution, any revolution, to end up this penury. But since revolutions themselves are understood as a result of lack or deficiency, (that is but another word for a poverty of imagination), then no one should in his/her right mind expect revolutionary regimes and revolutionary governments to fight, or at least, seriously defeat people's grinding material poverty. The absence of beauty in the

[Ψ] Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*. (1961), Gallimard, (1991), pp.190-1--194

way the revolution works with results in thieving beauty from Lacryville's children as this beauty can be experienced in high self-esteem and dignity.

The problem is aggravated when knowing that it is children, that is, tomorrow's adults and hope, who pay the cost of poverty in all aspects of life. Commenting on the statement made nearly by each child makes, *"Mon père? Il est mort."* Solo lets go of his astonishment:

Before I came here I did not know children could speak in such a matter-of-fact way about death. It is not an emotional statement they make about their fathers, just a statement of fact. I ask myself if it is that so early in life they have understood death and learned to live with it as part of life. (1973:16)

Having children robbed in their innocence is like having them dead. By death here, one can understand the children's fathers' death. But, it may also refer to these same children's death of imagination. Since they render their fathers' or anyone's death in a matter-of-fact tone instead of tending to this loss in an emotional way, then one can safely advance that by force of habits, these children are made dead. Being obliged to justify their begging shows their reason behind their bare need; a fact that had killed in them the emotional side expected from their fathers' deaths. Hence, these children are cut off from their roots or sources in existence, especially if one looks at the symbolic dimensions of fathers. This is again why they are 'killed', that is 'uprooted', and emotionally, if not physically, dead. Witness the way Solo details on what goes the moment these children are undergoing their begging reiteration. Clearly, Solo leaves no room for doubt that these children's experience is equivalent with imaginative extinction that can be equivalent with physical death.

I avoid their eyes. Even when with their mouths and faces they present a smile to the condescending giver, I see in their eyes a deeper knowledge of what it is that is happening to them and a resentment of the fact that they are reduced to begging while someone else elevated to the position of bountiful giver. (1973:17)

When people are reduced to the position of the beggar, having the feelings of resentment becomes quite expected. Resentment is a key word here. Instead of sincere thanks which they should show to those who would like to help them, these children store in their heart only resentment with a just a facade of being grateful for help. More than being expertly taught in hypocrisy, they are being made not to accept the ups and downs of life. They are gradually but very effectively taught to refuse their fate. Resentment actually comes from that refusal to accept themselves before themselves as well as before others. They read their misfortune as a finality, a deterministic approach of life where change of fortune is beyond the realm of the possible. As a result, they are handicapped with the understanding that they cannot possibly move ahead for their future and get their financial, but first emotional, conditions improved. There will always be this resentment stepping in their way before both accepting and being accepted as ordinary members in society. One can add that their problem is

mainly a failure of reconciliation with themselves and with the world. Resentment, again, keeps them insisting on perceiving themselves as social outcasts, always hating people and the world because they perceived people and the world in terms of hatred. Being nurtured in a culture, to which they are not responsible for, a culture that robs their innocence by mutilating their fathers, these children find their own little strategies of survival in hatred, alienation from the rest layers of the populations and finally in self-suppression.

On Heroes & Hero's Worship:

In this context, the cult of staying mesmerized before the heroic deeds of people gone (dead) is viewed as some poverty of imagination. Hero's worship is both unhealthy and unprogressive when it comes to serious tasks of nation-building. The fact of having major resources of the state, like the media (national television, radios, newspapers, etc…) wholly devoted to what can be little short of acts of devotion to certain martyrs and warlords of the war of liberation can be reproached as responsible of having a deactivated and alienated population. Celebrating past victories and sacrifices goes principally with the objective of initiating future generations in the love of the nation. Nevertheless, overdoing this task of erecting national memory might derail from this first task and start being a cover up to important developmental and policy failures, economic corruption or inefficiency and administrative mismanagement. Poverty in this context is a symptom rather than a cause or a consequence to all these failures. In the case of Algeria, forty years or so after independence, considerable sums of money were dedicated to celebrations and rituals of memorization, which can be after all easily saved.

Whether intended or not, this policy of worshiping the revolutionary past of the nation was responsible in bringing up generations of young men and women who are totally disinterested in this past, present and of course their future. For they approach that past as some miraculous achievement realized by 'semi-gods' or 'super humans', all beyond their scope of imitation and apprehension. The problem is worsened when knowing that this designed glory goes in parallel with their penury and destitution. Quite logically, they develop a tendency of distancing themselves and their ideals from these heroes' achievements, since these achievements do not make a positive difference in their daily life. What goes on actually, due to the cult of hero-worship, is a process of alienation. As a proof for this alienation, these young men and women prefer queuing for long hours and in miserable conditions before foreign embassies asking for visas that theoretically at least take them away from falsification and demagogy. The miseries they meet in foreign lands look much better than wait and expect a change from what they take as the confusingly frustrating ideology of heroes and their miraculous deeds. One can witness this loss or frustration inside one's identity even in the public switching to foreign TV channels, foreign clothes, foreign movies, and foreign fashion.

Mouloud Mammeri's *La Traversée* addresses this critical point and points out its weight as a reason behind the massive poverty in the Algerian society today. Mourad, the main intellectual (journalist) character in the novel, escapes Algiers to the desert as part of his active preparation for his flight from the country. In Algeria, he feels abused by so called 'heroic' and hero-worshiping officials. Unlike Kamel who accepts the fate of a disengaged intellectual and adheres to the rhetoric of the all powerful revolutionaries/heroes in the hope of being taken as part of the ruling elite, Mourad is determined not to betray his ideals in more justice in Algeria[†]. But no matter how far he flees, it seems he is doomed to come back in a mysterious call to finish the unfinished task of establishing justice. Mourad never makes it to France, where he plans to have his future life ordered, the way he always wanted to. He dies in the desert, symbolically in an insignificant death peculiar to an anti-hero, perhaps Mammeri's own way of discrediting the cult of heroes and hero's worship. In line with Mourad's unfortunate fate, Mammeri, in an interview states: "heroes are troublesome, one should get rid of them". Following into this line of thought, he adds: "A man who has been a hero for seven years is crippled when he comes back because he does not know what to do with his heroism. It is useless for the daily routine of the state. To settle small problems one needs different qualities than those needed to live underground".

Before his death and far away in the L'Ahellil du Gourara (or Timmimoune), Mourad encounters some Touareg nomads. Their penury conditions, he learns, tells the fate of all Algerians be they in the north, south, east or west. They do not enjoy life as it is the case with their lucky counterparts elsewhere in the world. On the contrary, they are just abandoned to cruel times, almost all busy in making a survival regardless to quality of life one has in the end. Algeria, as he understands it, is approached as:

La caravane mit plus de sept mois à traverser le désert, parce que, sur son chemin, le soleil, les hyènes, les vipères, plusieurs sortes de fièvres, la soif tous les jours et la faim quelquefois retardaient sa progression. Comme toujours en pareil cas, en tête marchaient les héros. Seuls et exaltés, ils occupaient les jours à taillader des obstacles toujours renaissants et les nuits à compter les étoiles. (1982:75)

[†] As a proof for Mammeri's preoccupation with this theme of the heroes' unhealthy weight over the people's mind, particularly when it is used as an instrument of control and ideological 'cleansing' of the young, we find his own non-fiction statements. Once in an interview he did in 1984, two years after the publication of *La Traversée*, Mammeri claims those who engineered the Algerian Revolution had " "beautiful images of the future" -- images which the reality did not live up to. "This was becoming evident even before it all began", he adds. "But still, somebody had to say it…"I believe it is an international phenomenon. There are those who make a revolution and those who -- I daren't say profit by it -- but manipulate it, who shape it afterwards. Usually they don't do it very well"..."heroes cannot confront "the terrible traps of peace… Seven and a half years was a long time to fight so hard… There are virtues and qualities which are useful during the struggle, but which have great shortcomings when peace comes." Chris Kutschera, "Mouloud Mammeri, a novelist's vocation" *The Middle East Magazine*, February 1984, <http://chris-kutschera.com/A/Mouloud%20Mammeri.htm>

The image of the Algerian society as a caravan is similar with Armah's van trying to make it up to the top of the steep incline! For before and even after its independence, some people, Mammeri calls them heroes, ought to presume the leadership of the caravan. The writer agrees that there is no way for any society, least of all, the Algerian one, to do without some kind of leadership. The hard kernel which he finds difficult to break, nevertheless, is the elevation of those leaders and engineers in the leadership to the status of gods and semi-gods. To make them sacred is to enslave the rest of the society members that there deeds cannot be reenacted in peace time conditions. Mammeri's next step, as in the following passage, is de-sacrilizing‡; a vision which insists at lessening the corruption of imagination.

Pendant qu'à l'avant les héros, téméraires et distraits, tombaient par gerbes entières, derrière eux, le troupeau agglutiné suffoquait dans sa laine et la chaleur du soleil, mais il prenait bien soin de rester soudé. Le destin des héros est de mourir jeunes et seuls. Celui des moutons est aussi de mourir, mais perclus de vieillesse, usés et, si possible, en masse. Les héros sautent d'un coup dans la mort, ils explosent comme des météores dévoyés ; les moutons s'accrochent à la vie jusqu'à la dernière goutte de sang. (1982:76)

Although it is very bold to pass judgment this way and with such force on the ones who were behind our society's freedom, the massive poverty, both material and imaginative, induce to wait and see the wisdom in this reasoning. To equate heroes with nondescript sheep, sticking up for sheer survival, particularly when the caravan has already started and found its direction through the wild desert, has been with the purpose of bringing down to earth these heroes' sacrifices, but without belittling their efforts! According to Mammeri, the challenges a young nation like Algeria faces calls forth for some other kind of heroes; a new generation that stands up to modern battles which are not limited only to the military side. Nevertheless, the old ones are hanging on the leadership retarding, abusing people's chance in a forward march and a better future. The image of a sheep hanging up and fighting for life up to the last drop of blood illustrates the ways in which the community’s attempt at self-preservation and survival can be self-defeating. Mammeri's drama is designed to show it as a childish dream or a unfortunate attempt to reverse time; a wish that is neither doable nor even rationally perceivable.

Addressing the Poverty Issue through a Sound Educational System:

Neither fleeing the homeland (Mourad's dream), nor working in the fraud business can bring in real relief in terms of individual satisfaction or fulfillment. Rather than being a solution, these options (escape or working in fraud) are symptoms of loss and confusinon that overshadow the whole of

‡ "De-sacrilization" is Michael Bakhtin word for the degrading or debasing quality in a novelistic discourse. The Russian critic conceives of the novel as a highly ironic discourse that can stand two opposing meaning. See Pan Morris, ed. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshina*. Arnold, London. (1994)

Algeria from east to west and from north to south! In Mammeri's eyes, those who opted for life abroad like those living on the margins of the economy are far from any beautiful dream. They see themselves caught in an evil syndrome, combined of self-loss and sense of failure and disappointment while making fat other peoples and economies. That is why Mammeri proposes, as a way of envisioning a solution, a radical reconsideration to the educational system. For the hope, all the hope, lies in a long term perspective that is tailored to meet the natural needs of the young. In the same interview, Mammeri never hides his disappointments from the present educational system. He finds it responsible for nourishing the children's mind in poverty. Alienation comes as a logical consequence since almost nothing in the curriculum has been designed to quench their thirst in freedom, creativity and self-initiation.‡

Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* is also a scathing critique for the present educational system, not the one implemented by the state of Algeria but the metropolitan one, to which the new leadership were subjected to. Armah blames this system as downright 'suicidal'. Modin reflects on it by saying: "I am supposed to get myself destroyed out of my own free-seeming choice…I should have stopped going to lectures long ago. They all form a part of a ritual celebrating a tradition called great because it is European, Western, white." (1973:31) But it is in *Osiris Rising* (1995), Armah's sixth novel, where the main preoccupation goes beyond only criticism of the educational system. Here and in this novel, the writer views the revolutionaries' formal training (education) as important for the need to readjust to social justice. It can be read as Armah's sequel to *Why Are We So Blest?* and his life-long concern with setting justice in Africa. Asar, the protagonist in *Osiris Rising*, is himself an ex-freedom fighter, a revolutionary who fought in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. His discussion with Ast reveals the nature of revolutionary work and the reasons why it cannot be of much service, particularly as a long term strategy facing up the challenges of imperialism and global capitalism in peace times.

Working for a movement under fire, he [Asar] said, you don't spend much time in the abstract. Specific problems confront you all day. Eventually, though, some of us concluded that what we were fighting to create was not a socially just society, only a radically reformed society. What we were creating was in each case just a neocolonial society with racial barriers slightly lowered. At first it was confusing, the fact that some countries had to take up arms merely to achieve neocolonial status. But revolutionary rhetoric was in the end

‡ When asked why he did choose the fate of the fraud dealers for the Touareg children, Mammeri answers: "It's not that I want to condemn these children to the absenteeism of the desert. These boys must go to school, I agree, but I say we should create schools adapted to their way of life. We should not force on them an enslaved happiness. Between an enslaved happiness and a free poverty, I opt for the second. The deprivation of freedom never leads anywhere, even if it is loaded with good intentions". "Ibid".

insufficient to forestall the realization: the societies we were fighting to make would remain structured in hierarchal unjust ways. (1995:116)

Asar thinks that having men of action, namely revolutionaries, at the head of the new established order once the revolution wins is the reason why a revolution falls short before fulfilling its ideals. True, the experience of dismantling colonialism is by no means a small or an insignificant one. One has to be objective that the old power structures, that of having a handful of European minority groups enjoying the wealth of the colony while the majority of the population hitting the rock bottom of poverty, has been altered. Nevertheless, alteration does not mean automatically an improvement in the welfare of the natives. In some situations, the native population's condition, and due to internal conflicts and civil wars, get worsened. Therefore, living under the conditions of unjust social organization begs for more questions about what actually went wrong with any revolutionary process. For Asar still thinks that:

A racially open neocolonial society is an improvement on a straight forward colonial apartheid system. But over the last few years, several of us were acutely aware that a social revolution in Africa would take a lot of preparatory work. The anti-colonial politicians never bothered to organize that kind of long-range work. Now we've got to do it unless we resign ourselves to this new form of slavery, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund beating out the rhythm for the dance of death. And there's no point calling preparatory work revolution (1995:116-7)

Now, alleviating poverty comes with establishing social justice, since poverty is defined primarily for Asar as some form of social injustice. And to reverse unjust social structures, there have to be a lot of preparatory work which is not necessarily revolutionary in nature. Asar defines his notion of preparatory work as a task that would:

…bring[…] up generations of conscious Africans with democratic working and living habits. Not rhetoric. Habits. Live, day to day practice. The daily work of people capable of examining the World Bank, the UN and the IMF and seeing through them as inherently undemocratic institutions wrecking the lives of millions they're unaccountable to. If we could move a generation beyond the notion that voting for politicians is democracy enough; if we can reach the point of refusing to have our economic lives run by dictators in banks and boardrooms, we can say we're working. I hope we can do it quietly, without stealing labels from the future. (1995:117)

Dire need for solutions for the phenomenon of poverty depends on addressing the mounting problems a nation like Algeria faces. First in the agenda, there has to be no victimology! Blaming only politicians for the present sorry state of affairs makes little difference. This is valid particularly when knowing that one can observe the establishment of just social structures starting from sound and identifiable educational system. Education into democracy habits sounds at first like new pills from a futuristic drugstore. In the end, it is

this challenge which Asar embraces with honor and the very one he dies for at the end of the novel. Aware with the dangers that Asar's innovative approaches in the educative system imposes and their long-term implications, the Deputy Director of Security decides to eliminate him. His elimination is a proof that his analysis as well as the action that followed that analysis is the one that can make positive difference while fighting poverty. To educate children along the ethics of democracy, the Deputy Director of Security decides, is a threat to the way his unjust society is structured, hence why putting an end to Asar's life. Poverty becomes a means of control; a tool for sustaining corrupt regimes and unrepresentative elites

In Conclusion:

What can one understand from these two novels? In point of justice, one has not to blame all revolutionaries, nationalists and heroes for the misfortunes of poverty Algeria suffers from today. On the contrary, it is thanks to these nationalists and heroes that Algeria owes its present political independence and dignity. Those who engineered the revolution really deserve the most sincere respect for they freed us from the bandages of colonization. But the moment we find that freedom mingled and disfigured with the evils of poverty, malnutrition and ill-health, we ought in the name of the same revolution to ask: what about those heroes' visions about societal harmony and egalitarian principles? What really went wrong and how? Is it not that abject poverty, the way it has become massive in the Algerian society nowadays, a reduction, if not a mark of shame, to our national independence and the militants' sacrifices? Can't the reader trust with Mammeri that the revolutionaries did perfectly their job on the battleground, but they had to step out of power and leave the task of nation-building to other no less zealous and honest people; people with a different mindset, peace time heroes (not necessarily war times ones), to fulfill these revolutionaries' initial dreams and ideals?

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