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Algeria: Memory(ies), territory(ies) and culture(s)

SUMMARY

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Introduction

In issue 100 of *Insaniyat*, the Director of CRASC, also the Editorial Director of *Insaniyat*, recalled the journal's commitment to publishing more articles in English. We now have a full issue in English that confirms the editorial committee's approach. The aim is not to follow a trend, but to give the many English-speaking readers who consult our journal more opportunities to read about our work in English[1].

This issue, which includes a selection of articles, reflects in part the state of the art of research carried out at CRASC and published in *Insaniyat*. The choice of texts is not random but reflects certain historical and socio-cultural aspects of Algeria's development over the course of a century. The emphasis is on the transformations and dynamics that characterize the country's history. This issue is also a tribute by the editorial board to some of its members, particularly the more senior ones, in acknowledgement of the work they have accomplished.

As such, the late Brahim **Salhi**'s article examines the evolution of Ibadite reformism, which he describes from the outset as “precocious” and “endogenous”, an evolution which was closely linked to the construction of the territory of the Ibadite community. In a context marked by colonial domination, which imposed not only military control but also control over religious education, the Ibadite community was able to safeguard the traditional aspects of its institutions. Reformism was not without its difficulties, given the impact of several exogenous factors. In addition to colonisation, trade, education and migration all led the community to turn towards the outside world (northern Algeria and Tunisia). Under the influence of Sheikh Bayyoud, the Azzabas played an important role in the “opening up of the community”, then in the religious reform that went hand in hand with the “economic ingenuity of the Ibadhites”. (Re)reading Salhi's contribution is essential to understanding the issues at stake in the Ibadite reform movement.

Fouad **Soufi**, one of the world's leading experts on archives, has written a fascinating history of the Algerian archives, which continues to

[1] We would like to thank Fadela Khedidja Benzaoui, Amina Boutaleb, Faiza Fatah, Fatima Zohra Habri, Nidhal Chami, Suzane Abou Ghaida, Mohamed Miliani and Abdelkader Latrache, for their contribution to the translation of the major part of the articles published in this issue.

be a subject of great interest to historians and specialists in pre-colonial and colonial Algeria. A re-reading of this article is most valuable at a time when the debate on archives is gaining magnitude. In tackling their complex history, Soufi invites us to “read the power of archives on the imaginary of two peoples” (Algerian and French). In so doing, the author demonstrates that the initial problem was administrative and bureaucratic. After independence, archive management was shaped by the political situation in the country and the policies of the new regime. In particular, the dual processes of “Algerianization” and the “purification of the administration” had a negative impact on archive management. As a result, documentary heritage was either “squandered” or “destroyed”. After outlining a “scientific assessment”, Soufi calls on the French army to take charge of the archives and “appease” their history.

Ammara **Bekkouche** discusses the colonial issues surrounding urbanization in Algeria, using the case of the construction of the town of Sidi Bel-Abbès. This project was, on the one hand, part of a strategy of war, domination and intimidation of the population and, on the other, a European settlement policy. To contextualize this vision, the author refers to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose thinking supported the colonial strategy and was echoed by Generals Lamoricière and Bugeaud.

Saddek **Benkada** looks back at the role of Algeria's political and intellectual elites in the first half of the 20th century in an article devoted to demands for public freedoms in the Algerian national movement. The author shows how the Algerian associations, set up at different times, played a role in raising awareness of the need to make such demands. Leading figures such as Emir Khaled and Messali Hadj were involved. To shed light on the evolution of social and political life in Algeria from the 1930s onwards, Benkada distinguishes between three periods. The first is that of the disappointments of the Popular Front period (1935-1939), the hopes and disappointments of the post-war period (1943-1945) and the demands of legalism (1945-1954). The latter, concludes Benkada, was “the moment of arrival at the point of no return in the radicalization of the demand for independence”.

Hassan **Remaoun**'s contribution on the Maghreb imaginary focuses on the different representations of the region. He begins by recalling the extent to which the ‘asabiyya phenomenon has contributed to local and global dynamics. With regard to the debate on the existence of an Arab nation, Remaoun returns to the socio-historical conditions that gave rise to Baathist ideas, Nasserism and anti-colonial movements such as the North African Star (ENA) and the Arab Maghreb Liberation Committee. The author points out that “the Maghreb is not a totally homogeneous

social entity", hence the relevance of the idea of an imagined community borrowed from Benedict Andersen. The author evokes the effects of the colonial order in the Maghreb to explain why the idea of the Maghreb has remained at the stage of the imaginary and of "national disenchantment", in the words of Hélé Beji.

The final article in this issue, by Abed **Bendjelid**, is on the Ouled Saïd palm grove in the Gourara (wilaya of Adrar). This study starts from the social history of the palm grove to show the practices and strategies of traditional local society in its relations with central authorities "with a view to taking charge of its own communal economic and social affairs". In so doing, the author shows how local policies contributed to the development of the oasis. By focusing on local emigration, on the one hand, and public policies, on the other, Bendjelid shows how traditional society and the rural habitat have been "positively transformed".

In sum, the diversity of issues and themes covered in this issue, and the choice of the editorial committee, confirm a collective endeavor to introduce English-speaking readers to some of the "crossroads" of research on Algeria.

As this issue was being finalized, we received the sad news of the death of our colleague Magnia Lazreg, an eminent Professor and researcher in sociology who worked for many years at the City University of New York. Marnia Lazreg devoted her career to work on colonial history, feminism, and the place of women in Muslim societies.

Her career has been fuelled by her experience working on gender issues and women's employment for the United Nations Development Programme.

The editorial board had been in contact with her over the past few months with a view to publishing her research journey in this issue. We are grateful to Ramzi Woodcock, her son, for making this possible. We extend our warmest gratitude to him. Marnia Lazreg was a member of the Scientific Committee of Insaniyat. In this issue, we pay tribute to her memory and recall the rich legacy of thought and friendship she left us.

Belkacem BENZENINE