Zhour Wanisi

Through Blossoms & Brambles
The Odyssey of a Woman

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A Glimpse into the Author

- Born in the venerable city of Constantine on December **13**, **1936**.
- She obtained degrees in Literature and Philosophy, with a specialized focus in Sociology from the University of Algiers.
- A dedicated *Mujahida* (veteran) of the War of Liberation; she is a recipient of the Medal of Resistance and the Order of National Merit.
- She devoted a significant portion of her professional life to the vocation of teaching.
- She was a foundational contributor to the establishment of the national media landscape in both the national and foreign languages.
- She managed and presided over the editorial board of "Al-Jazairia" (The Algerian Woman) magazine—the nation's first women's periodical—from **1970** to **1982**.
- Her literary works have been translated into several world languages, including French, English, Russian, and Norwegian, among others.
- She served as a member of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front (FLN).
- Elected as a member of the National People's Assembly for the legislative term spanning **1977** to **1982**.
- The first woman in the history of independent Algeria to hold a ministerial portfolio, presiding over the Ministry of Social Protection and the Ministry of National Education.
- Served as a prominent member of the Council of the Nation (the Senate).
- Member of the Scientific Council of the National Center for Research and Studies on the National Movement and the Revolution of Liberation.
- A dedicated member of the Union of Algerian and Arab Writers.
- A founding member of several prestigious cultural and social institutions.

– Recipient of numerous medals, honorary degrees, and commemorative awards both within Algeria and abroad.

– Author of a prolific bibliography spanning novels, plays, and critical essays:

– The Sleeping Sidewalk (Short Stories), Cairo, **1967**.

– On the Other Shore (Short Stories), Algeria, **1974**.

– From a Teacher's Diary (Novel), Algeria, **1978**.

– The Extended Shadows (Short Stories), Algeria, **1982**.

– Lundja and the Ghoul (Novel), Algeria, **1994**. Recognized as one of the hundred most influential Arabic novels of the last century.

– The Hags of the Moon (Short Stories), Algeria, **1996**.

– Rousicada (Short Stories), Algeria, **1999**.

– Illuminated Points: A collection of essays on Literature and Politics, Algeria, **1999**.

– The Dove's Prayer (Play), performed upon the stage of the National Theaters, Algeria, **2005**.

– Bridge of Revelation and the Ache of Longing (Novel), Algiers: Capital of Arab Culture, **2007**.

– She has several ongoing projects currently in print and production, including:

– Calyphon **2006**: A creative text, screenplay, and dialogue concerning the Algerian exiles to New Caledonia in **1875**.

– A screenplay and dialogue focusing on the life of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the pioneer of the intellectual awakening in Algeria.

– Several of her literary works have been adapted into creative television and cinematic productions.

Medals and Honors

- Recipient of the Medal of the *Mujahid*, State of Algeria.
- Recipient of the Order of National Merit, State of Algeria.
- Recipient of the Order of National Merit (Rank of *Athir*), State of Algeria.
- Recipient of the Golden Jubilee Medal of the War of Liberation (**50**th Anniversary), Ministry of *Mujahideen*, **2004**.
- Honored by the Ministry of Information and Culture, **2003**.
- Honored by the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Cultural Foundation of Kuwait, **2009**.
- Honored by the Supreme Council for the Arabic Language, **2005**.
- Honored by the High Islamic Council, **2010**.
- Honored at the First International Forum for Arab Diaspora Writers, **2007**.
- Honored at the "Suriyyat" Arab Women Writers Forum, **2007**.
- Honored by the "Diwan Ahl al-Qalam" in Beirut: World Book Capital, **2009**.
- Honored by the Syrian Ministry of Culture, **2008**.
- Honored by the Qatari Ministry of Culture, **2010**.
- Honored by the Military Academy, Ministry of National Defense, **1997**.
- Honored by the General Directorate of National Security, **2004**.
- Honored by the Higher School of Police, **2003**.
- Honored by the Faculty of Political Science and Information, **2002**.
- Recipient of the Medal of Merit from the Ministry of Health and Population, **2007**.
- Recipient of the Medal of the Emir Abdelkader University of Islamic Sciences, **2005**.

– Recipient of the Medal of the Fourth Forum for Creativity, Ministry of Culture.

– Recipient of the International Women's Day Medal, Ministry of Information.

– Honored by the National Union of Algerian Women, **2009**.

– Recipient of the "Golden Quill" for Thought and Creativity, Municipality of Sidi M'hamed, **2008**.

– Recipient of the Medal of the Forum for Tolerance and Dialogue in the Thought of Ben Badis, **2001**.

– Honored by the Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the Revolution of Liberation, Ministry of *Mujahideen*, **2010**.

– Honored by the Maghreb Union of Publishers, **2008**.

– Recipient of the "Jamilat" Medal at the National Cultural Festival of Women's Poetry, **2010**.

– Numerous honors and recognitions from the majority of Algerian Provinces (Wilayas), Municipalities, and various other institutions.

Foreword

As she ascends the "sixtieth milestone" of her academic and professional trajectory, it is a serendipitous coincidence that she has begun to organize whatever she could chronicle regarding this extensive path. It is a record of a long journey spanning the experience of revolutionary struggle, the realms of education and instruction, and the rigor of partisan and political activism—extending further into the practical spheres of parliamentary and governmental service, as well as the world of creative writing and literature.

Zhour Wanisi integrated all these formidable tasks with an immense and resolute will. Indeed, some individuals found it excessive that she could combine these diverse missions and achieve success across all of them. It reached a point where some of her male and female comrades felt more at ease categorizing her strictly as a "Minister," or solely as a "Teacher," or merely as a "*Mujahida*" (veteran). It seemingly unsettled them that she should compete and occupy, at every turn, a distinguished and prominent position within each of these multifaceted roles.

I believe, based on my own experience, that the very contemplation of writing such private texts—derived as they are from the living environment of varied human relationships and across the shifting stages of age—begins, first and foremost, with a genuine reconciliation with the self and the soul. Therefore, I am convinced today that my life companion has truly reconciled with her inner self before embarking on the writing of this genre of literary legacy.

Yet, notwithstanding this inner reconciliation, I bore witness to countless moments of profound contemplation, bewilderment, and hesitation:

Are these memoirs? Are they mere diaries? Or are they profound confessions? Could this be a novelized autobiography? Or perhaps they are an amalgam of all these elements, embodied in an Algerian woman—one who is truly exceptional, having lived through and kept pace with the most transformative and distinguished eras in the history of Algeria.

As the author meticulously wove the threads of these diaries—over a decade since her formal retirement from official professional life—she moved with the grace and peril of a tightrope walker, striving at every turn to maintain a precarious equilibrium. She sought to ensure she never leaned too far toward one side at the expense of the other, lest she fall and drag the audience down with her.

From the very inception of this text, her aim was to bequeath a vital message to future generations—a message devoid of agitation or hyperbole; a message distilled from goodness, truth, and love, containing far more of these virtues than of evil, error, or rancor.

She harbored no intent to disparage or offend any individual or any specific era—even those who may have erred against her personally or against the sacred principles and values she holds dear. She viewed all such occurrences through the lens of common human fallibility—errors that are inherently retractable and from which no human is entirely immune.

Furthermore, is not "confession" the quintessential moment of rare, searing honesty in a human life? I advised her to write down everything she remembered or that crossed her mind,

urging her to shatter all taboos. Her experience, I told her, has now become the shared property of others. I encouraged her to record all she recalled—what caused her pain and what brought her joy—and to write of the people she lived with and loved: those who treated her with kindness or otherwise, and to acknowledge those whose influence she felt positively influenced by them, for they resided within the ideal memory of her readers—that collective popular memory that relentlessly calls for its own preservation. How truly beautiful it is for a person to feel they have performed a deed valued by others, even those whom they have never personally known.

If history, in one of its many manifestations, is a genre of narrating past events and a pattern of storytelling concerning individuals and social phenomena—across all their cultural, economic, and political facets—then the Human Being remains forever the quintessential architect of this history and its events. As a writer, one also attempts to record these events through the lens of a novelist; as a creator who protests against reality when desiring its reform. One imbues the narrative with their message and objective through a creative style, liberated from the rigid constraints of time and space—a style that is not strictly defined like that of the historian. The historian chronicles events within a rigorous temporal framework, governed by the conditions of time and the boundaries of space, often utilizing a dry methodology that is fundamentally incompatible with the fluid, creative style.

Nevertheless, we frequently conclude that there is an inherent intersection between history and literature; for they are, in truth, a singular material manifested in multiple forms. That material is the Human Being in all his complexities. Therefore, we find that the relationship between history and

literature is ultimately governed by integration and mutual dependence, rather than by differentiation and distance.

In times past, it was claimed that "Greatness" was the exclusive domain of those who wrote their own autobiographies. Today, however, a further layer of inquiry is added: what is it that makes a "Great" person truly great, if not the profound weight of their experience? Greatness, therefore, resides in the experience itself; for no human can be truly great if they are devoid of experience, even if they were deemed "great" by other, differing standards.

These diaries—or this lived experience—which the author places today in the hands of her readers, should not be construed as an exhaustive account encompassing every minute detail. Rather, they constitute a series of reflective standpoints at specific junctures and stations; moments through which she felt she could articulate a truth, convey a significance, or deliver a lasting message.

And while there are certain memories or privacies that some might argue are better left veiled and dormant in the many-drawered corners of recollection—whether those memories are deemed momentous or trivial—there are indeed things we prefer to remain latent in the recesses of the soul and the mind, solely to preserve their cherished sanctity within us.

Nevertheless, the author of these diaries firmly persists in the belief that any experience in a human life—be it private or public—ought to be shared for the benefit of the reader, this "Other Human," and particularly for the ascending generations. She believes that these experiences become the rightful property of the youth, given the absolute necessity for intergenerational continuity and dialogue; a bridge to forestall

conflict and prevent the perils of estrangement and rupture. Inevitably, and regardless of how modest this experience may seem, it will stand as a landmark among the many landmarks that generations encounter upon the broad and arduous path of life.

He who reads these diaries and follows this extensive trajectory will sense that its author has navigated her experience with a profound degree of maturity and awareness. Through these critical pauses—scrutinizing both the self and the "Other"—she endeavors to advocate for the preservation of these temporal distances, treating them as sacred vessels that safeguard momentous events from the erosion of loss and the futility of absurdity.

I have lived alongside her—in my capacity as both husband and friend—the fear and the apprehension that gripped her as she wrote. It was the fear of falling into the trap of narcissism and the vanity of self-idolatry. This fear shadowed her, and indeed shadowed me, throughout the entire duration of the writing process; a fear that is entirely natural, legitimate, and justified when one endeavors to uphold the virtues of truth and integrity. Even as a creative artist, she recognizes the imperative to perpetually strive toward penetrating the very core of events, utilizing an analysis that leads to a meaningful moral and humanitarian harvest. She does this with the utmost care, ensuring she never oversteps the boundaries or encroaches upon the roles and jurisdictions of others—most notably, the professional historians.

In the final analysis, these diaries are but one relative version among many other possible accounts of human trials and experiences that bore witness to the same epoch and events the author lived through. It is these very reactions and

perspectives that ultimately shape her singular and unique character, distinguishing the author from all others, both women and men.

Professor Ahmed Jaber

Husband of the Author

City of Scent and History

In the beginning, I must confess that my relationship with Time is fluid and undefined. Maturity in this relationship, for me, rivals the speed of light in the way it shortens distances compared to the cold, mechanical ticking of the clock. Yet, my relationship with Space is a different matter entirely; it is profound, anchored, and deeply rooted.

Therefore, I find that my city, Constantine—as a Place—holds over me and over all its sons and daughters who graced her with their lives and honors, a boundless debt of love and loyalty. To me, she is more than just a birthplace; she is a lineage, a cornerstone, a playground of childhood, and the bedrock upon which I stood to launch myself into other worlds, whether through the passage of time or the crossing of borders.

It is for this reason that I saw fit to begin these diaries with her—as a plea, a whisper of longing, and a poetic tribute. I recall her before any other moment, for she is not merely a setting for my past; she is the primal spark of my inspiration, my Alpha and my Omega.

To me, Constantine is a beautiful dream—delicious in its mysteries, evocative in its hidden folds, captivating in its touch, and demure in its grace. She is ecstatic in her passions, yet sovereign over her fleeting moments... she is a dream uniquely mine, a singular and solitary vision.

My city is steeped in ancient glory and civic pride, enriched by the vibrant tapestry of its cultures and the diverse talents of its people. She is renowned for the brilliance of her creators and the heroism of her martyrs throughout history, both ancient and modern. She is a city that remains perpetually

elusive, fiercely resisting the urge to be possessed. As the celebrated Italian novelist Alberto Moravia once remarked in his famous work *Boredom*, there is no true distinction between the Woman and the City; both possess a profound feminine essence that defies total ownership. As for Malek Haddad, one of her most noble sons, he would say: *"No city in the world articulates its essence quite like Constantine."* She stands defiant even before her lovers; as for her enemies, their encounters with her were long, arduous, and bitter. She exhausted their spirits and planted a lingering seed of dread in their hearts.

She bewildered them until their feelings of enmity and hatred became entangled with a strange, begrudging devotion and passion. She is, and remains, an eternal mistress of allure.

In **1837**, the French officer General Clauzel sought to etch his name into the annals of glory and immortality by conquering her and subduing her inhabitants. He aimed to plant his crusader standards upon her domes, her hills, and her Casbah—banners of hollow victory and possession. Yet, the poor soul only succeeded in annihilating his own military and moral prestige. The city fought him house by house, fortress by fortress, alley by alley. He was left with nothing but the remnants of his retreating columns, treading over the bodies of martyrs that carpeted the earth. His pride in the occupation was swallowed by the bitterness of a truth we only taste when we are honest with ourselves: victory is never sweet in the face of such a city.

My city is carved from the very rock of the Great Atlas Mountains, which crown the Dark Continent. She sits enthroned upon twin cliffs, joined together thereafter by bridges—those majestic, massive structures suspended in mid-

air, traversing a void that meets the earth at the floor of the shimmering Rhumel Valley. The valley winds through her in an eternal embrace, never ceasing to wash her feet with longing and passion—much as the poet [1] sang of her in a flirtatious tribute:

—"The valley, intoxicated with passion, embraced her waist... as though the very breeze intended to woo her."

My city is cradled on every side by hills, plateaus, fields, orchards, and farms inhabited by ancient tribes who hold the credit for establishing the citadel-city of Constantine. She appears as a venerable matriarch whose soul has absorbed the essence of vanished civilizations, yet she remains a vibrant capital, keeping pace with the successive ages of creativity, art, and beauty.

"Constantine" is her current name, yet throughout the pages of history, she has prided herself on many other names—each a testament to those who found joy in her shadow. Names like "Caesar," "Syphax," and "Massinissa"—her intimate lovers—were followed by "Constantine" himself, who renovated her monuments and renewed her structures. Her name became inextricably linked to his, after she had been known as "Numidia," "Cirta," "Girdha," and the "Fortress of Africa," among other storied historical titles.

The city lived through cycles of blooming and breaking, each era leaving its unique fingerprints upon her people, her architecture, and her culture. She blossomed anew with every change, enriched by a continuous renewal of science, art, and civilizational values, until she finally found her anchor upon the shores of Arabism and Islam—a choice born of desire,

1 Mohamed El-Eid Al-Khalifa, the premiere poet of Algeria.

conviction, and faith. Thereafter, her inhabitants would settle for no name other than the city of "Sidi Rashed," in honor of one of her most noble icons of religious and civilizational heritage.

He was a man of God, a scholar, and a vital link in the chain of resistance against the colonial attempt to distort the city's soul and landmarks—a struggle that the occupier waged in Algeria for more than a century and a third.

The "Zhour" who writes these diaries was born in one of the ancient Casbahs of this city, where the old alleys are wrapped in the very heartstrings of the earth. I grew up among small shops where artisans took immense pride in their crafts, their hands dancing with molten silver in the soft glow of dawn. These men stood upon their doorsteps with a quiet, holy devotion—a sacred loyalty to a past that lived in their hearts and consciences, even as their trade dwindled and their livelihoods were threatened by the encroaching shadows of a new world.

A new world was being forced upon them—new concepts and alien values imported from the West by the occupier of their land. This "new civilization" crept into their reality against their will, built upon the ruins and remnants of an ancient intellectual and cultural edifice. Yet, the cultural values of a people with roots deep in history cannot be easily erased; they might be scarred or hindered, but they inevitably find a way to spring forth again, resilient and unyielding, until they find their home once more in the hearts and minds of the people.

Despite everything, the arts remained the strongest line of defense. The coppersmiths, the dyers, the tanners, the silk-weavers, and the embroiderers stood their ground. Their work

became a silent anthem of national identity. The forbidden national songs and the forbidden symbols of freedom were woven into the silk threads that adorned a bride's slippers, a groom's robe, and the velvet caps worn by children on their day of celebration. These threads decorated the burnouses of the riders, the saddles of the knights, and the festive attire of children on the day of their circumcision.

The antique dealer, surrounded by his mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture, stood as a steadfast witness to successive eras of resplendent time. The traditional coffee gatherings endured, where the aroma of freshly roasted beans mingled with the soft breezes of twilight, wafting from copper "jezwas" (coffee pots) whose edges were meticulously adorned with the sacred inscriptions of the *Basmala* and the *Hamdala* [2].

The tremulous chords of the most ancient and authentic folk melodies survived; the heart of their lyrics never ceased to chant for freedom and the restoration of national sovereignty. Meanwhile, the pulpits of the mosques and the tiled walls of the hammams were bathed in the splendor of vibrant miniatures and intricate patterns.

It was a collective resilience—of beautiful objects and even more beautiful, noble ideas and values that distinguish one character from another. These were values defending a people’s inherent right to existence against an occupier who threatened them daily with a forced substitute—an oppressor that utilized every weapon of fire, devastation, and annihilation.

2 Islamic formulas of beginning in the name of God and offering praise to Him.

In this city, I first recognized the light of existence, feeling through its beauty a sense of profound wonder and distinction. In this atmosphere, I grew and matured, seeking my true self within the roots of these arts, the rituals of the common folk, and the legends of *One Thousand and One Nights*. I sought my reflection in the epics of *Abu Zayd al-Hilali* and *Zenati Khalifa*, the tales of *Lundja and the Ghoul*, the *High Moon*, and the myth of the *Seven-Headed Serpent*. In those surroundings, my wandering questions began to take shape, tinged with a mixture of delight and the searing ache of suffering.

In this city of bridges that bind its soaring cliffs, as you wander through its paths, you witness how a normal life is suspended, much like the arches of its bridges. There, I saw girls under the age of ten whose childhood was already coming to a close, viewed merely as "projects for womanhood." They were denied the right to leave their homes, forbidden from education, and stripped of the simple joy of play and childish merriment. At the tender age of ten, they were expected to begin mastering the tasks of women: the arts of cooking, weaving, embroidery, and domestic management.

A dream, it seemed, was only permitted to flourish in the company of men. For a woman to harbor a dream in solitude was unthinkable; it was often viewed as a perilous path toward "soiled" or illicit fantasies. The only acceptable dream for a woman was the one that converged upon the "Rescuer"—the man who would eventually embody all her goals, both for the present and the future alike.

In my city, women were perpetually shrouded in the "M'laya"—that heavy, black wrap that enveloped them from head to toe. If a woman dared to step outside without her black socks, exposing even a sliver of her bare feet, her

punishment was a humiliating public spectacle: she was paraded through the market on a donkey, facing backward, while children mocked her, shouting, "The wrap with bare feet!" She was made a living deterrent, a public example to ensure that no other woman would even contemplate transgressing against established tradition.

Some argued that these customs were of Turkish origin, holding no true place in the authentic essence of Islam. Others maintained that the black M'laya was a symbol of collective mourning for a holy man, or perhaps a lingering remnant of Fatimid influence, as my city had once served as a primary center for that sect. Regardless of its historical roots, it remained a harsh reality imposed upon women—a stance they did not choose for themselves, but were coerced to adopt and inhabit, just as they were forced into numerous other subordinate social positions.

The Recurring Number

I emerged into the light of existence like a single pearl positioned at the very center of a necklace of brothers and sisters. I was not the firstborn, who traditionally enjoys the lion’s share of affection, pampering, and care—the quintessential "first fruit" of a marriage still basking in its initial honeyed days. Nor was I the "end of the vine"—the youngest child who receives the remnants of parental doting and attention. I was the middle child, the "recurring number."

Being the middle child meant I occupied a space where the unique fascination accorded to a first or a final child had already been spent. I was an iteration of a pattern already established, a repeat of a sequence; and as with anything that repeats, the intensity of interest naturally begins to wane. I felt this reality, yet I felt it without any of the typical childhood anxiety or any sense of neglect. What captivated me—even to the point of wonder—was the fair and equitable care distributed among us as siblings by both our parents together.

What continues to fascinate me to this very day was my father’s resolute stance regarding the birth of daughters. One of the primary reasons for his frequent irritation with his sister—my aunt—was her constant lamentation over his "misfortune." She was perpetually distressed on his behalf because my mother, his wife, had not yet "blessed" him with a male child. She continued to give him only daughters, failing—in my aunt's eyes—to provide him with the joy of a son who would carry his name and anchor his legacy.

In his resolute defiance of those archaic social norms, he would draw us close, one after another, appearing radiantly happy and profoundly proud within an environment that

remained steeped in the most rigid of traditions. Notwithstanding the immense societal pressures of the era, I sensed within me a deep, quiet wellspring of pride in the sanctuary of his love. It was this very love that subsequently provided me with the inner fortitude and the moral credibility to validate my father's theory: that daughters are indeed an abundant blessing.

I strived incessantly to ensure he remained proud of his choices, laboring to make certain that the shadow of regret never darkened his heart. And in this endeavor, I triumphed; he came to take monumental pride in all my achievements, and indeed, in the successes of all my sisters. We evolved into exemplars of what women could achieve in both the academic and professional spheres, particularly as we began to elevate our family name through the merit of our accomplishments. My father would boast of us and of our refined character to such an extent that the men in our neighborhood eventually began to long for daughters of their own.

Reflecting today across the distance of time, I believe my childhood was genuinely happy, despite the harrowing conditions that besieged all children within my country. Colonialism lay like a suffocating shroud upon the people, plundering their property and relentlessly pursuing a calculated strategy of systemic impoverishment and forced ignorance. While our family's deep, ancestral roots within the city provided a measure of protection, the pervasive shadow of the occupation ultimately cast its gloom upon everyone.

"This reality rendered it difficult for my young mind to forge a singular, clear concept of 'happiness.' Did it reside in the mere necessities of existence? In a simple piece of candy? Or perhaps in the novelty of a new dress for the Eid festivities? Or was it

instead discovered in those intimate, warm moments when we would gather around my father following the toil of his long working day? He appeared perpetually satisfied—perhaps moved by a wisdom that our juvenile minds could not yet comprehend. We could almost tangibly touch his happiness within the radiance of his smile as he embraced the youngest among us, turning then to our mother, whose maternal tenderness was perpetually interwoven with a quiet anticipation and a latent fear of the burden she shared with this hardworking patriarch. For was it not a monumental burden to raise five daughters in a society that regarded a girl as a 'time bomb'—a social ticking clock that might ignite at any moment? There was the constant, lurking dread that her reputation might, at any second, be tarnished. The ultimate aspiration for any girl was to reach her husband’s threshold without 'cracks or scratches'—even if that necessitated her entering her autumn years prematurely."

My sister Zahia, who was younger than I, possessed an exceptional, luminous beauty. Her hair was like spun gold, her eyes a deep amber-honey hue, and her dreams flowed like a river of sweetness. Every evening, we would venture out to play with the neighborhood children. Among them were the children of foreigners—Jews and Christians alike. One of them was the boy who would later become the world-renowned French singer, Enrico Macias (Gaston). He lived in our neighborhood, and most of the Jewish families were our immediate neighbors. My sister invariably preferred the company of these children, often leaving me bewildered as to why.

I recall returning home one day, a pang of jealousy stinging my heart, and asking her:

— "Why do you only favor the company of Susan the Jewess and Monique the Christian? Is it because you believe yourself to be as beautiful as they are?"

I spoke with a tone of accusation, as though she had committed a transgression. She replied with a nonchalant shrug:

— "It is simply... you are jealous of me."

But as we walked home, passing by the elegant houses enveloped in the fragrance of roses and jasmine, I could not resist peering through the ornate gates into those grand, sophisticated courtyards.

...I peered through the gate into the courtyard and the garden, where a majestic dog lay reclining with its paws outstretched before a bowl of food containing remnants that appeared far more appetizing and pristine than our own. I let out a heavy, long-drawn sigh and said to my beautiful sister:

— "Behold... even their beast enjoys a dish of its own, in solitary dignity, while we all must eat from a single large plate, and there are seven of us huddled in a single room..."

My sister Zahia replied in a subdued, fractured tone:

— "I wish we were like them... why is their world like that and ours like this?"

My sister wished and dreamed with a naive ease, seemingly without any sense of astonishment or existential anxiety; she did not appear to grasp the underlying reasons for my shock or the bitter source of my persistent questions.

Suddenly, and impelled by an inexplicable surge of hidden resentment, I pressed my finger firmly against the doorbell of that elegant house and fled. I left my little sister terrified by the

sudden, fierce barking of the large dog that had been so peaceful moments before. She ran after me, her voice trembling as she pleaded:

— *"Sister... sister, do not leave me!"*

I truly did not know then why I had committed such an act. Was it a gesture of pure jealousy, or an impulsive movement of a latent bitterness? I did not understand the motive behind my behavior at the time, but as I grew older, my sister—for whom that moment remained an indelible memory—offered an explanation as we revisited our childhood. She interpreted that impulsive ring as the early roots of my burgeoning resentment toward the "Foreigner"—and by extension, the "Occupier." I came to realize that the root cause of everything we endured—the systemic poverty, the forced ignorance, and the deprivation shared by our families and neighbors—was inextricably tied to those who lived around us, those we knew and those who remained strangers to our souls.

My sister revisited that day with me many years later. I was returning from a formal state ceremony, where I—alongside my comrades and fellow freedom fighters—had been decorated with the "Medal of the Mujahid." It was a recognition of our role in the Great War of Liberation—that revolution which vanquished the occupier and reclaimed our soil in **1962**.

Was that childhood intuition truly accurate? Can a ten-year-old child genuinely comprehend the vast disparities of existence and the systemic reasons behind them? Perhaps. Yet, it felt then like nothing more than a nebulous, internal vibration—a truth that remained veiled to my understanding until much later in life.

The Swiss Tea

The "Big House" we inhabited was not massive in its physical square footage, yet it was immense in the number of its inhabitants. It was a single house shared by several families, who in turn formed our neighbors. It was a neighborhood of a unique kind, defined by its privacy, the strength of the bonds between families, and a spirit of spontaneous, mutual commitment. There was an absolute solidarity in all circumstances and fields; all of this made the neighbors within that single house feel like one large family. The worries of one were the worries of all, and if one family rejoiced, it was a wedding for everyone.

The proprietor of the "Venerable Residence"—whether he was the legitimate landlord or merely the figurehead in charge—assumed the mantle of a father or an elder brother. He stood as the ultimate and sovereign authority over the house and its dwellers, extending his influence even into the pedagogical upbringing and discipline of the children. He was universally revered; his dictates were received with absolute compliance and respect by all who lived under that roof.

The inherent splendor of this communal dwelling resided in its immaculate luster and pristine hygiene, which was regarded as the collective, sacred obligation of all the neighbors without exception. Each family faithfully assumed its assigned turn in the cleaning ritual throughout the days of the week. There existed a spirited and wholesome rivalry for order and aesthetic charm between the houses tucked within those narrow backstreets and secluded, winding alleys. It was a noble wager—a communal challenge that the residents vied incessantly to win, for the sake of their collective dignity.

Elegance within the homes of Constantine was never confined merely to the cultivation of jasmine, honeysuckle, or the verdant grapevines that draped the walls in vibrant green. Nor was it restricted to the scrupulous cleanliness of the masonry, the stairwells, and the shared facilities. Rather, it manifested profoundly in the personal grace and refinement of the inhabitants—men, women, and children alike. The aesthetic appeal of their environment—regardless of its scale—transcended the mere pride of the household; it was the very currency of their communal prestige and social standing among the dwellers of adjacent houses in the same quarter.

In the venerable city of old Constantine, beauty was regarded as a collective cultural wager, a shared conviction held by every inhabitant. In their eyes, poverty, material need, or even the debilitating trials of illness never signified a deficiency of character or a scarcity of the soul. It was sufficient for them to be recognized as honorable and dignified neighbors; they anchored their entire existence upon the intrinsic value of these noble principles. Even when they could not fully satiate their hunger, they never permitted themselves to appear in a manner that was anything less than impeccably dignified. Poverty was never deemed a source of shame in this city, nor was it viewed as a social flaw, provided it did not hinder the people from remaining refined, civilized, and deeply rooted in their ancestral values and ancient ideals.

Through successive generations, the city proved itself to be a sanctuary for science, a cradle of culture, and a bastion of the arts. Beauty—in its multifaceted material and spiritual forms—was a common space inhabited by all, the affluent and the destitute alike. Indeed, it was often the case that the wealthy

had commenced their lives in the shadows of poverty before ascending to success.

A woman within the sanctuary of the " Grand Residence " required no vast fortunes to adorn her table with a bounty of delectable dishes at a meager cost. Her exceptional dexterity in domestic management, coupled with her refined social and economic prudence, empowered her to invest every available resource to secure a dignified life for her family and her neighbors. The aesthetics of her presentation were a testament to her inner grace.

Furthermore, women were deeply and intricately involved in commercial labor from within the confines of the home. They dedicated themselves to the meticulous arts of embroidery, weaving, and various other handcrafts. One among the neighbors would assume the mantle of responsibility for marketing and selling these hand-crafted treasures to the merchants in the city's markets. Subsequently, she would return to each woman the full and just measure of her hard-earned rewards. This arrangement allowed a woman to contribute economically without being compelled to leave the house or expose herself to the idle gossip and "he-said, she-said" that might follow her movements.

As for the household provender—the "Aoula"—the homes were meticulously stocked with elongated, rosary-like strands of green peppers and other seasonal legumes, suspended from the windows and sprawling across the sunlit rooftops. The rays of the nascent morning sun and the lingering glow of twilight would tenderly embrace these offerings until, with the passage of time, they transformed into a hue of deep, regal purple. From these, pungent spices were crafted, alongside sun-dried tomatoes that had once been nurtured by the pure waters of

the "Hama" springs, now prepared with care for preservation and storage. Then there was the cured, sun-dried meat—known as *Khlii*—and the *Mkhlaa* meat fat, infused with the aromatic essence of garlic, caraway, and a selection of other distinct spices. These traditional processes furnished every family with a robust store of essential sustenance—vital provisions relied upon during the heavy, silent snowfalls of winter, a season when employment opportunities for men became desperately scarce.

Among the men, some were modest traders, while others were merely seasonal laborers. As for the fixed-income employees residing in these popular quarters, their relative social stability bridged the gap between them and the administrative class they occupied; yet, they remained culturally distinct from the broader social strata often referred to as "the Arabs," as well as the few Jewish families residing in the vicinity. Regarding the intricate arts of knitting, weaving, and embroidery, these remained the paramount interests that young girls were expected to master with absolute proficiency before reaching the threshold of marriage. A maiden's highest accolade, as she approached the age of marriage or aspired toward it, was captured in the popular saying, uttered with a flourish of affectionate exaggeration:

— "So-and-so... in every single finger of hers, there resides a craft!"

Indeed, the intricacies of embroidery, the ornate decorations, and the diverse patterns constituted a cultural phenomenon in their own right. Not a single girl or woman could afford to dispense with these skills, despite the extensive array of specializations available to the men, who had

transformed every individual craft or trade into a specialized marketplace or a dedicated alleyway known as a Darb.

When the spring season arrived, the spirited competition among neighbors over roses and various flowers assumed an entirely different dimension. During that time, the sphere of beauty and fragrance expanded significantly; quintals of roses and blossoms, harvested from the city's bustling markets—and specifically from Rahbat al-Souf—would saturate the atmosphere, their scent prevailing over every other aroma. Women would race against one another to acquire exactly what they required of these flowers, subsequently preparing the Fattira in specialized vessels and using a unique, traditional method of distillation. The resulting distilled waters were utilized for the laundering of garments, as personal perfumes, in the meticulous preparation of various traditional sweets, and to infuse the late-afternoon coffee with a delicate aroma. This was a cherished tradition that we considered to be far more aristocratic than the rituals of Swiss or English tea observed at five o'clock in the afternoon by European society.

The Fragrance of the Hammam and the Green Tattoo

Within this labyrinthine city, my sisters, my mother, and I would set out every single week, traversing from our familiar alleyway to another quarter, exceedingly close yet distinctly different. It did not bear the name of our particular neighborhood, yet it housed the bathhouse that my mother favored above all others: Hammam Ben Sharif. It stood there, a silent and beloved witness, adjacent to the shop of an old and cherished friend of hers. The air within those walls was a thick, intoxicating symphony—a blend of jasmine-scented soap, billowing steam, and the palpable essence of human effort. Inside, a kaleidoscope of bare forms moved gracefully through the mist, many of them adorned with the intricate, emerald patterns of green tattoos. I would cross the threshold with a heart that was simultaneously racing and hesitant; my childish dread of the Hot Room—the Beit al-Skhoun—warred constantly with my sense of wonder. The dense steam nearly veiled the walls from sight, yet through the translucent haze, I could discern the resplendent tiles—vibrant mosaics of ceramic that lined the floors and scaled the walls, ascending toward the high ceiling. The marble beneath our feet shimmered with a liquid luster, decorated with fragmented rose-colored patterns and the recurring geometry of the Star of David. It felt as though the bathhouse itself had been constructed by the hands of a descendant of those Jews who were once cast out from the lost, golden paradise of Andalusia.

Those weekly pilgrimages with my mother were the absolute highlights of my young life. I felt my very soul soar in those moments; today, that memory has become a lingering fragrance that illuminates my path, making me feel in

retrospect as though I were Queen Bilqis herself, in all her resplendence, awaiting King Solomon.

There was a singular harmony in those weekly encounters. The woman who assisted the bathers and massaged their weary frames—the Tayyaba—was a person my mother informed me was Jewish. She was a poor, humble soul working to survive, and my mother treated her with a profound, protective kindness and genuine affection.

At that time, I possessed no inkling that she was distinct from us in origin or creed. Why would such a thought even cross my mind? There was not a single sign to suggest any difference. The woman lived among us in the same neighborhood, shared our steamy heat, spoke the same tongue, and carried the same heavy burdens of life.

When I reached the age of nine—specifically during the **1940**s—my father began a campaign to collect donations for our brothers and sisters in Palestine during the Eid al-Adha holidays. Driven by a child's persistent curiosity, I asked my mother:

— Where is this place, Palestine?

My mother let out a heavy sigh, the underlying cause of which remained a mystery to my young mind at the time, and replied:
— It is a Muslim land that the Jews are attempting to seize.
— The Jews? I asked in utter astonishment. Do they have lands other than Constantine?

— Yes, my daughter, she said. They are scattered everywhere, and they wish to migrate to Palestine. Or so they claim.

— But is Palestine truly their land?

— No, she replied firmly. But they maintain that it is. God knows best. You should ask your father; he is the one collecting the donations. Perhaps he possesses the answers that will satisfy you, you little chatterbox.

My mother's brief and evasive answers were clearly intended to silence my incessant questioning and distance me from matters she deemed far beyond a child's concern.

A short time after that dialogue, I heard from our neighbors that our Jewish acquaintances had moved away. They had relocated to modern, sophisticated apartments in a nearby quarter, close to the Christians and far from the Muslim Arabs of the Casbah and the ancient alleyways.

I overheard my father explaining the situation to my mother: France has issued a law that allows the Jews to join the ranks of French citizens, granting them the same rights, because they are no longer viewed as Arabs like us. This was happening even to those who had spoken nothing but Arabic and wore only our traditional attire—ranging from the Ghandoura and the wide trousers to the tall red fez with its long silken tassel.

Despite this legal shift, the social fabric remained woven together in strange and intricate ways. Jewish women were still hired to enliven weddings with their songs and trills of joy, just as they were hired as professional mourners at funerals to wail and lament on behalf of the bereaved. It was a profound intersection of lives, a shared existence between the Muslims and Jews of Constantine.

Yet, my internal question marks only grew larger and more insistent. The answers remained scarce, and a child's curiosity often births a restless, growing tension. I continued to search for answers within myself, through my schoolbooks, then

through the rising tide of the Revolution, and later, through the constant reflection that comes with the passing years. My innocence eventually collided with the harsh historical reality of Zionism and its assault on Palestine—an assault on everything Arab, Muslim, and the sacred sites of Islam therein, attempting to transform it into a historical homeland for this global diaspora. They turned the history of these displaced people into a tragedy for humanity, even though they had lived for centuries among the Arabs without being harmed, being instead respected and honored in every Arab land, without any distinction of religion or race, and enjoying the same social rights and duties as their neighbors.

This reality became crystal clear to me when our glorious Revolution of Liberation broke out. The leadership of the Revolution in Constantine—specifically in the Second Province—contacted prominent Jewish figures. They asked them why their community was taking up arms alongside the French forces against the Muslims, and why they appeared to be collectively hostile toward the Revolution.

The response from one of these figures—who was a prominent social leader—was a formal declaration of hostility toward the national cause and a proclamation of absolute loyalty to France. In doing so, he turned his back on his own friends and loved ones—those with whom he had grown up. Among them were the Arab families who had loved him as an artist and a master of Andalusian music. Muslim families had always favored him over any other singer to perform at their weddings and private celebrations. How many times had those joyful ceremonies taken place within our Grand Residence, where we lived together as children, playing in the very same narrow alleys?

That Jewish figure was the favorite singer of Constantine's elite, Sheikh Raymond Leyris—the father-in-law of our childhood companion, the famous French singer Enrico Macias, whose real name is Gaston Ghrenassia.

Bizza the Pampered One

In our shared Grand Residence, the living quarters our family occupied alongside our neighbors consisted of a vast, rectangular room. It featured one prominent window that overlooked the inner courtyard of the house and another, more modest one that peered out into the narrow alleyway of our neighborhood. In front of this room lay a small vestibule dedicated to the tasks of cooking and storage, where the heavy bags of charcoal and various essential kitchen utensils were kept. Every inhabitant of the house referred to this small, practical space by the diminutive name S'tiha.

The overall management, oversight, and daily care of this great house were the domain of a beautiful and kind lady whom everyone, young and old alike, addressed by the affectionate name Mama. At the time, I did not fully grasp the underlying reasons behind this title, but I later realized that Mama was a wealthy and generous woman, the wife of the actual owner of the house. Yet, to the profound and lingering regret of all who knew her, she was childless. Every neighbor lived in a state of bewildered sympathy regarding her incomplete happiness, quietly wondering in the silence of their own souls if the infertility lay with her or her husband. They never voiced such delicate inquiries aloud; instead, they vied with one another to please her and show her constant affection. Each neighbor would offer their own children to her, claiming they were hers should she so desire. However, these gestures brought her little true solace. Thus, she chose instead to raise a small female dog whom she named Bizza, primarily because her husband had stubbornly and absolutely refused to allow her to adopt a child from an orphanage or through the channels of social services.

"Bizza" was a white dog speckled with black spots; she lived among the neighborhood children like a pampered child cared for by everyone. No one ever displayed the slightest resentment toward her, even when she left her waste in the various corners of the Grand Residence. Since all the neighbors shared the responsibility of cleaning the house periodically every week, each woman would remove those messes without uttering a single word of complaint, doing so out of profound respect for the dog's owner—that kind, beautiful, childless woman who appeared happy despite her biological lack, or rather, despite her radiant beauty and the luxury that surrounded her.

Yet, how Mama loathed anyone who dared to object to her pampered dog's antics or its persistent barking! Among those critics was the wise "Abdelkrim Ben al-Faqoun," our neighbor who used to visit the sick among the house's inhabitants. No sooner would the sage enter the premises and hear the barking than he would express his irritation and anger, exclaiming in a loud, authoritative voice:

— "What is this? Are we in the Casbah or in the wilderness? Get this dog away from me, and keep it away from your children as well!"

He would gesture toward the women, who would respond with smiles of relief and secret amusement. Indeed, the wise Abdelkrim Ben al-Faqoun was the only one who possessed the daring to speak such blunt words. And why shouldn't he? Was he not a sage in every sense of the word—a scholar, a mentor, and one of the few Arab physicians of that era? He was fortunate to hail from a prestigious and educated lineage; so much so that his grandfather had attained the rank of Minister of the Hajj under the French administration because his lineage

and his knowledge empowered him to become a man of standing, much like the notables among the Christians and Jews, were it not for his preference to dedicate his genius and his modest means to the service of his people.

Mama's room—or rather her private wing on the upper floor of the Grand Residence—was like a sanctuary. Its expansive windows overlooked every alleyway of the neighborhood, yet no one from the outside could gaze inside. It was an exquisite room, furnished with pieces that none of the other neighbors possessed, regardless of how much their fortunes might have improved. It was a universe of mirrors, furniture crafted from rosewood and mother-of-pearl, and various curios scattered here and there that made one feel as if they were in a museum. Her bed—the Namoussiya—was gilded, with pillars that rendered it akin to the legendary beds of Cleopatra or Bilqis in the realms of myth.

Mama favored me more than the other girls of the neighborhood. Was I truly worthy of that love? Or was it because she felt my young age allowed her to envision me as the daughter she had never birthed? Despite my youth, I recognized her uniqueness compared to the other women. I would stare at her incessantly, and to please her, I would sing everything I had memorized and learned: revolutionary anthems, childhood chants, the rope-skipping song, the national anthem, my favorite Little Cat song from school, and much more.

Beside her bed, Mama kept a very large gramophone with a wide horn. It was decorated at the base with a figure of a dog or a puppy that bore a perfect resemblance to her own dog, Bizza; indeed, I genuinely believed the figure was a portrayal of Bizza herself. Every evening, that gramophone would pour out

the songs and melodies of Sheikh al-Ifrit, Sheikha Yamina, Safiya Helmy, Mohamed el-Kourd, and Sheikh el-ChaKlab.

Mama's husband, whom we affectionately called Uncle Arab, was a man of striking handsomeness and undeniable elegance. He loved her with a profound devotion, undeterred by the fact that she had not granted him an heir. Perhaps he was the only man in his circle who possessed the quiet self-awareness to know that the flaw resided within himself rather than her. Crucially, Uncle Arab was of Berber ancestry, a son of the rugged mountains. Like many who migrated from the untamed peaks and wilderness into a city as ancient and intellectually refined as Constantine, he integrated with remarkable speed. He adapted seamlessly to its intricate customs, its storied traditions, and its refined etiquette.

Constantine, you see, is a city that does not merely host the newcomer; it absorbs them into its very soul. It exerts influence without ever being influenced; it dissolves others within its crucible but remains forever unchanged. It beckons the rural dweller and the mountain-folk alike with a civilizing grace and a humble, irresistible charm. Without the need for force or overt pressure, everyone eventually becomes Constantinian, as proud of their new belonging to this rock-hewn fortress as they are of their ancestral lineage.

Uncle Arab was a communist—a man consumed by ideology. His passion for his party was so intense that he sought to entwine Mama in all its political ventures. He would promise her a gown of crimson velvet embroidered with threads of gold, or a shimmering golden anklet, if only his party would triumph in the upcoming elections. Conversely, if his party met with failure, he would subject her to a spirited lecture that was, in all honesty, entirely unwarranted. The poor woman thus lived

through every political shift with a vibrant, anxious intensity. She would rally a large group of the neighboring women to join her in fervent prayer for her husband's party to win, simply so she might be spared a night of his political frustration and his explosive vents of anger over a defeat.

Regardless of these ideological storms, the sweetest and most cherished hours for those women—and for Mama herself—were the legendary afternoon gatherings.

As the clock chimed the arrival of the afternoon coffee hour, each neighbor would emerge from her quarters bearing a modest offering: one might bring golden, porous pancakes, another a selection of delicately crafted sweets, and a third a handful of roasted Sudanese peanuts. They would all coalesce around a solitary, grand tray, sipping their brew from porcelain cups adorned with gilded rims—a shared ritual of communal grace and unspoken affection.

In those fleeting intervals, the very essence of the residence was transfigured. It was no longer a mere physical dwelling of stone and mortar, but a hallowed sanctuary of shared emotions, vitality, and aesthetic splendor. The rhythmic, soulful pulse of the *Darbuka* drum would rise, accompanied by the heady fragrance of incense that perfumed the air and stirred the spirit. Within this enchanted atmosphere, they were melded into a singular, cohesive family, dwelling in a harmony so profound and sacred that none would ever dare to fracture its peace.

Their unity was their impenetrable shield. In these luminous gatherings, there was no quarter for the bitter chill of isolation or the lingering shadows of enmity; their collective life stood as an enduring testament to a solidarity that transcended all

individual discord. It was a world where even the smallest joy was magnified through sharing, and where the burdens of reality were momentarily suspended in a symphony of laughter and sisterhood.

Faces and Fates

Among our neighbors within the sanctuary of the Grand Residence was "Douja"—a name spoken as a tender, diminutive form of Khadidja. I remember her weeping with a searing bitterness on the day she was forced to sell her most cherished possessions to meet the mounting, relentless needs of her three young children. Among those sold treasures was an Oud, exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl—an instrument her late husband used to play with soul-stirring skill at weddings and celebrations before tuberculosis claimed his life in the very prime of his thirties.

Then there was "Umm Masouda the Younger." We called her so because the house was home to two women sharing that same name. She was a woman of small stature who earned her bread as a domestic servant for an elderly French woman in the "Modern Quarter," specifically on France Street—a place that felt worlds away from the heartbeat of our popular alleyways. There, the roads were meticulously paved, and the grand, imposing buildings and sleek cars cast a shadow of intimidation over the simple folk who happened to pass by.

Umm Masouda would return to us bearing the remnants of food from her employer’s table. She took a peculiar delight in inviting my mother to taste these dishes, an act that sparked a flurry of endless questions about their exotic names, the manner of their cooking, and the mysterious spices that seasoned them.

In that same mosaic of faces was "Uncle Al-Sa’id the Student"—the Quran teacher. He was instantly recognizable by his massive yellow turban and his pockets, which were perpetually heavy with the weight of talismans, amulets, and

mystical scrolls he painstakingly wrote every evening for the sick, the unwed, and those longing for children.

There was also among the neighbors "Umm Zulaikha," who resided near the outer gate. She was a constant subject of critique among the women, for her tongue was a relentless weaver of gossip. Despite the rheumatism that had gnarled her fingers and burdened her frame, she never ceased articulating the private lives of others, one by one, with a tireless fervor. The neighbors feared the sharpness of her wit and avoided her company, for she possessed the uncanny ability to find a flaw in any soul, whether with or without cause.

Yet, amidst these complex human conditions, there were figures of pure, illuminating light. I remember "Lalla Floulou"—a woman of singular beauty and refined grace. Her true name was Lalla Fella, but that was the affectionate diminutive we bestowed upon her. She was an educated woman, a teacher in one of the educational institutions, and she carried herself with a dignity that was entirely free of arrogance. She lived a modern, disciplined, almost nun-like life, always impeccable in her attire and composed in her spirit. We, the young girls of the neighborhood, adored her with a devotion that bordered on reverence. She would dedicate time every single day to instruct us in the arts of sewing and embroidery, meticulously advising us on the etiquette of dining, the grace of one’s gait, and the mastery of coordinating colors in our garments.

In our youthful eyes, she was the very epitome of the "Perfect Woman." We worshipped the ideal she represented; her presence was so commanding and her influence so profound that we would often forget her physical form and instead perceive her as a living moral exemplar.

Then there was "Fatima," a woman of such enchanting beauty that she was often referred to as "the pampered one." Yet, a cloud of curiosity surrounded her, for despite her striking loveliness, she remained without a suitor for many years. Rumors swirled in the shadows; some whispered that she was wed to a Jinn from the invisible world, a spirit who would manifest himself only to her. She remained an enduring mystery to us all—a vision of beauty that seemed to belong to another realm entirely.

In the heart of those winding alleyways lived Baba Effendi—a man who seemed to belong to an entirely different epoch. He was a figure whose world appeared to begin and end at the very threshold of his shop. His domain was a cavernous warehouse, a somber storage space filled with massive, rusted pieces of iron and tightly sealed crates—a place that seemed to guard the secrets of a wealth we children could only guess at. I recall that once a week, he would be visited by groups of mysterious strangers whose arrival sparked a flurry of hushed rumors and persistent questions among the residents regarding the hidden contents of that warehouse. I, a curious child of ten, would watch him from a distance with a mixture of reverent awe and silent bewilderment.

Baba Effendi was a man of immense physical presence, a mountain of a human being. He moved through the world with a slow, deliberate pace, his great belly preceding him as if to announce his grand arrival moments before he appeared. He would habitually take his place upon a tiny wooden chair positioned in front of his shop—a scene I watched with a peculiar, breathless fascination, always half-expecting the fragile chair to splinter and give way beneath his formidable weight.

He would smoke his pipe with profound relish, the aromatic, heavy clouds of expensive tobacco filling the narrow alley and scenting the very air we breathed. To my childish imagination, he appeared like a sovereign monarch seated upon a throne, even if that throne was merely a weathered chair in a dusty path. There was a ritualistic gravity to his movements; he would twist and wax his long mustache until it glistened with a sharp precision, while sipping from a cup of coffee with an air of absolute composure.

It was during the height of the commando operations in the city, during the fiery days of the Liberation Revolution that Baba Effendi fell. He stood unyielding despite the agony of torture, stubbornly refusing to divulge the location of the secret cell of the Fidaiyin—a cell that held within its ranks his only son, Hamid.

Then there was the tale of Uncle Abbas. At sixty years of age, he had discarded his first wife to marry a mere child, a girl of fourteen. On the night of the wedding—the traditional Dakhla—the poor girl suffered a violent and terrifying hemorrhage. The groom, however, remained entirely oblivious to her agony. He was lost in the ecstasy of the celebration, dancing wildly to the melodies of the musical troupe led by the Jewish musician, the father of the world-famous Enrico Macias. He danced with the bride's father, triumphantly waving the blood-stained wedding garment, utterly indifferent to the trauma that had befallen his young bride.

When the girl's father finally brought her to the physician, weeping with a belated and desperate fear for his daughter's life, he was met with a stinging rebuke. The doctor looked at him with eyes full of loathing and asked:

— Are you truly her father? Could you find nothing for her to eat but to marry her off to a beast at this age?

This physician was the very same man of wisdom, Abdelkrim Ben al-Faqoun, the same man who had so famously and loudly voiced his disdain for the pampered antics of the dog, Bizza, within our Grand Residence.

Jabal al-Wahsh (The Wild Beast Mountain)

Among those residing in the "Grand House"—Dar al-Gharghari—nestled at the threshold of Zenqat Halmousha in the neighborhood of Sidi al-Jalis, the days of Constantinian family life would pass vividly before my eyes. Despite the narrowness of means and the persistent presence of material need, there was a shared thread that bound everyone together: a noble, honorable, and profoundly human existence—in every sense, a truly civilized way of life.

There was the meticulous preparation for the holy month of Ramadan and the religious festivals; the fasting of Ramadan with genuine piety; the congregational prayers in the mosques; and the exchange of traditional dishes between neighbors. One could witness scenes of profound solidarity and mutual care, blooming even among the needy themselves. The evenings were delightful, filled with melodies, rhythmic dancing, and the ring of pure laughter. Despite the endless litany of life's problems and worries, a specific atmosphere would prevail, stamping the air with a unique flavor—a month distinct from all others in the year.

These soirées would reach their conclusion shortly before dawn with the arrival of the "Mesaharati" (the dawn-waker), or Boutbeila as he is known in various parts of the Arab Maghreb. He would shout before every house he passed, pampering the children by calling out their names and summoning them, until they would emerge to greet him laden with food, sweets, and small coins. At the close of Ramadan, during the celebratory days of Eid, his massive drum would precede his great belly, its powerful, resonant rhythms announcing his presence from

afar—a drum draped in nationalistic colors, cradling a star and a crescent.

While appearing as a mere folk tradition, it was, in truth, a bold and overt declaration of the burning desire to reclaim national sovereignty and to snatch the flag from the iron grip of the occupier—a perpetual reminder intended to never vanish from the collective imagination or the vibrant dreams of the succeeding generations.

Through all of this, the day eventually dawned when my sister and I celebrated our very first fast. We were pampered within the sanctuary of our own home and the homes of our generous neighbors alike. Ceremonial henna adorned our palms and fingertips, and our pre-dawn *Suhur* meal consisted of couscous embellished with raisins and that rare, precious yellow sugar. We were permitted to slumber until the late hours of the morning, receiving a level of tender care that was found on no other day. Our faces were monitored almost by the hour: were we still capable of completing the arduous day as fasters? We were showered with an abundance of gifts—varied delicacies and mouth-watering sweets presented by each neighbor individually, as an honor and a gesture of bright optimism for the little fasters.

Upon achieving the goal and successfully completing a full day's fast, each girl would be rewarded with a beautiful gift—often a piece of fine gold—even if its price had to be paid to the jeweler in humble installments over time, for it was to remain an eternal, shimmering memory of one's first fast.

As for the spring season, one need not ask about the grand collective excursions for families to the pristine beaches of Jijel, Skikda, and El Kala, or the weekly pilgrimages to the

breathtaking heights of the city. There, Jabal al-Wahsh (The Wild Beast Mountain) sat enthroned with its emerald green lakes—a hue mirrored from the dense Aleppo pines that blanketed the entire mountain and crowned its peaks and crags like a verdant halo. The little ones would race in their vibrant, festive clothes, traversing stretches of the mountain path that often exceeded ten kilometers. Their tender, young feet would cross these vast distances amidst peals of laughter, spirited play, and boundless merriment, their voices growing hoarse before they even arrived, from the constant repetition of patriotic anthems and resonant folk songs.

As for the elders, they proceeded with a stately grace and solemn dignity, bearing crates of diverse provisions meticulously prepared for the day-long retreat: jars of fresh yogurt, golden pancakes, squares of semolina sweetened with date jam, and the essential essence of distilled orange blossom water. Everyone welcomed the spring season with open hearts, basking in beautiful moments of relaxation where children would plunge into the cool lakes, drying themselves under the gentle sun before resuming their ball games. Meanwhile, in secluded, shaded corners of the forest, groups of youth would weave enchanting melodies—souls still vibrating with the heritage of Malouf, Hawzi, and other classical poetic muwashahat and traditional modes.

In this refined and romantic atmosphere, the dreams of the maidens and the youth would deepen, and their spirits and ideas would take root in the profound depths of art and beauty.

I was one of those children—a young girl inhabiting the fullness of an innocent childhood. Yet, that did not prevent these radiant moments from being etched into my nascent memory like golden engravings upon the very first thresholds

of my life. Even today, I find that my spirit only truly stirs to dance when it hears the soulful strains of Malouf music.

These were not mere transient images or fleeting shapes that cling to the mind for a season only to fade with the passage of years. They were, in truth, events that carried a significant intellectual substance, contributing profoundly to the architecture of my character, my sensibilities, and my firmest convictions. This was forged through the persistent questions, the research, and the constant dialogues I practiced, particularly with my mother.

Often, my mother would prepare to visit friends or relatives who were patients in the hospital. The moment I sensed her intent, I would cling stubbornly to the folds of her black traditional M'laya, entreating her to take me along. My desire to accompany her was born not out of a wish to visit the sick as much as it was a profound yearning to ride in the "Caleche"—the traditional horse-drawn carriage. There was no other feasible path to reach that hospital except by traversing the Great Suspension Bridge of Sidi M’Cid. How magnificent and ethereal was that bridge! I was utterly enamored by the vibrant colors of the horse's regalia and the ornate carriage it pulled. Its seats were upholstered in a rich, textured red and black velvet, and the horses' hooves would strike the iron deck of the bridge, producing a formidable and rhythmic percussive echo. It was a sound at once strange and captivating, a resonance that blended within my young heart a sense of trepidation with an overwhelming delight. Those echoes, intertwined with the spirited neighing of the horses as they navigated the heights of the Great Bridge, left an indelible and exquisite impression upon my soul—a melody that remains resonant in my ears to this very day. To me, that sound was far more beautiful and

evocative than the clatter of the "Caleches" I rode much later in life while wandering through the ancient, historical backstreets of Vienna, the capital of Austria, where the venerable residence of the immortal composer Mozart still stands.

Yet, amidst all this sensory beauty, desire, and childlike pleasure, I would attune my hearing with great focus toward my mother as she engaged in conversation with a friend of hers:

— *"When we embark on a visit to the sick, we do not do so merely to fulfill our social and moral obligation of inquiry and consolation. Rather, we do it to perceive how truly blessed we are. We enjoy the grace of health and the gift of wellness, and for that, we must unceasingly offer our praises and gratitude to the Almighty."*

The Hidden Alleys

The Casbahs of Constantine are manifold, and its gates are numbered at seven: Bab al-Oued, Bab al-Qantara, Bab al-Rowah, Bab al-Rahba, Bab al-Suwayqa, Bab al-Madina, and finally, Bab al-Jabiya.

This last gate was strictly proscribed for us children; we were permitted neither to cross its threshold nor to venture into its winding alleyway. Initially, I failed to grasp the underlying reason for this strict prohibition, but as I matured slightly, my schoolmates would whisper enigmatic tales, and I began to catch their hushed words with a sharp and cautious curiosity.

The alleyway of Bab al-Jabiya served as the designated quarter for the wanton women—Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike. One day, fueled by a reckless daring, I ventured there with my companions. Our young hearts raced, their beats thundering faster than our footsteps, as we approached the quarter to witness firsthand that which we had only heard of through whispers. We beheld a collection of women—striking beauties draped in translucent, ethereal garments, their countenances shimmering beneath dense layers of cosmetics.

What bewildered us most was the sight of each woman either smoking a cigarette or a shisha pipe, accompanied by the low, bubbling murmur of the water and a strange, brazen laughter that appeared to emanate more from a state of internal agitation than from any genuine sense of mirth. One of them caught sight of us and offered a smile that carried a palpable tenderness. We stood frozen for a fleeting moment, then instinctively grasped one another and took flight. It was quite enough for us to have witnessed what we did of that secluded quarter, of which we had previously known absolutely

nothing at all, until our curiosity dragged us toward it. We never breathed a word to our mothers that we had committed such a deed; it remained a sacred secret between us, often utilized as a tool for minor blackmail among one another—exchanged for a piece of candy or a colored pen.

As I matured and delved deeper into the contemporary history of the city, I discovered that the architect of legalized prostitution in Constantine was none other than Monsieur Morina, who served as the Mayor for twenty-five years. It was he who had systematically imported prostitutes from France since the early days; his calculated intent was to divert the youth's attention from the gravity of national concerns and patriotic issues.

The city's gates were thus closed upon secluded and profoundly private worlds, bifurcated by paved streets and modern roads. High-rise buildings were constructed by the occupier for his colonial citizens, allowing them to live in an atmosphere devoid of anxiety or disturbance, far removed from the daily pulse of the popular quarters and historic neighborhoods. For an eternity, these parallel worlds seemed as though they would have no horizon to their conceptualizations or their expansionist fantasies.

The neighborhood of Sidi al-Jalis, where our Grand Residence—Dar al-Qarqari—stood, was one such Casbah. It was defined by an Andalusian Islamic architectural character, featuring ancient mosques with their graceful domes and grand doors adorned with glistening copper knockers. Its intricate geometries often whispered tales of artistry and grace. The neighborhood felt as though it were inhabited by the very spirits of angels and devils alike—a sanctuary holding the enigmas of the entire universe, a world strictly governed by

absolute convictions, unwavering faith, and destinies attributed to every cause, motive, and outcome.

The neighborhood was named in honor of a scholar who, during the nascent days of the occupation, would sit among the common folk, educating them on the matters of their faith, their worldly existence and their history. Often, the number of these venerated scholars and reformers—acting as spiritual guides and mentors—would multiply whenever the proselytizing and administrative pressures from the colonial forces intensified, and whenever the occupier launched its systematic assaults upon the city's heritage and identity to distort, forge, and alter the faith of its residents. This occurred both in this city and in various other towns across the entire national territory.

In the hidden heart of the neighborhood stood a humble mosque and a shrine, which served as the final resting place for this "Righteous Resistance Fighter." The residents would congregate there for every prayer, until its courtyards would overflow to capacity during the Friday sermons.

The neighborhood square was vast but uneven and sloped. At its center stood a fountain of perpetually flowing water; we children would often wash our small feet there before retreating into our homes each evening. In the early mornings, the square was the domain of the rural vendors of fresh milk and pristine white butter, who brought their yields from the farms on the city's outskirts, near the goats, to be distributed among the neighborhood dwellers. They carried their goods in copper vessels, which the owners vied to keep meticulously polished and engraved with ornate patterns.

From this central square, narrow and winding alleys branched out—each a "Darb" (pathway) housing a cluster of homes—only to conclude at one of the neighborhood's exits leading to other quarters, which bore evocative names such as: Rahbat al-Souf (The Wool Market), Zenqat Hamousha, Rahbat al-Jimal (The Camels Market), Al-Sayyida, Al-Suwayqa, Sidi Bazzar, Arbaeen Sharif, and other historic quarters within the Casbahs. One of these alleyways led to a long, paved street that bore a resemblance to the streets inhabited by the French; it was known as "The Bottom of the Street" (Qaa al-Share'), and it was the quarter inhabited by the Jews.

The Jewish community in Constantine, as I have previously alluded, existed in our midst not merely as neighbors, but as cherished companions and loved ones. We found them standing alongside us on every conceivable occasion, whether in times of radiant joy or somber sorrow. There was no distinction between us in language, attire, or even most customs; rather, their sanctification of the Sabbath was met with a profound sense of respect and esteemed consideration by us Muslims. Human relationships of a remarkably high order bound us together. I recall how delighted I was when one of our Jewish neighbors—a lady by the name of Madam Zaqziq—would specifically choose me to perform certain tasks for her, favoring me over the members of her own household. I would be summoned to light the match for her stove in the kitchen, which almost always contained a heavy pot of dried beans mingled with various legumes—a traditional dish known as Al-Dafina. At the time, I did not comprehend the origin of that name, which means "The Buried," but I would habitually interpret it within the secret chambers of my soul as a tribute to some woman who had perhaps been buried alive through

injustice or coercion. In my young mind, I linked this idea to the poignant Quranic verse:

"And when the girl who was buried alive is asked: For what sin she was killed?"

Indeed, their religious refusal to light a fire on the Sabbath was one of the sacred rituals that we assisted them with, driven by a spirit of neighborly cooperation and a steadfast adherence to the ancient bonds of our quarter.

As children, we would frolic and play together without reservation, exchanging colorful sweets, seasonal fruits, and dolls meticulously crafted from linen and multi-colored woolen threads. We forged intimate, innocent friendships and grew up alongside one another, never suspecting that among our playmates would be those who would eventually become world-renowned singers, or that one of us would one day ascend to be the first woman minister in the government of a sovereign, independent Algeria.

Those days passed through a landscape of innocent childhood, an era seemingly unmarked by any disturbances, until that thunderous and agonizing decision arrived from our fathers and theirs: that we should no longer play together, and that we must henceforth sever all ties, no matter how intimate or longstanding.

That decision descended upon our small heads with the sudden and violent impact of a lightning bolt. We were utterly incapable of comprehending, at that tender age, why such a difficult and painful decision had been made, or how we could possibly be expected to sever the visceral bonds of relationship with children whom we loved and whose company we craved—children with whom we spent our days dreaming of tomorrow's

encounter and the meetings of the days to follow. Only much later did the explanation and the rationalization arrive; it was a clarification achieved with great difficulty as we struggled to understand, yet it was presented as clear and sufficient, at least from the unwavering perspective of our fathers.

It was related that a certain individual among the Jews, in a state of drunkenness, had previously desecrated the surroundings of the mosque or its very walls by relieving himself there. This singular incident ignited the rawest emotions of the Muslims at the time; they suffered a profound sense of insult and were consumed by a righteous rage. This event remains vivid and is renewed in the collective memory time and again, owing to certain underlying causes that touch the very heart of identity and belief.

My father spoke to my mother, his voice laden with a grim and heavy conviction:

— *"They have desecrated our sanctities and violated the sacred purity of the House of God. It is a heinous and unforgivable crime, and we are duty-bound to boycott them. This is not the first offense they have committed, nor the second, nor even the third."*

It was not only my father who rose in protest; he was merely echoing the analysis and the justifications shared by the entire community. Indeed, all the neighbors and residents of the quarter were vying with one another in their expressions of indignation. It was a monumental event that completely overshadowed all other occurrences of that period. The Jewish community was destined to pay a heavy price for that sacrilegious act afterward, just as they had paid the price in times past. The Muslims responded to their transgression with

a massive and retributive retaliation. Why, I wonder, did they choose to repeat such a deed?

Today, I find myself questioning through the lens of maturity:

— *"Was their act truly intentional? Was it a deliberate and calculated provocation, or an act of harassment designed to test the limits of our endurance?"*

I possess no absolute certainty on the matter; yet, what I understood then was that, in the eyes of our fathers, the Jews had betrayed our trust and willfully sought our humiliation. They had disregarded the hallowed moral compacts that existed between us, failing to accord our long decades of intimate fellowship and shared proximity the profound esteem they so rightly deserved.

Within that very square, concealed behind a sprawling wall that carved a boundary between the path of the livestock-laden carts and the residential dwellings, stood a grand house—much like our communal residence. It was home to families of dark complexion, and in those days, the house was referred to as "Dar al-Wasfan" or "Dar Bornu." As children, we possessed no inkling that these dark-skinned neighbors were sons of the soil, Algerians just as we were. We did not yet grasp that Algeria was a vast, sprawling land of profound reaches—encompassing the North and the deep South, home to the black, the bronze, and the fair alike. All were Algerians, fashioned by the hands of the Almighty, born of the same nine-month human duration.

Our mothers often voiced their apprehensions before us, particularly my mother, who regarded their presence and our observations of them with a frequent sense of wariness. We used to imagine them as hailing from an entirely different land, for, in short, we had not yet perceived that Algeria was infinitely broader than the narrow quarter we inhabited. In our youthful eyes, that quarter was an entire nation, a vast region, or a continent; the neighborhood was our complete universe, requiring nothing from the world beyond its borders. In "Dar Bornu" resided a family whose patriarch was known as "Baba al-Baraka"—pronounced with a static, unvocalized "r"—whose vocation, recognized by all, was the orchestrating of the "Zar"[3] ceremonies.

Every week or month, these gatherings played host to the noblewomen of Constantine, who joined in visceral, ecstatic dances. Through these movements, a woman found herself

3 The "Zar" is known as "An-Nushrah" in the local urban dialect.

liberated from all worldly constraints and social considerations; some would dance driven by a solemn vow or a spiritual promise, moving to the rhythmic thundering of massive drums. These drums were draped in emerald green banners, intricately embroidered with gilded stars and crescents, and were borne by the powerful, titan-like forearms of men. The air was heavy, nearly saturated with the intoxicating scent of incense, aromatics, and henna. The groans of the afflicted and the sighs of the pained would rise until even the most guarded tongues reached a stage of spiritual unveiling—uttering truths they could never disclose in ordinary circumstances. These were states of profound spiritual lucidity and trance, accompanied by the resonance of drums, invocations, and prayers upon the Prophets and Messengers. Traditional Tamina sweets were distributed, and a black bird was sacrificed without the Basmala, while the dancers were sprinkled with the essence of floral waters and roses.

Thus, the entire world seemed to unite in these rhythmic undulations. The body was liberated from its earthly consequences, escaping the duality of the Sacred and the Profane to perform whatever the rhythms demanded. Life, which had remained nearly dormant for a full year, would stir with a sudden violence and intensity. The dance, in its peak hour, became a form of worship—albeit an unconditional worship marked by bowing and prostration, swimming in the vast spaces of being, where the self-melts into the Supreme Essence, far from all mediations. Thus, repentance became a certainty, and perhaps all sins—minor and major—were purged through the beads of sweat, cleansing the body from its impurities.

Through these invocations, visual realities would eventually fade, replaced by moments of stupor and spiritual dissolution. The vision would clear, the unseen world would appear transparent, and the secrets of the universe were revealed in atmospheres reserved only for those who had reached the highest stations of Sufi ecstasy. It is that state of Nirvana of which Buddhist philosophy speaks.

One would fervently believe thereafter that every singular participant in that "Zar" ceremony had achieved her ultimate spiritual objective, sooner or later. She emerged from the experience inhabited by a profound sensation that the spirits—the "Masters"—were no longer incandescent with rage toward her; for she had faithfully performed those arduous rituals, most specifically the sacrificial offering of black birds entirely devoid of the sacred *Basmala*, before their hallowed altars.

Similar congregations existed among other women from the common strata of society as well. They were recognized by various evocative names such as the "Faqirates," the "Bnoutat," or the "Ziyarat." These women practiced their collective ceremonies through a cadence of quieter, non-violent rhythmic beats and a more melodic form of music. They would inaugurate their sessions with the invocations of the Masters, subsequently pivoting gradually toward the sublime praise and veneration of the Noble Messenger (Peace Be Upon Him).

They would transition between disparate states of consciousness, as if their souls were embarked upon a mystical migration from one physical vessel to another—desperately fleeing the dark companionship of demons and the pained wretchedness of the mortal world to ascend toward the celestial ranks of the angels. They sought a hallowed refuge from the malevolent touch of demons, striving to unify the

fragmented soul through these sacred methodologies and the most hallowed of the Masters.

How vast and varied were these traditional customs within the ancient tapestry of my city! They possessed their own sequestered sanctuaries and were presided over by a pantheon of hallowed and venerable masters: "Sidi Rashed," "Sidi Mimoun," and "Sidi Mohamed al-Gharab." This latter saint was enshrined within the most breathtaking outskirts of the city, where his shrine stood as a majestic sentinel overlooking the winding, labyrinthine valleys. Venerable women would make pilgrimages to these shrines to offer solemn oaths and sacred vows of unyielding loyalty and pious submissiveness, forever seeking a sanctuary of solace for their weary hearts. They would immerse their bodies in the crystalline, blessed currents beside the "Hama" springs, dwelling in close proximity to those monumental turtles that had chosen that place as their eternal home. Folklore whispered that these primeval turtles had once been human beings, subjected to a sudden and divine metamorphosis (metamorphosis) as a punishment for their audacity to trespass or rebel against the ordained local order.

As for this hallowed man, his Fate followed him after he was betrayed by the city's sovereign, who cast him from the formidable "Kaf Shkara" cliff to be devoured by predatory birds of prey. Yet, by a sudden divine decree, he was transformed into a raven that soared majestically into the heavens before striking the jagged rocks of the abyss.

Does this entire phenomenon constitute a process of profound spiritual venting? Is it a cathartic release for the years of heavy suppression and societal pressure under which the woman lived? Are these rituals merely ancient customs, as respected by the masses as they are unscrutinized by reason?

Or perhaps, was it an instinctive desire to soothe the tormented soul and seek a touch of spiritual entertainment, even if it were delivered at the hands of strange men?

I do not possess the definitive answer, but I came to realize later that this phenomenon was not confined to women alone. It was a widespread phenomenon prevalent across all Arab and Islamic nations, stretching into Africa and beyond—continents where the mind was often governed by the spirits of fatalism and the unseen, and where the allure of magic and prophecy was fueled by factors such as ignorance and an intellectual void.

Perhaps it is imperative to note that this specific phenomenon was a primary target for the intellectual crusade of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis and his Reformist Movement. He combated these practices with relentless vigor, for in his enlightened view, these were stagnant traditions that distracted the people from their authentic religious values, distorted their history, and corrupted the pristine teachings of their faith. Such rituals allowed despair to seep into the collective soul, making fatalistic reliance stronger than the will to labor and hope. The primary beneficiary of this spiritual decay was colonialism itself, for it would encounter no genuine resistance from a society so fragmented and lost in superstition. The occupier could then plunder the material and spiritual wealth of the nation at will, clearing the path for another century of dominance.

As a direct consequence of his [Imam Ben Badis] relentless crusade against these regressive phenomena, anyone who embraced his guidance and stood in resolute opposition to those negative customs was branded either as a "liberated Badisi" or a "heretic"—an iconoclast who had supposedly

forsaken the sacred traditions and ancestral ways of their forefathers. My father, my mother, and every member of our household were counted among these steadfast and unyielding "Badisi." In truth, that reformist spirit eventually transcended our home to encompass and define the very soul of the entire city of Constantine.

Daughters of the Builder

My father was a master mason, a builder by trade. Consequently, my sisters and I were known among our neighbors by the collective epithet "The Builder's Daughters" [4]. This was a social shorthand used to distinguish the various families within our quarter: there were the sons of the carpenter, the daughters of the plasterer, the children of the dyer, the offspring of the lamp-lighter, and the daughters of the weaver, and so forth. Such were the titles derived from the traditional crafts and vocations practiced by the fathers of the neighborhood.

In our immediate surroundings, there was no trace of the children of physicians, lawyers, or high-ranking officials. Those individuals belonged to an entirely different world, a realm far removed from our own—the world of the French colonists or those who strove to mimic them. We all revolved within the same popular, grassroots orbit, whether we occupied its very center or drifted along its periphery.

This social homogeneity did not imply that we were identical to those in the "other world," or rather, it meant that our laws and social codes were not shared with theirs. In fact, we harbored a firm conviction that we were superior to them; we claimed this superiority with pride. This was because our neighborhood, by virtue of its popular and authentic character, imposed its own distinct essence upon the environment: the very air we breathed, the nature of our labor, the architecture

4 The glottal stop (Hamza) is traditionally dropped in the local dialect of Constantine; hence it is pronounced "Al-Bannay," which is linguistically sound and authentic to the city's tongue.

of our homes, our modes of thought, and even the subtle nuances of our spoken language.

Building was my father's sovereign craft, and thus we were forever "The Builder's Daughters."

The expression "Al-Bannay" (The Builder) was subsequently consolidated into our formal family name. To my mind, this naming carries a profound significance, for it distinguished us in a manner that would be elucidated later. It implied that, in the final analysis, we were all contained within a single vessel, and there was no meaningful distinction between those who remained fiercely loyal to their heritage and those who were merely admirers of it, or even those who were enamored with it.

For the "Builder" stood as one of the master masons within the city; both were regarded as a grace bestowed upon Constantine when they descended as guests upon it from its outskirts. One chose to stay and became irrevocably faithful to the city, while the other remained an eternal stranger and a steadfast rejecter of its ways.

My father acquired his profession and mastered its intricate arts from the Italian master builder, Gano [5]. He imbibed from him the twin crafts of construction and artistry until he himself became a master of both quantity and quality. He was no longer regarded as a mere source of labor; he ascended to the rank of the specialized masters in the city. Vast voids were left within the city's architectural fabric as a result of the monumental displacement of people from their ancestral

5 Sale Rasce.

lands—those very lands that the colonizer had seized by force, displacing their rightful owners.

Thus was born the unified family name, "Wanisi," as the disparate branches consolidated under a single title and a shared lineage. They adopted the name of their great tribe as a surname, categorized in their pedigree as belonging to one mother and one father. In truth, our clan of Kamersh and our tribe within Tadjnanet and its surroundings were harmonized into a single unit. Their sons and grandsons traversed the widest regions, eventually establishing deep roots for the long term. This intricate network of kinship and tribal structure was essential to reclaim authority whenever it was recovered, serving as a formidable stumbling block to thwart the colonizer's strategic plans for a protracted normalization.

In the relentless pursuit of transforming the land and everyone upon it into an inseparable part of the "Motherland," France.

And so, my father did not merely become a mason or a master builder; he was a man who had committed the Book of God to memory (a *Hafiz*). He possessed a refined literacy and a keen intellect, notwithstanding the high levels of scientific illiteracy that characterized certain other branches of the "Grand Family"—a family that had become fragmented and dispersed due to the colonial policy of "Divide and Rule" [(6).]

I used to reflect that for a man such as he, construction was both a craft and a vocation through which he raised his children

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6 The Wanisi family produced philosophers and geniuses, most notably Hamdan Wanisi, the Great Scholar of Constantine and the mentor of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who famously advised the Imam not to accept any employment under the French colonial administration.

and sustained his family, perhaps secretly harboring the hope that one of them would one day reclaim a portion of the family's stolen glory and prestige that had been plundered by colonialism.

Was this truly his dream? I cannot say for certain. But what I do know is that he was a man of few words, nor did he ever insist on being understood by others. I used to perceive that his face suggested he lived solely for the present moment, untroubled by worry, anxiety, or complaint—neither dwelling upon the past nor fretting over the future.

He was possessed of striking blue eyes, a handsome countenance, and hair that shimmered like spun gold. He held the physical stature of the noble, and his skin bore the pallor of ancient pedigree. He harbored no fear or apprehension; he seemed to me eternally content, standing tall and joyful. Even now, I can see him vividly in my mind: a cigarette poised between his fingers, exhaling its smoke with a gentle, rhythmic grace while sipping his cup of coffee with a quiet, aristocratic dignity. I truly believed then that he was one of the "Noble English Lords."

He remained happy even when he fathered only daughters, devoid of any male heir in a society that prides itself exclusively on males. In such an environment, a man would often marry several times, driven by an obsessive and urgent desire for a son. The birth of a male child was perceived as the singular path to extend the family lineage and secure the "Throne" for future generations. When I matured and delved into the vast array of sociological theories and the historical philosophies of nations, I came to realize that the obsessive desire for male offspring was, in reality, a strategic attempt to safeguard the assets and lands of the family and the tribe. In this context, the

marriage of a daughter to her cousin—rather than an outsider—was seen as the ideal mechanism to ensure that wealth remained within the kinship circle. However logical this reasoning might have appeared within its era, it seemingly ignored a fundamental truth.

Yet, can such a conviction endure? For eventually, properties were plundered and lands were seized, and it became clear that "Man"—whether male or female—was the only true survivor who would populate the generations and alter the course of everything upon this earth. This was echoed in the bitter realization of the occupier when the popular uprisings intensified, particularly the victorious November Revolution. They proclaimed with a defiant arrogance: "If France departs from the lands and the fields, her influence must remain entrenched within the tongues and the minds." This sentiment was personified in General Lamoricière, who was elevated to the rank of French Minister of Defense, having notoriously boasted of his habit of decapitating Algerians as casually as one might cut off heads of cabbage.

My mother bore the same family name as my father, for she was the daughter of his maternal aunt. She was a truly magnificent woman; despite the suffocating psychological atmosphere and the rigid mentalities of the time, she managed to pour forth her immense tenderness and love upon her family. No material need or state of want ever hindered her from providing a warm, joyous, and dignified sanctuary for her husband and children. She was a vessel of nobility and goodness, for those very conditions—though harsh—were the lived reality of everyone in that era. like her, they were merely temporary and predestined matters, caused by an intrusive colonizer who had taken everything by force and injustice.

Therefore, as I grew older, I discovered that our family was remarkably wealthy—notwithstanding our material modesty—for it possessed what was most precious: nobility of character, a profound sense of contentment, and the most honorable of ethics. We lived with an inherent pride, an independence of opinion, and courageous intellectual convictions. Even within those arduous social conditions and oppressive environments, my father ensured that every single one of us was educated. He did not deprive a single daughter of school, even as we moved beyond the early stages of childhood.

In a closed and conservative social climate that often forbade girls from attending school once they reached the age of puberty, my father insisted that a girl had the sovereign right to learn far more than just a few Quranic Surahs for the purpose of prayer. She was not destined to be confined to the home merely to master the arts of cooking, sewing, and embroidery while waiting for the "Knight on a White Horse"—that singular, ultimate dream which, in so many cases, transformed into a nightmare from which she was denied even the right to choose its color or form.

In this social atmosphere, my father provided a beautiful exemplar for many other fathers and guardians within the city. He permitted us to learn in the first "Free School"—the only institution that remained entirely independent of the colonial schools, their administration, and their alien curricula. It was the school belonging to the "Association for Education and Islamic Teaching."

This was an exemplary, model school, founded by a visionary reformer and *Mujahid* who rightfully earned the merit of paving the path for the armed struggle against colonialism through the noble channels of education and upbringing—

cultivating generations rooted in the love of their homeland, the profound knowledge of their national identity, and an unshakeable pride in both.

This *Mujahid* was the Imam Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the architect of modern Constantine and the scion of the heroic Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah al-Fatimi, the founder of Cairo. He descended from the most illustrious of Algerian lineages, the Sanhaja tribe.

He erected this school through the toil and contributions of the common folk, to whom both he and my father belonged. He prioritized "Education and Upbringing" (*Tarbiya*) as a sacred goal preceding formal "Instruction" (*Ta'lim*). The school stood as a pioneering beacon within a vast network of educational institutions that pierced the heavy shroud of ignorance and loss that had blanketed the nation's cities and villages. It was a vanguard institution where the tuition fees were borne by the boys, whereas the girls were graciously exempted from payment as a deliberate incentive to encourage their learning—a provision explicitly enshrined within the school's internal statutes.

The majority of those who were nurtured and formed within its hallowed halls—and indeed, within the other free schools spanning the length and breadth of the country—went on to carry the torch of the national struggle. It was from this very institution that political consciousness sprouted; through its curricula, the dust was finally shaken off our authenticity and our national cultural heritage.

The truth of this people and its deep civilizational roots was restored, and confidence was reclaimed for a national character that had nearly been erased or distorted by the

calculated, multifaceted strategies of the colonizer through over a century of forced assimilation policies. The school proved to be one of the most vital launching pads toward an enlightened and mature society, equipped to withstand not only military assaults but all cultural, political, and psychological offensives.

The Father of the Awakening

The Association of Ulema, presided over by Imam Ben Badis, was defined by the very nature of its methodologies and the vibrancy of its activities. This included the establishment and structuring of these institutions upon the foundation of lived reality, through its new pedagogical curricula and methods. Among these were the existing Zawayas and the few other schools that were then affiliated with the People's Party.

It was a national movement that marched alongside other political and religious movements; and though they all converged upon the unity of the ultimate goal—which was the reclamation of national sovereignty from the occupier—this Association was markedly different. It relied upon science, religion, and the virtue of a "long breath" (tenacity) to achieve its far-reaching objectives.

It adopted the most arduous methodology among the forms of resistance against colonial settlement: the path of penetrating into the very core of the civilizational dilemma. To this end, it relied upon the enlightenment of the people, the eradication of their illiteracy and ignorance, and the revival of the cultural and civilizational heritage that had been neglected for centuries. It restored to the Arabic language its pristine and true value, cleansing it of the impurities and negative accumulations that had clung to it for over a century. It effectively returned the Arabic tongue and the spirit of heritage to the people. The Association's defining slogan was:

"Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our country"—these were the non-negotiable constants upon which colonialism had trampled and intended to replace with

Christianity; for what was Algeria in the eyes of the occupier but a mere fragment belonging to the motherland?

This movement was a revolutionary movement, pioneering and reformist, which labored to prepare society through its continuous activities—an awakening whose dual pillars were the man and the woman together. Its primary foundation was the struggle against ignorance for every individual member of society. For was it not the Greek philosopher Socrates who said:

"If I were assigned any mission of reform, I would begin with the school"?

Indeed, the success of this movement and its wager on the woman was a civilizational triumph. It challenged the prevailing mindsets and won the bet by bringing the woman out of the home, educating her, and making her a vital part of the pedagogical project.

Regarding those conditions imposed upon the woman—later on, they themselves did not impose them upon the man as well. Why so? Is the woman now more sacred than the man? Or is it because she is viewed as the vessel carrying the man of the future, who must therefore be bound by axiomatic conditions? In truth, these are conditions that the man, too, should be obliged to follow.

In this school, my sisters and I would learn, and we volunteered to repair and restore whatever was damaged in its classrooms, walls, and floors. He was the master builder; after all, was it not his school, and the school of his daughters, and the sons of this people to whom he was so proud to belong?

Eventually, my father’s name was recorded as a founding member of the Association in his city, earning the profound admiration and reverence of the Association’s scholars and teachers. It reached a point where one of them—the Eminent Scholar Sheikh "Al-Abbas bin Al-Sheikh Al-Hussain"—bestowed upon him the title: "The Father of the Awakening."

Is it not a formidable "Awakening" to challenge all the diseased ideas and stagnated mentalities that surrounded you? Is it not an awakening that imposes its will, and compels you to allow your young daughters to witness the morning every day at school, enabling your youth to perceive the world through the eyes of others?

In this school specifically, where children and adults, girls and boys alike, pursued their studies, fathers would often encounter their children as they departed the classrooms each evening.

It was in this school that I first grasped the alphabets of writing and reading. It was here that the cocoon began to unravel, the thorns began to break, and a saffron-colored lily began its radiant bloom. I awaited the flush of maturity and the ripeness of a single fruit of a promising summer. From the abstract, my thoughts emerged as purposeful words, destined to be published as my very first creative endeavor in the Al-Basa'ir newspaper—the official mouthpiece of the Association—on behalf of the Movement in the year **1954**. Independent of any conscious volition on my part, that initial endeavor was heralded as the finest literary composition in the Primary Certificate examination on a national scale.

Was My Mother Educated?

My mother, Zakia, was the beloved of my heart and mind; I was born her mirror image in every aspect—in spirit, in form, and in stature. She possessed a rare gentleness and a profound tenderness that were matched only by the formidable strength of her character, the nobility of her ethics, and the impeccable soundness of her judgment in all matters.

She was an overflowing fountain of love and compassion; hatred or malice were alien concepts, entirely absent from her psychological makeup. Every member of the family received their full share of her devotion and tenderness, as did the neighbors and relatives; she was unstinting with her care, providing solace, human companionship, and a serenity anchored by that modest, gentle smile that never left her face.

When one of my siblings fell ill—particularly our brother, the male child who arrived after the long line of daughters—he was named "Mohamed al-Bashir" as a tribute to Imam al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi, who presided over the Association of Ulema following the passing of Imam Ben Badis.

This boy, despite the collective care of the entire family, arrived in this world frail—as if he were predisposed for such excessive devotion and veneration. Every time he fell ill, my mother would spend the nights at his bedside, nursing him and drawing the fever from his body. Even though I was the middle child among the sisters, I would stay awake alongside her during those long vigils, at a time when my other sisters slept soundly, their eyelids heavy and untroubled. It was not that they were indifferent, but rather that my mother—despite the exhaustion of her household chores that occupied her throughout the entire day—never seemed to tire when it came

to nursing him. I would sit by her side, helping as best I could, while she gazed intently into the face of my sick brother, her eyes tracking every minute change in his condition. I, in turn, would stare into her weary yet patient face—a face marked by a quiet terror, the fear of losing the long-awaited male child who had arrived after so much waiting and patience.

And although my mother eventually gave birth to two more sons after Mohamed al-Bashir, both of whom are still alive today, Mohamed al-Bashir himself passed away on one of those terrifying nights, leaving behind nothing but the lingering, cold scent of death.

The contented and serenity-filled disposition of my mother had a profound impact on us daughters in particular. Despite our relatively modest social standing, we lived in a perpetual state of psychological comfort and satisfaction, entirely free from any sense of inadequacy or inferiority.

My father adored my mother immensely; we could sense the depth of this affection through his daily behavior toward her, and in the way he spoke of her to others. He would pamper her with affectionate nicknames every time. This was a remarkable trait, for in that specific era, the traditional Arab man often felt a sense of profound shame at the mere mention of his wife's name, or even at referring to her directly. He would often apologize when forced to mention her, starting with phrases like:

— *"My servant, begging your pardon,"* or *"May God protect you from the mention."*

It was as if he were speaking of an enslaved person, something unclean, or a contagious disease. If a woman were "fortunate" enough to have borne sons, she might be elevated

slightly in status and called "The Mother of So-and-so" or "The Mother of Sons." But if she bore only daughters, she was often denied even the title of "Mother."

In that regressive social climate, my father stood uniquely apart. He would address my mother with various terms of endearment, sometimes calling her "The Lioness," and at other times "The Gazelle," taking immense pride in her gentle personality, her profound patience with the hardships of life, and the way she gracefully mitigated the severity of the days upon him.

I recall an occasion when my father entered our home from the world outside, and his countenance was veiled with a shadow of sorrow and agitation. This subtle shift did not escape my mother's keen intuition, nor did he attempt to conceal it from her. She approached him and asked:

— *"What is the matter? What is it that disturbs your peace? Are you complaining of some ailment?"*

— *"It is nothing at all, do not worry,"* he replied. *"It is merely that my friend 'Bouqara' is returning from performing the Hajj pilgrimage the day after tomorrow, and I had promised to meet him at the port of Skikda along with a group of our mutual friends."*

Before he could even complete his sentence, my mother interrupted him with a gentle composure and a delicate smile that illuminated her face:

— *"But your means are tight at the moment, and you do not possess the necessary travel expenses, is that not it?"*

Her words were accompanied by an action even more serene in its grace; she moved with a quiet resolve to remove

her gold earrings. Before my father could utter a single word of refusal, she swore a solemn oath that he must take them, dispose of them as needed, and fulfill his promise to his companion.

It was a moment of profound admiration and exaltation—a scene that stayed with me and my sisters, shaping how we conducted ourselves with our own husbands in later years.

So, to return to the central question:

— *Was my mother an educated woman?*

No, she was not literate in the sense of formal reading and writing, much like my father. Yet, she was far from ignorant. She had committed to memory a vast treasury of Quranic verses, the Prophetic biography (*Sira*), and an abundance of poetic verses. She knew by heart much of the traditional wisdom, ethical poetry, and specifically the legal and moral counsels of Imam al-Shafi'i (may God be pleased with him).

She had acquired this significant wealth of culture through her diligent attendance of the afternoon lessons specifically dedicated to the women of Constantine, held between the Noon and Afternoon prayers at the renowned Green Mosque. These were literary and social pedagogical lessons that no housewife, mother, or wife of that era would ever forgo. They were lessons in enlightenment, designed to counter the age of forced illiteracy, the systematic suppression of our national language, the distortion of religion and history, and the colonial campaign intended to impose intellectual stagnation. My mother, in her turn, would diligently recount everything she had heard and absorbed to her neighbors who were unable to venture out of their homes for one reason or another.

The ironic—indeed, the remarkable—truth of the matter was that my sisters and I never once realized that our parents were illiterate in terms of reading and writing until we had grown older and reached the prime of our youth.

It was the ingenious method through which my father used to test our lessons and review our notebooks that kept us in the dark. He would ask if we had memorized our assignments and inquire about the teachers' evaluations of our homework. It was a subtle, clever strategy that never betrayed the reality of their situation. On the contrary, it reinforced our belief every time that our work and assignments were under rigorous surveillance, and that he possessed a full and expert awareness of the teachers' methods and pedagogical skills.

Driven by his boundless love for knowledge and the Arabic language, my father would bring home every scrap of paper with Arabic script he encountered on the street, even if it were retrieved from a waste bin. He would carefully wipe it clean and then command us to read it to him, repeating the reading over and over until its contents were fully understood. He did this out of a sacred fear that the paper might contain a verse from the Holy Quran or a religious text.

It happened once that he brought home a paper, and although we read it to him line by line, we understood none of it. The sentences remained obscure and mysterious to our young minds. We eventually took the paper to our teacher, who was at that time the venerable Sheikh Mohamed al-Salih Ramadan (may God have mercy upon his soul and grant him eternal peace), so that he might decipher its script and inform us, with a look of profound astonishment, that it was a page from the "Gospel of Matthew." He explained that these were Bibles printed in the Arabic tongue in the Arab Mashreq, which

the Church would distribute to the inhabitants of remote villages and rural hinterlands as part of its systematic missionary and proselytizing campaigns within its colonies in Algeria and across Africa.

My Grandmother's Hand

My grandmother Ruqayya's palm was a book... a speaking book. Its lines were expressions that reflected an entire lifetime with all its minor and momentous events; at times they evoked tears, and at others, they breathed sighs of regret. In both instances, these expressions were as innocent as childhood itself, harboring neither a permanent sorrow nor an everlasting joy. They were expressions that I used to decipher from the paths of her green-veined hand.

The lines of my grandmother's palm were a ledger of time in its sunrise and its sunset, in its light and its darkness—tales of a short-lived life and a youth of long-endured suffering.

My grandmother was the mistress of the ancient, venerable hand and the gentle, child-like mouth. Her inner spaces were vast and expansive, yet she possessed no tools for expression other than her weeping yet laughing tones, eyes glistening with an eternal, still tear, and silent gestures that spoke more eloquently than any tongue.

I recall when I was a small child, and my hands would freeze during the season of bitter cold and snow. She would take them between her own vein-crossed palms, rubbing them together and breathing into them from her own warm breath until the heat and vitality returned to them. Her warmth was a double blessing: the physical heat of the body and the profound warmth of love and tenderness.

My grandmother's fingers were coarse and furrowed, steeped in the sweat of a life dedicated to labor; they moved the wick of the fire amidst coals redolent with the scent of pine, and turned the supple dough until its surface flushed red, mimicking the petals of a poppy. With those hands, she fed

children who eventually grew into the knights and riders of a radiant tomorrow.

Did I not say that my grandmother's hand spoke, conversed, and engaged in dialogue? Her face was a mirror of her hand; a parchment etched with wrinkles and roughness, yet carrying within its folds all the suppleness and softness of spring herbs before the ogre of subjugation and suffering launched its assault upon them.

My grandmother had been exceptionally beautiful in her youth; I used to envision her as one of the legendary queens of beauty. I came to know her well when she was already toothless, her mouth resembling that of a newborn infant. I sensed she wished she still possessed her teeth. Often, we would provide her with the soft centers of the bread so she might manage to chew them. Frequently, she would snatch an arts magazine from me to gaze at the cinematic faces within. Suddenly, she would pause before a smiling face and begin to count the star's teeth—be it Vivien Leigh or Ingrid Bergman—whispering:

— *"One... and the One is God... two... three..."*

And so she would continue until the count was complete, letting out a satisfied sigh, her face glowing as if she had reclaimed her old smile before her teeth had fallen away. At that moment, her face would return to its youthful, child-like innocence once more.

Was it a deficiency of calcium? Malnutrition? Or perhaps the exhaustive burden of frequent childbirth? Or was it that all these factors combined had taken their toll on her, as they did on so many grandmothers of her generation?

Whenever I recall my grandmother—the mistress of that hand steeped in the toil of life—I relive beautiful moments that I long to "arrest" (preserve) within the sanctuary of my heart and memory, so that her life may endure through mine.

I recall one day, during a routine raid by the French military searching for *Mujahideen* in the city of Constantine, a soldier's hand happened to touch her skin. Once the patrol had withdrawn, she hurried to the bathhouse to scrub her arm with an intensity akin to fire and water, as if the touch of the "infidel" soldier had fundamentally polluted her very soul. She was convinced that if she did not cleanse it immediately, her limb would wither away, or she would be cast into the fires of hell; at the very least, she harbored a sacred fear that such a touch would permanently paralyze her arm.

On another occasion, she graced us with a visit on a radiant morning, carrying a basket brimming with various fruits and delicacies. My mother was struck with bewilderment, for it was not my grandmother's custom to venture out on such errands; even my uncle, her own son, used to prohibit her from doing so out of a constant fear that she might overexert herself, stumble in the street, or be struck by a reckless vehicle.

To our questioning gazes, she replied:

— "This is fruit I have shared between you and your brother's children. I purchased it with my own personal funds."

My mother smiled and inquired:

— "And since when have you possessed your own money, Mother?"

My grandmother answered:

— "It is the four 'Doros' [7]—the lingering remainder of my dowry (Mahr) from your father. He had neglected to hand it to me when we were wed... forty years ago."

My grandmother had birthed many sons, yet they all passed away before reaching their tenth year—but only after each had committed the entirety of the Book of God to memory. For this reason, whenever a neighbor died, she would strictly forbid the women from wailing or raising their voices in loud lamentation, saying:

— "Do not weep for my son; he was a bearer of God's Word, and he is surely in Paradise now. One day, I shall find him there, offering me a drink in the Gardens of Eternal Contentment."

When my grandmother lay upon her deathbed, she whispered her final wish:

— "I hope I do not depart this life until the skies clear and the weather settles, so that my son Mohamed is spared the heavy toil of my burial, and his pristine white qashabiya remains unstained by the mire of the graveyard."

7 A traditional unit of currencyt.

Aunt Bayya

Aunt Bayya was a formidable and enigmatic personality. She held convictions so resolute that no one dared to challenge her or argue against them. She sanctified roots, customs, and traditions, rejecting even the slightest scent of change in any direction. She and my father were siblings, yet they stood as polar opposites in every regard. Despite this, my father respected her deeply and consulted her on many issues, even if it were out of a sense of duty rather than a true need for her counsel. He was often visibly distressed by her tension, her anger, or her profound lack of understanding, yet she remained his only sister.

Her speech was a tapestry woven from proverbs. Whenever my mother inquired about her well-being, she would respond with a heavy, long-drawn sigh:

— *"We are eating for now, and waiting for death."*

This constant mention of death unsettled me; it felt like a popular expression of world-weariness and disgust, as if the entirety of human existence were reduced merely to the simple acts of consuming food and awaiting the grave.

Yet, despite this, whenever my mother sent me to her house for a chore or to check on her health, I was never unhappy. it was not because I harbored a particular love for her—for I was always anxious about her perpetual opposition to my father—but rather because her personality fascinated me. I was equally dazzled by her impeccably tidy home and by her husband.

Her husband was a judge or a senior clerk—I do not recall the exact title—a retired official from the French administration. He was an extremely conservative man, a

traditionalist who rejected any thought that advocated for change or renewal. He was a follower of a Sufi order, believing firmly in class distinctions and viewing them as the immutable will of God in the universe. "Why rebel against the decree of God?" he would often ask. He believed that people's livelihoods were predetermined from the moment of birth, and that God's wisdom dictated that some should be rich and others poor. My aunt was entirely convinced by his worldview.

The moment she opened the door for me, I would be overcome by a sense of profound awe, as if I were stepping into a sacred sanctuary. My aunt would take me by one hand, while holding the index finger of her other hand to her lips, signaling me to maintain absolute silence. She would lead me directly to the kitchen to ask first about her brother's health, then my mother's, and the rest of the family, without even waiting for a reply. Suddenly, she would look at me with a gaze that was more stern than affectionate and ask:

— Are you hungry?

As she spoke, she would prepare for me a piece of bread with butter and jam. I would not answer, for my eyes had already stolen a glance through the partially open door of the sitting room. There, I would behold a sight that never failed to dazzle me: her husband, immersed in a world of pristine, white cleanliness. He wore gold-rimmed glasses that seemed to perch precariously on the tip of his large nose. He was surrounded by stacks of books—some in yellowed Arabic script and others in French—along with copies of the newspaper Al-Balagh, the voice of the conservative Sufi movement. Between his hands was a cup of coffee. The entire scene breathed an air of religious and intellectual seclusion, redolent with the aroma of Sufi mysticism, sanctity, and a quiet sense of self-pride.

My aunt was profoundly swayed by her husband's convictions; echoing his stance, she harbored a fierce opposition to the reformist ideals introduced by Ben Badis and his intellectual circle. This lay at the very heart of the discord that perpetually ignited between her and my father. My father stood as one of the architects of the "New Awakening" championed in Constantine by Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis—a movement dedicated to clearing away the cobwebs of superstition and innovations that had entangled Islamic thought and heritage. It was a clarion call for renewal, anchored in the restoration of the authentic values of freedom, knowledge, and justice.

My aunt, however, perceived these changes through the prism of her conservative husband, who sanctified the French administration so long as it ensured his personal tranquility. To her, he was the quintessential figure of the "old guard," fearing no transformation more than the loss of his privileged status. The administration provided him with a dignified salary and a life of relative comfort. He was even honored by recurring invitations to national celebrations, which he wore like a badge of distinction. These were privileges he found impossible to relinquish in exchange for the radical ideas Ben Badis promoted—ideas concerning the construction of a society where a woman's role was no less than a man's, and where the rural and urban dwellers stood on equal footing. Ben Badis's vision proposed a fundamental restructuring of society, a prospect that threatened established interests.

On one occasion, my aunt visited us at my father's invitation. He sought to consult her on a momentous matter involving one of his daughters—my eldest sister. My childish curiosity led me to eavesdrop on their dialogue:

My father began:

— "A venerable scholar has brought a proposal for my daughter on behalf of one of his young disciples—a teacher. I wish to hear your counsel."

My aunt inquired:

— A young teacher? And from where does he hail?

My father replied:

— He is one of the sons of the Desert.

My aunt interrupted him with a tone of visible condemnation:

— From the Desert? Has Constantine run out of men and youth that we must seek a suitor from the Desert? Has he proposed before the sons of the noble and great families within the city?

My father answered:

— My daughter has her own opinion as well; she knows him, for they pursued their studies at the same school. Ultimately, mutual understanding and righteousness are the true foundation.

My aunt pressed on with her interrogation:

— And what does he possess? What is his lineage and his ancestral pedigree?

My father replied with a tone nearing anger:

He possesses nothing of material wealth. He is a simple, poor teacher who owns nothing but the certificate he returned with from Al-Zaytuna University in Tunis.

My aunt scoffed:

— And what manner of certificate or knowledge is this that the youth of today possess? And how, pray tell, will she live with him while he is destitute?

My father said firmly:

— The Imam once told us: marry while you are poor, and God will provide for you.

My aunt remained enveloped in silence for a brief interval, then posed her next inquiry:

— "And what dowry (Mahr) have you two settled upon?"

My father replied, and within his tone lay a trace of palpable embarrassment:

— "The dowry, in truth, shall be merely symbolic; for as I have already stated, the man is of impeccable righteousness."

My aunt erupted in a fury:

— "A symbolic dowry? What manner of righteous man is this who does not even possess the means to provide a dowry for his bride? You are casting your daughter into the abyss of the unknown simply because one of these 'new scholars' has vouched for him and lauded him in your presence. And what business do these scholars have meddling in the private lives of people's daughters? If he is so exceedingly righteous, let the scholar marry his own daughter to him then!"

My father was incensed by her concluding remark, yet he suppressed his indignation and maintained his composure, as was his unwavering custom. She, however, persisted with the same sharp, biting tone:

My Aunt:

— "You have yet to inform me of the specific dowry you agreed upon. Is the dowry not a fundamental prerequisite for marriage?"

My Father:

— "Indeed, it is a fundamental prerequisite. However, there is no harm in it being symbolic as a gesture of benevolence toward the youth. Daughters are not merchandise to be bought and sold, nor are they livestock to be bargained over. Furthermore, I am not the solitary individual who shall marry off one of his daughters in this fashion; my friends and colleagues within the Association shall likewise adopt this principle, so that we may finally put an end to these corrupt and destructive customs—such as the exorbitant inflation of dowries and the imposition of impossible conditions."

The discourse reached its conclusion at that point, and my aunt departed from our house on that day enveloped in a cloud of profound indignation. My sister ultimately wed that impoverished young teacher, following my father's dedicated assistance in overseeing every facet of the wedding—from the initial arrangements and preparations to the very ceremony itself.

Indeed, the dowry bestowed upon my sister remained purely symbolic; it consisted of nothing more than a collection of poetic anthologies by the romantic poet, Mahmoud Taha.

I find myself asking today, with the benefit of hindsight: Was my sister so desperate or deemed an "old maid" that my father felt compelled to resort to such unconventional measures? No. Was she plain or lacking in grace and beauty? No. Was she uneducated or void of intellect? No.

On the contrary, my sister was a luminous and noble young woman in the prime of her seventeen years. Was my father the one in the right, or was it my aunt who possessed the truth? I cannot say for certain. Yet, within the secret depths of my soul, there remained an enduring halo of admiration and wonder for Aunt Bayya. She was a woman of formidable character, staunchly defending specific principles she held with absolute conviction, particularly in an era when women were expected to be merely submissive followers, devoid of independent thought. Her principles were a vital part of her personal truth, as valid as any opposing ideals.

However, later in life, and to my profound and lingering regret, I discovered that some of those very scholars who once preached these lofty, ascetic ideals to the common folk chose to marry off their own sons and daughters into families of immense and excessive material wealth.

My Uncle and the Long Street

My uncle was not merely a relative by blood; he was a living embodiment of the most profound human emotions: tenderness, love, kindness, and a rare delicacy of spirit. All these virtues resided within this man who was my uncle, yet fortune was never his companion in this life. He possessed no luck in matters of the heart, nor in any other sphere of his existence.

Experience records that everything my uncle bestowed upon those around him—his tireless care and his gentle, warm emotions—was never truly reciprocated. According to the harsh laws of "give and take," it seemed as though the man had been created only to weave love out of the threads of hatred and tenderness out of the cold fabric of cruelty. He was a man who offered emotions in their purest, most unadulterated forms, yet he received from his days only their bitter antitheses. Throughout his life, he reaped nothing but the gall of envy, the irrational hostility of others, and a desperate, inexplicable longing for revenge against him.

Life was exceptionally harsh toward him from the very beginning, starting with the premature loss of his parents, followed by a profound and persistent lack of understanding from those who surrounded him. He lived with us in our family home. We did not address him as "Uncle," but rather as "Khoya al-Sharif" (Our Noble Brother), for my own elder brothers had not yet arrived to bring honor or standing to our small family. My father loved him and cared for him as he cared for us, his own children, with the sincere and protective devotion of a parent. He was like a son to my father; yet love—when perceived through a certain tragic lens—can sometimes

become the catalyst for the greatest of human misfortunes. The ancients were not mistaken when they observed: "From love comes that which kills."

The love that played a pivotal role in the unfolding tragedy of my beloved uncle—or perhaps our brother whom my mother had not yet birthed—was a love of a different and more complex nature. It was a state of psychological "overcompensation" that took possession of my father's psyche. He endeavored to cast my uncle, then a youth of fourteen in the nascent spring of his years, into a grand and rigid project, charting the entire course of his life and future without ever once seeking his consultation or consent.

Is it not an enduring truth that the interests of the young are almost always held captive in the hands of their elders?

I remember my father saying to him one day, his voice thick with a desperate conviction:

— "It is for you, and for your sole benefit, that I undertake all of this. Knowledge is the only true horizon for your future. Tunisia is not as remote as you might imagine; it is right there, beside us. I can see my own condition with a painful clarity; I regard my educated peers with a mixture of envy, longing, and a quiet sense of awe. I hold my own father responsible, for he did not insist upon my education. Every time I behold a man carrying a newspaper or a book, a part of me yearns to be him. I constantly dwell upon the thought that if only I were educated, my situation—and that of my Italian master, the builder—would not be as it is today. I am a man whose formal instruction never transcended the primary level; thus, he controls my destiny, issuing orders as he pleases while I obey him with a submissive heart. His tools are the paper and the pen, while my

task is back-breaking labor. I found myself adrift and unable to decipher the script in the raging sea of life—a life that respects nothing but minds and formal certificates."

Then he added, his words steeped in a profound sense of regret:

— "Was I truly wrong when I sought to send you away to acquire knowledge and study, so that you would not become a hollow replica of myself, falling into the very same trap that claimed me?"

My father would utter those words with a heavy heart, then look toward my mother as if seeking from her a silent, validating approval. My father's project, which he perceived through the lens of his own burning desire, then began to manifest. He saw my uncle's face flushing with the red blood of youthful rebellion—a rebellion against the project imposed upon him, which he neither desired nor understood. He did not wish to leave, and my father was profoundly unhappy with this; he could not endure his brother's refusal. This opposition and resistance at that difficult age—adolescence—transformed my father's care into a stark clash of wills, where the conflict ended in a painful separation.

My father would say: "I know what is best for you." Meanwhile, my uncle—or my elder brother—would remain enveloped in silence amidst my mother's tears and our own suppressed, childish cries. He eventually withdrew into himself.

And then, one day, the "Long Street" emerged. The deep, hungry street bared its fangs to embrace him, and my uncle walked out, disappearing into its cavernous mysteries.

From that day forward, we no longer saw my uncle except once or twice a year. After he had matured into a young man, he would visit us only when my father was away from home. He would arrive laden with delicious delicacies and gifts, laughing heartily, jumping to embrace my mother in a state of happiness that defies description. My mother would rejoice at the sight of him—a joy akin to that of a mother whose lost child has finally returned.

But the joy was always short-lived. We realized all too well that my uncle's absence would be long. He was not absent because he did not care for us, but because he was unable to endure the crisis that had developed between him and my father—a crisis that had turned into a financial strain or a deep personal rift. He became a man of the "Long Street," frequenting the long sessions of the military quarters and the rhythmic beats of the Malouf and Al-Hadeeh music.

He would frequent those sessions with his companions—those who had resolved to join the marginalized fringe of society in their quest for a life detached from the oppressive system. They fled toward a luminous world of human connection, where a thirst for angelic purity and honorable sentiments consumed them. They retreated into their own beautiful realm, turning their backs on the margins to inhabit a world of love, mysticism, and Sufi devotion—a world that made them feel like saints or celestial beings in an existence otherwise rife with ignorance, demons, and a bitter reality.

On one occasion, I was walking with my noble uncle, and we entered one of the popular cafes. He was searching for a friend with whom he had an appointment but could not locate. He called out to someone present:

— "O Mohamed..."

I asked him with the persistent curiosity of a child:

— "Do you truly know his name is Mohamed? You called him by his name!"

He answered me with a gentle laugh:

— "His name might not be Mohamed, and perhaps it is. But we invoke the name 'Mohamed' for everyone we do not know, as a blessing from the Messenger of God (PBUH). Everyone remains a 'Mohamed' until we learn otherwise."

I did not fully grasp the nuance of his idea then, but I later understood the psychological reversal at play. The colonizers and orientalists utilized the name "Mohamed" as a generic label for every Algerian man, and "Fatima" for every Algerian woman, as a tool for mockery and dehumanization. Yet, our people took those very names and transformed them into a badge of pride and an emblem of sacred belonging to the Prophet, turning the colonizer's intent entirely on its head.

When my uncle passed away, I had blossomed into a young woman. I grieved for him with a depth that surpassed even the grief I felt for my father. When I witnessed the tears of those who had once been arrogant before his death, my heart shattered. He had dissolved into the essence of his own sorrow, and his beautiful memories—even if he had never tasted much of actual love—were the only remnants of his illusions.

He was, in truth, a lover of love itself, even if he never tasted it.

My Maternal Uncle and Leader Atatürk

My maternal uncle was a man of profound culture, both in his intellect and his conduct. I came to recognize his true worth through the aura of reverence and wisdom he commanded; he served as the primary counselor for every member of the family, our neighbors, and even for strangers who sought his guidance. He was the consultant to whom everyone turned in their various quandaries, whether they resided within the ancient heart of Constantine or along its rugged outskirts.

I truly grasped this man's significance on the day I first comprehended the intrinsic value of reading and the weight of the press. One day, I found myself leafing through newspapers, scanning their boldest headlines. I observed a vast collection in my uncle's possession—though their deeper meanings eluded my young mind at the time. There were titles in Arabic and others in foreign tongues: *La Dépêche*, *Al-Basa'ir*, *Al-Shu'la*, *Al-Minshar*, *Al-Zahra*, *Al-Nahda*, *Al-Usbu'*, *Al-Wazir*, and *Al-Thuraya*. The majority of these publications hailed from neighboring Tunisia.

Among those Tunisian periodicals that I cherished—reading them even long after they had grown dated—was *Al-Zahw*. It was a satirical and humorous gazette. My uncle would often recite excerpts of its content aloud to the household, sharing the simple delight of reading with us all. It was through the pages of *Al-Zahw* that I first discovered how the pen could elicit laughter while simultaneously enlightening the reader through sharp wit and a masterful, sardonic style.

My uncle would return home from his work in the "Arbaeen Sharif" neighborhood, which sat adjacent to our own and was named in honor of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis. I would

invariably see him carrying a bundle of those newspapers in his left hand, while his right was occupied by a large, yellow watermelon. His countenance was always luminous, defined by a smile that revealed teeth of a pristine, dazzling whiteness. He took meticulous care of them, as if recognizing they were a vital component of his cheerful persona. He wore a red Turkish *Chechia* (Fez), its silken tassel trailing playfully back over his dark hair, and a white silk *Qashabiya* that announced from afar a character combining distinction and civility—the quintessential Constantinian man.

My uncle was a man of many words, yet he was never a babbler of empty speech. His conversation was always anchored in significant and diverse themes. He carried himself with humility among all people, stopping to converse with everyone he knew, observing everything, and critiquing much. He was frequently irritated by certain behaviors he deemed unfitting for the residents of a civilized city.

Upon returning from his work as a druggist (pharmacist), his pockets were always brimming with stories about those who had entered the pharmacy to purchase medicine or those whose ailments he had witnessed. These human examples he encountered daily became the subjects of his domestic discourse and analysis—a comprehensive report presented to his family. Meanwhile, he rejected the way most men compartmentalized their lives outside the home; it was as if he sought to educate his family by guiding them and providing a shield against falling into the same behaviors that annoyed him, turning others into cautionary examples of a backward society.

Once, he was speaking with my mother, his only sister, as she was purchasing some medicine. He said:

— "Imagine... a woman came to the pharmacy today, weeping. She was buying medicine for her small son whose hand had been scorched. I asked her: 'How did your son get burned? Where were you when it happened? What use are you in the house? You are the reason for his neglect; surely you were busy gossiping with your neighbors at the time!'"

My uncle uttered these words while casting a searching gaze upon those present, as if attempting to measure the impact of his rebuke. His wife offered a smile of weary tolerance and remarked:

— "The poor soul has already endured a bitter lesson; was her misfortune not enough that you must add this sharp reproach to her grief? It was merely the decree of fate— Mektoub."

My uncle erupted at his wife, visibly agitated, as if he had been awaiting precisely such a remark to fulfill his didactic mission:

— "Who was it that spoke such a thing? You commit grave errors and then seek to absolve yourselves by hanging them upon the hook of fate and predestination! Oh, the depths of such ignorance!"

And my mother, acting as her brother's sole ally and the one person capable of soothing his fiery spirit, intervened:

— "My brother speaks the truth. Imam Ben Badis once instructed us that in such matters, extreme caution must walk hand-in-hand with faith in destiny. For these children were brought into this world to live, not to be taken before their time as small buds."

My maternal uncle was, as I came to perceive in later years, a man whose intellect far outpaced his own era. He seemed to inhabit a society of his own crafting—an ideal world fashioned from his imagination, his dreams, and his refined culture. His daily communion with global events through newspapers—which filtered into the country from France and neighboring Tunisia and Morocco—or through his exquisite "Schneider" brand radio, served as his vital window to the wider world. His wife would meticulously wipe the dust from that radio, tending to it with greater devotion than she accorded any other piece of furniture, even the ancient mother-of-pearl heirlooms that adorned the house and most traditional Constantinian homes.

My uncle harbored no desire to offend his neighbors, kin, or beloved companions when he saw fit to intervene in their conduct. He held a steadfast conviction that his calling as an enlightened citizen was to reform the tapestry of society, beginning first with those nearest to his heart.

He was the man who would willingly purchase pungent hot peppers at an exorbitant price, while acquiring ripe yellow bananas at a meager cost, exclaiming with a sharp, ironic conviction:

— "Behold! I purchase ailment at a premium, while forsaking health despite its affordability!"

Predictably, the reactions to his interventions varied: ranging from sheer exasperation and annoyance at this "meddlesome" soul who intruded upon private affairs, to profound gratitude and a sincere belief in the wisdom of his counsel.

What stirred my profound wonder in later years, once I had attained the age of self-awareness, was the extraordinary courage with which my uncle challenged societal norms. He

refused to capitulate to any social or intellectual pressure; whatever he held as a firm conviction, he would manifest and defend. It was he, for instance, who compelled my grandfather to cease his labors upon sensing the encroachment of frailty and old age, enrolling him instead in the *Kuttāb* (Quranic school) alongside my mother. There, the patriarch—having already crossed the threshold of his seventies—committed the Holy Quran to memory, spanning from *Surat al-Fatiha* to *Surat Maryam*.

How I cherished my time within my uncle's residence, gazing tirelessly at a grand golden frame that housed the portrait of the leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. I recall a peculiar sense of unease regarding the narrative my mother related about that very image. When she was but a young girl, my grandfather once discovered her admiring the man's features in the portrait with visible fascination. Consumed by sudden fury, he seized her by her hair and dragged her from the chamber, bellowing in rage:

— *"What is it you find so alluring in this visage? You gaze upon a strange man with utter shamelessness; naught remains but for you to ogle his likeness in the public streets!"*

My mother would always vibrate with the resonance of that memory, gazing upon that portrait with an admiration that never withered—the gaze of a child who had not yet crossed the threshold of her tenth year, possessed of an aesthetic sensibility that had not yet fully crystallized. In that comprehensive aesthetic image, she perceived nothing but a striking and conspicuous outward beauty.

I came to realize much later that the woman in the lands of Islam—whether in Turkey or in Constantine—was dispossessed

of even her most rudimentary rights, including the very capacity for aesthetic appreciation, let alone the right to claim such beauty through either intellectual mastery or heartfelt passion.

Ben Badis the Sanhaji

In my previous discourse concerning the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema and its educational mission, I touched only briefly upon the nature of the relationship that anchored the inhabitants of the city and their children to this institution—my father being among them. However, the subject itself necessitates a more concentrated and equitable pause to reflect upon the city's renaissance, and perhaps to offer a few words concerning the master of this institution and the architects of its struggle. I refer specifically to the intellectual facet of his combat: the Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis.

It is this intellectual component that preoccupies me most as I stir the embers of my school memories, which I am keen to forge into a vital link within the realms of culture and literature. These memories can never be disentangled from the hardships and the lived events—or even the pervasive politics—that were never absent from our lives. This remains true even if the perspective leans toward the superficial or the subjective, or rests purely upon the tremors of emotion.

My sentiment regarding the labor of writing about this man—the teacher, the educator—is one of profound pride, appreciation, and reverence. It is a deep-seated feeling of love, particularly as I find myself today heavily indebted to him. His scientific awakening was the ripe fruit of his labor, and a noble extension of his struggle and objectives.

This daunting task compels me, firstly, to approach this genre of writing with profound humility, and secondly, to be uncompromisingly honest in expressing the pride I felt—and continue to feel—toward "Abdelhamid." He is the one who

forged an eternal bond between student and mentor through his intellectual convictions and the resonance of those convictions within popular circles, ensuring their continuity and expansion generation after generation.

Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis was, as Dr. Turki Rabah elucidated in his scholarly study of the Imam, a personality that unified the characteristics of two titans of the Arab-Islamic world: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Mohamed Abduh. He succeeded in attaining a superior degree of success in his reformist mission for several fundamental reasons, most notably:

First: Ben Badis launched his renaissance from a rooted local foundation, focusing on it as a solid cornerstone, whereas Al-Afghani and Abduh prioritized pan-national goals before establishing a local groundwork.

Second: Ben Badis's movement concentrated on the popular base, while Mohamed Abduh, for instance, contented himself with influencing the intellectual elite, who formed the majority of his students.

History has taught us that the truly great and the geniuses typically emerge only when a people's crises intensify—crises marked by the absence of education, the spread of intellectual dispossession, the erosion of freedom, and the resulting plague of ignorance, illiteracy, and superstition. Such conditions allow military and political occupation to seize a nation, its resources, its identity, its history, and its culture. These are the very precursors that precede the emergence of such great men, for the need for them becomes urgent and pressing. As individuals, they represent the stage of maturity and awareness within the

movement of history; they are the harbingers of deliverance in epochs of human suffering.

The Ben Badis movement, emerging from the core issues and concerns of the Algerian people across the entirety of the national territory—and not merely within Constantine—interacted profoundly with the people's aspirations. Although it was a religious association in name, this movement, from its very inception, labored to establish a comprehensive curriculum for the education and guidance of the masses. It sought to combat that massive residue of stagnation and superstitions that had historically clung to the nation’s religious thought.

In truth, it adopted within its methodology and strategy a holistic vision of the intellectual, political, social, and economic facets of Algerian society. It was a complete civilizational project for the nation, commencing with education, guidance, and enlightenment—objectives and principles that paved the way for the goals of subsequent political movements and parties. Ultimately, it cleared the path for the Great November Generation to achieve victory through its monumental liberation revolution, with absolute nobility and merit, and with a reason and a will far removed from states of blind rebellion or intellectual terrorism.

Nationalists in Algeria, including the architect of this civilizational project, never forgot the strategy of the occupier, who from the beginning utilized every conceivable means and method to distort the history of the Algerian people. The occupier sought to undermine the nation's independent personality by targeting its core values and constants, aiming to entrench the identity and culture of the colonizer in its place.

The nation's intellectuals, Ben Badis among them, also do not forget the words of the French King Louis-Philippe when he received Bishop Dupuch in Algeria to inaugurate missionary activities, saying:

— *"The Arabs will not become French—meaning the Algerians—unless they become Christians, and that must happen through us."*

Then the King continued:

— *"Let life return to Africa."*

For in the view of the occupation, Africa only possessed "life" if it were Christian. Likewise, nationalists—Ben Badis among them—do not forget the words of General Domon when he entered Algiers as a victor, addressing the priests:

— *"You have reopened with us the door for Christianity in Africa."*

This declaration later served as the justification for the conversion of mosques and religious endowments (*Awqaf*) into churches, and the cancellation of the legal recognition of Islamic holidays. Did they not transform the "Ketchoua Mosque" in the Casbah of the capital into a cathedral immediately after the occupation of Algeria, following the martyrdom of more than a hundred worshippers who had barricaded themselves inside its walls?

Regarding this, one of our eminent scholars, Imam Mustafa bin al-Kababti, said with profound pain and even greater defiance:

— *"Though worship within our mosque has been transformed, its Lord shall never be transformed in our hearts."*

Spanning more than fifty years, these insights did not remain as mere intellectual fruits in my mind without pauses for deep reflection and contemplation. Frequently, they would transport me back to my childhood, where I find that not a single significant thread has escaped the tapestry of my memory.

It happened that I fell ill one day when I was but a five-year-old child, suffering from an acute chest cold. In those days, such bouts would stir a profound dread among physicians, for they were almost certain to deteriorate into tuberculosis before the widespread availability of vaccinations. Thus, I was not treated with any degree of seriousness at home; instead, I was admitted to the hospital, where the medical staff and nurses were the "White Sisters"—nuns clad in their long blue habits and white headpieces that bore a striking resemblance to the wings of birds. My mother was forced to admit me to the hospital, yielding to necessity with a heavy heart.

My mother would later recount to me:

— "*My daughter, you were enveloped in a shroud of special care and attention within that hospital. I was perpetually anxious because you were the only patient whose hair they did not shave—a measure they took with others for fear of lice, which were rampant at the time due to widespread malnutrition. Not only that, but the 'Sisters' took singular care of you, combing your hair every day and adorning it with a silken ribbon that matched its color. They also insisted that your nourishment be distinct, your bed kept pristine with linens changed every week, and the garments you wore inside the hospital were the very same ones you wore outside; meanwhile, the rest of the patients were clad in uniform white gowns that resembled nothing so much as flour sacks*."

"*All of this brought me a sense of joy as I visited you, for it placed you in a singular and distinguished category. You had won their profound admiration with your keen wit, your gracious character, and your persistent, luminous smile—for they were, indeed, practitioners of humanitarianism*."

My mother proceeded with her recollection:

— "*Three full months elapsed, by which time you had attained a state of complete recovery. Notwithstanding your health, every instance in which I requested your formal discharge was met with sudden obstruction, marked by procrastination and the presentation of feeble excuses. I found myself utterly incapable of deciphering the motives behind their refusal, until that fateful day when you revealed to me that the nurses, supplementary to all their pampering and meticulous care, were in the habit of taking you with them on Sundays to attend the Mass celebrated within the hospital chapel. They had instructed you in the memorization and chanting of Christian prayers—prayers which you persisted in reciting for a significant duration even after your return to the sanctuary of our home*."

Concluding her narrative, my mother let out a heavy sigh and remarked:

— *"The nurses shed many tears as they bid you farewell, yet I wept with a bitterness far greater than theirs. For in that moment, I felt with absolute certainty that I would have lost your soul forever had you remained in their company for even a single day more."*

The Association for Education and Islamic Teaching

The "Association for Education and Teaching," where I first grasped the rudiments of literacy, stands as a monumental pillar among our nation's educational and instructional institutions. Its influence was woven into the very fabric of the country under the visionary leadership of Abdelhamid Ben Badis—a project fueled by spiritual struggle and a profound moral and material solidarity among the sons of the soil. After all, were they not the true beneficiaries of this awakening?

These institutions were never merely buildings of stone and mortar; they constituted a comprehensive civilizational project. They emerged as a swift and decisive response to the arbitrary and oppressive colonial practices directed against our nation's heritage—practices that the colonial administration had relentlessly pursued since the French occupation of Algeria in **1830**.

Our school in Constantine was named as such specifically because "Education" (*Tarbiya*) preceded "Instruction" (*Ta'lim*). This was a deliberate choice to harmonize with the customs and the conservative, yet enlightened, thought of the people regarding the education of girls alongside boys. Its noble objective was to ensure that the female half of Algerian society would not remain an obstacle in the path of progress—revolutionary principles that were significantly ahead of their time. These ideals defied the harsh conditions of that era with an intellectual courage of the highest order. Indeed, had fate not claimed the life of the Great Builder and founder of these bastions prematurely, his project would have taken even bolder strides; most notably, the strategic plan to send missions of

Algerian girl students to complete their secondary education abroad.

It so happened by serendipity that one of these educational missions was destined for Damascus, the Syrian capital—specifically toward an institution known as "Dawhat al-Adab" (The Orchard of Letters). This establishment was presided over by Her Highness Princess Aadila, the granddaughter of the Great Algerian Emir Abdelkader. To this day, I still cherish a copy of the Imam's correspondence regarding this matter. Furthermore, during my university years, I conducted a scholarly study on him, an assignment entrusted to me by my mentor, Dr. Ammar Talbi, who remains to this day a teacher exceedingly dear to my heart.

The paramount objective of this school was to sow the seeds of national sentiment and to deepen cultural consciousness. We, the children and students, became the very vanguard of this awareness, notwithstanding the rigorous surveillance imposed by the municipal police of Constantine upon both the school and the Association. Every time we organized a celebration for a religious or historical occasion, or performed a play or a new national anthem, the atmosphere would vibrate with a patriotic fervor that shook the emotions of parents and students alike. The colonial administration, in its repressive blindness, made no distinction between the young and the old.

I recall vividly an instance during a celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (*Mawlid al-Nabi*), when we were strictly prohibited from celebrating at the "Green Mosque". However, the teachers and parents resolved to defy the ban and proceed with the festivities regardless. The students lined up within the Green Mosque, intending to chant an anthem titled: *"In the Pursuit of Glory and Nations We Live and Thrive"*...

I was a small girl among the ranks of the students, and one of the men lifted me onto his shoulder so I could recite the poem with a burning passion. I remember vividly that one of the man's hands was amputated; he clapped with his single hand against his side to cheer me on, a sight that drew all eyes toward him. I only learned years later that this man was the Great Mujahid and scholar, Sheikh Al-Shadhli al-Makki—may God have mercy on his soul.

I met him again much later, during an intellectual seminar in Constantine in the early **1970**s. I was there with the great Algerian thinker and philosopher Malek Bennabi. I was honored to receive the same enthusiastic applause from his single hand as I delivered a lecture on the subject of marriage to foreigners—a lecture I had prepared at the request of the late President Houari Boumediene, through Professor Mouloud Qassem Nait Belkacem. This followed the President's reading of a series of my articles in El Djeich magazine and other publications.

My aim then was to break one of the most sensitive taboos of the time, highlighting the psychological and social risks that marriage to foreigners posed to the cohesion of the Algerian family and society at large, whether Islamic or otherwise.

That lecture and the seminar itself sparked a massive wave of reactions, both positive and negative. Among the negative responses were attacks from certain French-language newspapers; I believe it was Le Monde. I was defended by Professor Mouloud Qassem, who shielded me from the vitriol of certain female writers—Algerians who wrote in French and were married to foreigners—whose reactions were steeped in a particular kind of French-influenced resentment of the darkest variety, simply because we were defending the integrity of the

Algerian family and its national constants, refusing to let them dissolve into the culture of the recent occupier and its nefarious schemes. But let me return to the Association for Education and Teaching. We were an addition to those cultural, athletic, and scouting activities. We received a diverse education that included scientific and humanistic subjects, alongside religious and historical studies—even the French language. We also studied domestic science and music, just like the schools overseen by the French administration. We, the girls, sat alongside the boys in the same classrooms without any sense of unease, preconceived notions, or suspicion. The values that governed everyone were those of discipline and mutual respect—concepts of liberation and experimentation, not of coercion or commands. Our school mornings would begin with a slogan that defined our identity: "Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our country." We hailed knowledge in its essence, regardless of the form or color it would take in the future.

The classrooms were attended by a rotating staff of young, militant teachers. Some were graduates of Ben Badis himself, while others came from Al-Zaytuna University in Tunis or Al-Azhar in Cairo.

My Mentor, Ahmed Hammani

I was in the sixth grade when a teacher joined our ranks of whom it was said he held the "Worldly Degree" from Tunis—the contemporary equivalent of a Licentiate. However, it was far more than a mere certificate of graduation; it was a testament to his immense intellectual volunteerism at the Al-Zaytuna University.

This mentor was a man of striking appearance: fair-skinned with piercing blue eyes and distinct Berber features. Yet, he possessed an Arab mind and tongue, and a heart anchored in Islamic certainty. His black hair was partially covered by a red fez, beneath which white jasmine blossoms—which he picked every morning from the garden of his brother-in-law, the martyr Ahmed Boushmal—would often fall. He would begin every lesson with a joyous, natural philosophy, an exploration of beauty, and a refined taste for art and literature. He was at once a compassionate father, a strict and brave knight, and a master of his pedagogical craft.

This man was the Great Scholar, Sheikh Ahmed Hammani. I mention him specifically not just because I studied under him in primary school, but because I remained his student even as a woman and a mother in the university. After our emergence from the War of Liberation, it was he who paved the way for Mujahideen and women of the revolution to participate in university entrance exams. Were these not the very heroes who had chosen the path of sacrifice for the homeland, seeking the "Great Witness" and carrying the slogan of the noble leader and martyr, Larbi Ben M’hidi:

"*No knowledge without freedom, and no degree without dignity*." The certificates they held were forged from our very wounds—could anything be more beautiful?

When we emerged from the fires of the Revolution, I never imagined that I would see my mentor again. He had nearly perished in prison due to the diseases caused by torture and the harsh, unjust sentences he endured. Yet, years later, we were reunited as he delivered a speech in the liberated zone of the Fourth Province, welcoming a group of Mujahideen who had recently been released from the dungeons. Among them, sitting beside the late President Ferhat Abbas, were the Mujahid Madani Abassi, Professor Mohamed Fares, and others. We met in a hall in one of the buildings of "Diyar al-Mahsoul" in the Al-Madania neighborhood—formerly known as "Clos Salembier"—in the capital Algiers.

The Sheikh beamed with pride as he looked upon his "daughter" and the fruit of his own teaching and upbringing. My mentor, Ahmed Hammani, remained both a father and a teacher to me. As I grew older and our paths converged in the march of national building and reconstruction, we worked together on numerous intellectual, educational, and social projects. Yet, his gaze remained fixed in that paternalistic, guiding mold—a perspective that occasionally disapproved of any divergence of opinion or intellectual independence from my side. Despite my deep respect, I was often pained by this paternalistic rigidness. After every opinion I voiced that contradicted his own, I would seek his pardon, even if his critiques were harsh and occasionally caused me significant friction with certain opposing intellectual currents.

I suffered on many occasions, yet I never retreated from my convictions. As the days passed, I found myself wondering:

—is it possible for a mentor to be unsettled by the courage of his student's ideas? Is he not the one who implanted within her the love of thought and the perpetual aspiration for the better? Is he not the one who taught her that knowledge is not the exclusive property of one father or one teacher, but is a common right for all mental and intellectual capacities? Should he not have served as an exemplar for all his students in their pursuit of freedom and human liberation—be they men or women?

I wished for him to be proud, to boast before others of the results of his instruction and upbringing, rather than being troubled by divergence and difference.

Despite all that, I loved this man—both as a father and a teacher. Indeed, I loved the entire family; I harbored a profound affection for them as if I were one of their own.

— *"The Wanisi family is my family."*

This is what the late Sheikh al-Sadiq Hammani, my teacher's cousin, once said as he defended my father and the entire family following a misunderstanding that occurred between my father and my mentor, Ahmed Hammani.

The root of that misunderstanding lay in a play the Sheikh had authored for us—his students—to perform at the end-of-year school celebrations. The content of the play featured a dialogue comparing an "Arab girl" with another girl described as "European," or more accurately, "French." The play depicted the French girl in the most resplendent terms, while characterizing the Arab girl with the ugliest of traits, portraying her as ignorant, boisterous in her laughter, crude in her movements, and unrefined, uncultured, among other comparative traits.

This was the text placed before me—a script I remember to this day because the role was specifically assigned to me. It was the role of the "Ugly Arab Girl." I was but a child then, yet I instinctively felt a reason to refuse or to justify my rejection. I refused to play the part and wept bitterly, without fully grasping the underlying cause of my profound unease, despite the pressure and the teacher's insistence that I perform. At home, I burst into tears under the persistence of my mother and father's inquiries.

My father granted me his full support and shared my indignation, strongly condemning the mentor's rigid and biased stance toward the image of the Arab girl. The following morning, my father went to lodge a formal complaint with the school principal, Sheikh Abdelhafid al-Janan, who in turn summoned Sheikh Ahmed Hammani. The teacher remained steadfast in his opinion, addressing my father in a condescending and superior tone:

— "You are ignorant, and you understand nothing of the art of theater."

My father was incensed, and the story reached many ears. My mentor, Ahmed Hammani, eventually felt the weight of his reaction and was later rebuked by his cousin. Ultimately, he came to offer his sincere apologies to my father, speaking both in his own name and on behalf of the entire family. My mentor was deeply influenced by the European scientific awakening and the civilizational progress France had achieved—specifically through his mastery of the French language, which he had cultivated through an exchange with a French officer who was his neighbor. As he recounted to us himself, they used to exchange lessons: he taught the officer the Arabic language, and in return, the officer taught him French.

I shall never erase from my memory his distinguished and elegant visage, adorned with his scarlet fez, as he set out toward the school situated near our home in the nascent years of the **1950**s. Clasped within his hand, he invariably bore a copy of the La Dépêche de Constantine newspaper, unfolded broadly before his eyes and nearly veiling his entire countenance from view. His gaze was so utterly consumed by the lines upon the page that he appeared oblivious even to his own footsteps upon the path.

As I attained maturity, I came to comprehend with profound clarity that he—may God's mercy abide with him—was driven by a fierce and burning protective devotion toward the Arab woman. He harbored a desperate, soaring ambition for her to ascend to the civilizational heights occupied by women in the developed world. Yet, it seemed he found no conduit for his dreams other than the searing and unsparing critique he had woven into the fabric of that play.

Verily, his method of presentation possessed an intrinsic and immense value, irrespective of whether one found its premises convincing or not. Today, I carry a sense of profound pride that I was favored by fate to pursue my studies under the tutelage of two monumental masters hailing from a single noble lineage: the Hammani family.

Pioneers and Envoys in a Leading Free School

Many were the masters under whom I studied: Mohamed al-Salih Ramadan, Mohamed bin al-Abid al-Jilali, Ahmed Hammani, al-Sadiq Hammani, Abdelrahman Shiban, al-Sadiq al-Jumou'i, and al-Sadiq Abdelwahab... Every one of them played an honorable role in the Revolution of Liberation, whether through imprisonment, exile, or attaining the glory of martyrdom. However, I would be ungrateful if I did not specifically address three women who were among the very first female teachers of the Arabic language in the modern history of Constantine. They were appointed to this noble mission upon the personal recommendation of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis himself, serving as the foundational stone for the woman's entry into the fields of education and instruction.

As educators in the Arabic tongue, these three ladies held the honor of pioneering this path. Consequently, they worked in the public sphere, far removed from the French administration. They were the Mujahidat: Horriya Ariba and Aqila Kahloosh—the wife of the martyr Ammar Rawaq, who attained martyrdom in the Al-Rasif neighborhood alongside a group of Fidaiyin, including the martyr Fadhila Saadan. The third teacher was my eldest sister, Na'na'a Wanisi—may God have mercy on her soul. She married a fellow teacher, and her dowry was a collection of poetic anthologies by the poet Mahmoud Taha. That marriage, as I recall, became the spark for a long-standing feud between my father and my aunt, as I previously mentioned at the beginning of these diaries, only to be followed by other female teachers from the Association's schools, such as Madame Kouar from Tlemcen, and the

Mujahidat Khadidja Khattir, Amina Za'nan, and Fatiha Zamoushi from Oran, among others.

As for the one who first instilled the alphabet in me, trained my tongue in the nuances of correct Arabic pronunciation and speech, and guided my fingers to master the art of beautiful calligraphy, it was Madame Hourya—or Lalla Hourya, as we addressed her with a profound sense of childhood pride. Lalla Hourya did not differ in any respect from the teachers of the French schools; in fact, she rivaled them in modern elegance, with her golden spectacles, her high-heeled shoes, and her hair cut in a short bob style according to the fashion of that era.

We loved and obeyed her, seeing in her the very model we aspired to emulate. It was perhaps for this reason that I found myself, quite suddenly and later on, practicing the craft of teaching before I had even reached the age of seventeen—as if it were an irrevocable destiny beyond my control and even against my own will. Years later, while I was at the head of the National Education sector as Minister, reports reached my ears that were far from pleasing: the lack of recognition for the pioneering efforts and leadership of those women who had preceded us in service, whether in education or in other fields. I suffered greatly for their sake and endeavored to mend what others—those who see no further than the tips of their noses—had torn, whether out of ignorance or arbitrariness. I considered the acknowledgment of these pioneers and their honoring to be both a moral beauty and a necessity.

One of the most egregious afflictions that can hinder the progress of nations is the delusion held by some that they alone are the preeminent masters of their craft, dismissing their predecessors as having languished in an era of ignorance. They hold the vain conviction that they are the most gifted and

astute, and that their own tenure represents the definitive "Golden Age" of progress.

Regarding the lessons in drama and music, these were the sessions I anticipated every week with a restless and eager yearning. I recall that the directorship of the Association for Education and Teaching was entrusted to a succession of militant intellectuals, each contributing his own unique flair. Among them were Abdelhafid Souilah, Al-Saïd bin Hafeedh, and Ahmed Reda Houhou. All of them performed distinguished roles in ensuring the success of this independent educational experiment, confronting the French colonial administration and its restrictive mandates with a fortitude and courage that knew no equal. They were all subjected to the rigors of interrogation, the agony of torture, and the darkness of imprisonment. However, the individual who left an indelible imprint upon the activities of this school was the writer and martyr, Ahmed Reda Houhou.

He was a man of that rare breed described as being 'ahead of his time.' Consequently, such figures often manifest as enigmas to their contemporaries, operating within a realm of thought and conduct that provokes a certain bewilderment among their peers. They bear no resemblance to the mundane, resolutely refusing to conform to the established norms to which others have grown accustomed. Their methodology was one of perpetual evolution, constant renewal, and a keen alignment with the *zeitgeist* of the epoch. This was because their minds were illuminated by broader global realities, looking far beyond the immediate horizon to the diverse experiences and expertise of other nations. They harbored a visceral loathing for intellectual inertia and stagnation, rejecting the rigidity of 'pre-packaged' ideologies. Guided by their own

spirited and audacious temperaments, they mastered multiple languages and harnessed every potential to remain at the vanguard of history, extracting profound lessons from every unfolding circumstance—lessons that served to enrich their ideas and provide a steadfast cornerstone for their strategic endeavors and the noble objectives they aspired to achieve for their homeland

Our school director, Ahmed Reda Houhou, was a veritable polymath among men. He inaugurated a theatrical troupe and established a musical ensemble, which he christened The Constantine Blossoms. He was himself an active participant in the troupe, for he was endowed with a myriad of artistic and musical gifts, mastering several instruments with a rhythmic elegance. He breathed life into our school with vibrant cultural activities, where students—both boys and girls—engaged in the rehearsal of plays, anthems, songs, and various intellectual and athletic competitions. He dedicated himself to the revival of heritage, sweeping away the dust of oblivion from the truths of Algeria's suppressed history through the staging of plays such as The Kahina, Umm al-Qura, Majnun Layla, Hamlet, Othello, and Hannibal. These were undertakings that rivaled, and frequently surpassed in their meticulous organization and depth of content, the offerings of the most prestigious media channels and cultural institutions of our modern day.

In any discourse concerning athletic and cultural endeavors, it is imperative to acknowledge our affiliation with the Algerian Muslim Scouts: specifically the Hope and Success troops. These two battalions were saluted by the Imam Ben Badis himself—may the Almighty bestow His mercy upon him—through the verses of his historic poem The People of Algeria are Muslim,

and to Arabism they belong, as he stood on a momentous occasion prophesying:

O Youth, you are our hope ... and by your hand the morning draws nigh.

Take up for life its weapon ... and plunge into the depths, harboring no fear.

He etched this symbolic herald of a forthcoming revolution, destined to be led by these nascent buds once they attained the strength of manhood. His prophecy was indeed brought to fulfillment; may God bless his soul.

And today I wonder: Is the mind not the soul? And is the exercise of thought not the sport of the mind? With the passage of time, the means evolved, and these activities became easier through modern technologies and visual media. However, human effort has dwindled to a point of recession, a matter that has led to a decline in cultural and educational standards and the hollowing of their content and essence. Ultimately, it is the human being and their effort that remains the driver and the guide; no machine or electronic device can take their place, for the human being is the true capital of nations and peoples.

When we recall the national anthems, we must link most of their melodies to a grand master of music who participated in every creative work of this educational institution. He was the Sheikh of the Malouf practitioners, Abdelkader bin al-Toumi. This master violinist worked as a volunteer, and he was also one of the devoted students of Imam Ben Badis in Constantine.

I remember his violin case, lined with red velvet. Whenever he opened it for the music hour, it sparked a radiant joy in my

soul that lifted me to the heavens. It spread before me a space redolent with roses and basil, despite the narrowness of the place where he composed our anthems—a building adjacent to the Association's headquarters, which was the home of the martyr Ahmed Boushmal. There, an ancient and precious piano sat, in the very headquarters where the Association used to print its newspapers and publications, beginning with Al-Muntaqid and Al-Shihab.

Master Abdelkader bin al-Toumi was a breath of art and music, an encyclopedia of knowledge. He worked tirelessly to preserve and revive the musical heritage of Constantine's Malouf and the various classical music schools, especially those of Andalusian origin. Under his tutelage, we grasped the profound significance of melodic scales and rhythmic modes. We committed to memory the Masdar, the Btayihi, the Darj, and the Khlas, among others.

While I recall Master Abdelkader bin al-Toumi today, I must not fail to mention the composer Ibrahim Belmoushi, who crafted the melodies for our commemorative poems and that Great National Anthem, which almost every Algerian holds in their heart: "The People of Algeria are Muslim, and to Arabism they belong."

This was the very anthem with which we saluted our teachers every morning in the classroom, just as the students before us had done. Among those predecessors was my eldest sister, who, every morning, would offer her salute to Imam Ben Badis as he looked down upon the assembly from his office balcony at the school with that immortal slogan: "Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our country."

In light of all that I have retrieved from the well of my memory, is it possible to forget today this civilizational momentum led by Ben Badis and his movement? Is it possible to forget my fellow students and the companions of my journey—those who, one day, performed their national duty and joined the youth in reclaiming freedom and national sovereignty, and thereafter in the revolution of building and reconstruction?

Is it possible to forget this school, where every single inch possesses the right to recount a story of nobility and a legend of struggle?

Is it possible that I do not ache when I hear that someone attempted to change the name of the school to that of one of their relatives—a private and ordinary name—at a time when the entire school ought to be transformed into a unique museum of its kind, documenting a vital civilizational epoch in the history of modern Algeria?

The Awakening of Consciousness

I was but a small child when my emotions were jolted by sudden and violent tremors. Persistent, mysterious fears of unknown origins began to sprout within my imagination, accompanied by hushed, pained murmurs—whispers of sorrow that were more than enough to shatter the sanctuary of an eight-year-old's world. News, secrets, and fragmentary remarks drifted from various directions, gradually pulling me away from the blissful ignorance and the untroubled tranquility of childhood.

Within our home, the atmosphere shifted entirely. My mother's face, those of her intimate neighbors, my father's countenance, and the faces of my maternal uncle, my father's cousin, and our neighbor Saad—all were suddenly masked by a dark, melancholic shadow. Their conversations became laden with a heavy resentment and gloom, and their remarks wavered between the grim confirmation of the news and a desperate, prolonged seeking of divine forgiveness. At times, their indignation reached the point of despair—a seething, suppressed fury against the cruel whims of these changing destinies.

The house and everyone in it, the neighborhood, and above all else, the school—which had once been for us children a fountain of joy and a universe of learning and upbringing—were transformed into a source of bewilderment and anxiety. Teachers began to vanish from sight. How? and why? None of the young ones truly knew. The curriculum changed, and the subjects we studied were subjected to hollow modifications. History, cultural activities, and the national education that had once been our pride were discarded, and our teachers were

forced to content themselves with providing only religious and moral instruction.

What were the underlying reasons for these changes? Were these new pressures truly beyond the comprehension of us little ones? The French administration's watchful eye never ceased its monitoring of the school and the Association's activities. As for us, we perceived nothing of the unfolding events save for the heartbreak etched upon the faces, the anxiety lingering in the eyes, and a profound sense of brokenness within the spirit. Or perhaps there were even deeper causes, deliberately shrouded from our young and innocent hearts.

It was a Sunday. As was the custom in our home, some of our relatives had gathered: my maternal uncle, my father's cousin, and our neighbor, Uncle Saad. However, it was a Sunday unlike any other. The air was thick with a palpable tension and a sorrow that marred every countenance. The conversation was hushed, concentrated, and even the very tones of their voices had undergone a transformation.

On that day, the men did not seem like themselves. It was as if they had been replaced by entirely different personas. There was no jovial chatter about politics or culture, nor the usual boastful stubbornness of the Ulema Association that typically occupied my uncle and father. Gone was the defiant bragging about the People's Party and its leader, Messali Hadj, which used to fill our ears with the resonance of the Arabic tongue. The customary tranquility and calm of our neighbor Saad—who was always prepared to defend the principles of the Manifesto Party and its leader, Ferhat Abbas—had vanished. He revered Ferhat Abbas for his intellect and brilliance, a man who surpassed the French in the very logic they had birthed. He was

a man of immense culture, yet even his trademark humility and grace, which had always mirrored my father's own temperament, were gone.

The world, it seemed, had darkened before their eyes. Their concern was no longer merely for the small family, but for the Greater Family—the homeland for which everyone struggled. It was a volcanic eruption of emotions that swept away all trivialities and petty grievances, the common denominator that unified their scattered gaze toward the common enemy. It was proven once again that the homeland was in dire need of a different kind of man—men entirely distinct from the "salon politicians," the individualistic leaders, and the mouthpieces who cared for the part rather than the whole, the branch rather than the root, the result rather than the cause.

On that day, a dialogue unfolded in our house. As was often the case, I understood nothing of it at first, for the questions surrounding it only began to swell and take shape as the days passed and I entered the stage of true self-awareness and national consciousness.

My maternal uncle began the conversation, dropping a piece of information like a heavy stone:

— "The displaced people from Sétif, Kherrata, and Guelma... they say the number of victims has exceeded the hundreds."

My father replied with the tone of one who knows the grim reality all too well:

— "It was the airplanes. They did their work. They were bombing unarmed demonstrators. Imagine... they didn't distinguish between a man, a woman, a child, or an elder.

Those who were in the protests, those who were merely watching, and even those who never left their homes."

Saad added with a biting sarcasm:

— "But the bullets did not remain mere spectators. Everyone's bodies were fused together in their final cries for Revolution and Freedom."

My father added, steeped in sorrow:

— "And why shouldn't they? Did we not share in the making of this 'Victory' that the Allies are celebrating today? Hundreds died for it. Have they forgotten that I personally fought in the Battle of Verdun in France during the First World War, before I had even reached the age of twenty? We dug the earth and stood firm. We had nothing but our heads to shield the ground, and we struck the enemy. God granted us a new lease on life... Is it not our right today to demand the liberation of our land?"

My maternal uncle, interrupting: "For the French, your land is their land; it is a fragment of their motherland. Even if a sea separates the two continents and the two territories, they regard you as 'French,' and you must strive to become like them one day... this is their ultimate objective, which they label the 'Civilizing Mission.' In their eyes, they consider this a mandate for all their colonies in Africa. We are at the vanguard of Africa—indeed, in its very heart—and by colonizing Algeria, they have, in truth, colonized the whole of Africa."

Uncle Arab, pressing down on his cigarette as if he intended to extinguish the anxiety within his own soul, added:

"Their colonies are numerous, and we are but the Arabs of North Africa."

My maternal uncle interrupted again without apology:

"But we are the most wretched and the most miserable. Others constitute 'protectorates' for colonialism, whereas for us, it has seeped into the very marrow and bone. It was not content with seizing the land, the economy, or politics; it has metastasized into our spiritual values and our civilizational constants. It intervenes in our traditions, our customs, our language, and our identity. It even interferes between a man and his wife. It is not satisfied with plundering material resources; it wishes to turn our people into a hollow shell of themselves. It wants us to become a French people with a substitute persona, an ersatz identity, and a history of their own making."

Saad, with the confidence and resolve of a committed militant, added:

"*He will never reach his goal, even if the very last Algerian were to be killed."*

My maternal uncle added, his voice heavy with compassion:

— "But the thousands of victims people are talking about—in Sétif, Kherrata, and Guelma—and the others from the various cities that rose in support of the demonstrators... this is no small matter. They view us as nothing more than a herd of sheep to be slaughtered at will. And yet, they have the audacity to carry the banners of 'Human Rights' and 'Racial Equality'?"

Uncle Saad remarked with grim solemnity:

*— "Have they not been satisfied with the millions of martyrs who have fallen since they first set foot here in **1830**?"*

Uncle Arab, with a clarity born of bitter experience, said:

— "It is the policy of double standards. Have I not told you all along that the 'People's Party' is the one that holds the truth?"

Saad, letting out a long, weary sigh of exhaustion, replied:

— "There my brother 'Al-Arabi' goes again, relentlessly defending his party. We are in the midst of a grand ordeal, my brother, and we are not standing upon a platform for oratory or mere political struggle."

Following these seismic events and these dialogues that surrounded us everywhere, our school was forcibly closed. Its locks were sealed with red wax. Some of its leaders were cast into prison, and thousands of militants and women—in the cities where the demonstrations had erupted—attained the glory of martyrdom. We, the children and the youth, quickly absorbed the new anthems and revolutionary songs. Among them:

"Hail the North, O Youth of North Africa..."

"Hail the North, stand firm for the National Party..."

"And for the people of Sétif, O my sorrow... they died for the love of Freedom."

Thus, with each passing year, a fragment of my happy and innocent childhood seemed to retreat into the distance. Yet, despite the loss of that blissful ignorance, I found myself accepting the arrival of subsequent stages of life—eras where human thought ascends to its rightful place as sovereign. The words of the wise proved undeniably true: "The more one thinks, the more one suffers; and the more one understands, the more one aches." This sentiment is echoed in the words of the poet:

The man of intellect suffers in the midst of bliss due to his reason... while the brother of ignorance, even in wretchedness, finds joy.

Love... Is it the Solution?

Eighteen years of age—eighteen springs of life. I emerged from a cocoon of boundless and infinite dreams only to find myself in a state of absolute and profound ignorance regarding the myriad secrets of existence, its labyrinthine depths, and its unpredictable daily surprises. I bore a perennial smile and a radiant cheerfulness that nearly cascaded from my very being onto every soul within my orbit; it was a love I nurtured and distributed with a heart that recognized no frontiers and knew no limitations. I harbored the steadfast belief, for an extensive duration of time, that other human beings would not diverge in their inner feelings, their sensitivities, or their emotional responses from my own until I was violently jolted by the impact of certain shocks and vexing surprises pertaining to the behavioral conducts of others. Certain reactions caused me deep distress and left me in a state of utter bewilderment, yet they proved fundamentally incapable of altering my unwavering, optimistic vista of humanity and life itself.

My gaze remained merciful and compassionate, even toward those whose actions and behaviors were intentionally injurious or hurtful to me. I carried myself as if I were a "Saint" who adamantly refuses to acknowledge even the existence of hatred, firmly convinced that my predetermined role in this earthly existence was to sow the seeds of affection and distribute smiles wherever my footsteps led me. Even when individuals exhibited stark differences in their behaviors and ideological beliefs, I persisted in acting with a degree of kindness that many observers branded as either naivety or sheer folly—particularly because my response was invariably an act of benevolence even in the face of calculated, intended, and deliberate harm.

A certain lady once remarked to me, her voice laden with profound astonishment:

— "I truly do not know whether to characterize you as a simpleton or as a holy saint!"

This remark came following a specific incident where I was met with ill-treatment, yet I responded with nothing but tolerance and love. Quite simply, I did not know how to hate, nor was I capable of harboring a grudge. Perhaps my personality was larger than all those petty matters that I regarded as mere trivialities. My emotions were like a fertile soil where the seeds of evil, malice, or envy simply could not take root or sprout. I was firmly convinced that this trait was not related to folly or stupidity, but was rather the pure, primordial, and innate nature upon which God fashioned the human soul.

Yet, despite the weariness of life I bore, and the facets I had come to understand about existence—along with the many things I was still awaiting—did life meet me with that same readiness?

The answer to this inquiry, perhaps, remains more than my own prerogative; it is the inherent right of the noble reader. These are the intricate specifics that formed and sculpted our private lives, marking them with luminous white imprints at times, and somber black ones at others. Personally, I do not deem them a matter of concern for the reader of these diaries. I am not prepared to fling wide the "Chest of my Life" in all its hidden recesses and corners. There are privacies that we prefer to remain forever latent in a secluded corner of our souls, shielded from prying curiosity and protected from being

distorted by preconceived judgments and shallow, trivial opinions.

It is exceedingly easy for us to lie, or to exaggerate, or to omit certain details; for we frequently speak about ourselves and about others with a sort of defensive bias. This constitutes a state of psychological overcompensation through which we desire to fill the voids and gaps in our past—those very gaps which we were unable to bridge when we actually lived them in real time. This state is a perilous slippery slope among the many pitfalls that I loathe in others, and it is something I can absolutely never tolerate or accept within my own self. That which I wish to utter, I say with absolute honesty and profound transparency, and without any retouching or artificial adornment. And that which I do not wish to say, I do not say at all. I desire to remain at peace and reconciled with my own soul and satisfied with the words I commit to paper. I shall not betray a covenant I made with myself and with a dear, longtime reader—one whom I have wanted, for fifty years, to remain intimately connected to me. I want that reader today to benefit from my experience, even if it were small when placed alongside other grand experiences, for it is certainly significant in its specificity, as are all the diverse experiences of human life. I firmly believe that the very thought of writing private diaries begins, first and foremost, from a genuine and true reconciliation with the self. I have undertaken this reconciliation with my spirit ever since I first attained awareness and understanding, and long before embarking upon the writing of this genre of literary legacy.

Is it Truly a Choice?

Eighteen years. This is all that I carried of a profound ignorance of life. Consequently, the happiness and the satisfaction that I felt—despite any inherent flaws or deficiencies—constituted a state of contentment and inner peace that inspired a sense of psychological comfort and an enduring optimism for the days yet to come. This anticipation and hope for the future, without being cocooned within the past or even tethered to the present, remained a persistent habit and a second nature that empowered me to overcome the harshest crises I navigated.

Perhaps in this existence, the more one applies thought, the more one grows weary and confused. Conversely, the more one remains in a state of ignorance, the easier life becomes, rendering it simpler to confront its tragedies and its sudden, startling surprises. Knowledge unfailingly brings exhaustion and bewilderment, planting seeds of question marks and wonder; ignorance, on the other hand, grants us that spontaneous, unconditional happiness.

Eighteen years. At this precise age, and on the first day of the month of November **1954**, a momentous piece of news was broadcast and disseminated—news that upended the very foundations of our home. Some grasped its immense gravity, while others—myself included—did not.

It was the news of the outbreak of the Revolution, the War of Liberation. I was then in the company of my elder sister, who had just given birth to twins whom we named "Uqba" and "Tariq," invoking the blessings of the first Islamic conquerors: the first, Uqba ibn Nafi, the conqueror of North Africa; and the second, Tariq ibn Ziyad, the conqueror of Andalusia.

I remember vividly the moment the statement of the Revolution was broadcast. As the news of the outbreak spread, my sister's husband shouted as he stood up, startled, as if a scorpion had stung him:

— "God is Great! It is the Revolution. It is Jihad!"

Then he began to shed tears. He was prone to weeping for the simplest of reasons, despite being a man—a trait for which he was often reproached in our Arab societies, where the prevailing norm dictates that men do not cry; he was criticized and mocked for this even by my sister's own children.

I did not comprehend anything at that specific hour, except that something of immense importance had occurred for us Algerians—the Arab Muslims—and that it was certainly in our favor.

Do I claim today—while I was in that state of youth and dreams—that I had grasped the true value of that news, its profound content, and the sheer magnitude of its impact? Do I claim today that I was as enthusiastic as the others, and that I understood the reasons behind their passion, their impulsive emotions, and even the reasons for their weeping? No, never.

I ask myself today the following question: Is it possible for news of this nature to trigger a radical change in a girl of that age? This is despite her nationalistic background, and even without the direct influence and pressure of her small and large surroundings?

The answer to this question is, in reality, quite simple. For considering that age, it is a stage of life that does not permit its possessor to be preoccupied with anything other than the state

of youth itself—a state defined by profound psychological, biological, and social transformation.

Youth is perpetually preoccupied with dreams and concerns—the quintessential concerns of youth—even if those dreams appear small or trivial, reflected perhaps in the mirror of satisfaction and joy over a new dress or a striking hairstyle brought about by the latest fashion.

However, if the very environment surrounding this youth undergoes a radical transformation—one that gradually shifts their focus from a preoccupation with the mundane to a set of entirely new and pressing interests—there will inevitably follow a total change in matters, values, and conceptualizations. This transformation becomes a common denominator among everyone. It renders the individual dreams of these youth—despite their vast horizons—a very small and secondary part, or rather an almost ornamental aspect of their being when placed alongside the "Grand Dream." This Grand Dream becomes a defined, collective goal for an entire people, with the youth standing at its courageous vanguard.

But such a radical change in reality cannot manifest with either speed or ease. It is the cumulative result of the events that unfold, and of a life that alters its course suddenly at one turn, and gradually at another. Small, personal concerns begin to fade away, one after another, appearing increasingly trivial as the days pass, leaving the stage open for other, far more valuable preoccupations. Their true value is derived directly from the intrinsic value of human life itself. The human being thus becomes the primary actor and the driver of these events, and the true architect of future concerns.

All of this was destined to happen through the formidable power of this Revolution—a Revolution capable of igniting a change at the very level of the human being. It was the human being who charted the path for this radical change and planned their future concerns. This future, which I wanted to be entirely distinct from both the past and the present, could only be realized through long struggles and the sacrifice of generations—a struggle that had been preceded by decades and for which millions had paid the ultimate price.

Victims whose names no one knew, except perhaps their executioner; all for the sake of reclaiming sovereignty and dignity over long decades of time.

The Revolution was the singular force that revealed this monumental truth to those youth: that their ordinary practice of life, and even their youth itself despite its familiar dreams, was still shackled in a state of enslavement, devoid of true freedom. Their dreams remained inherently short-sighted as long as they were not preceded by the "Dream of Dreams": the restoration of national freedom and sovereignty.

The youth who used to enter prison every day because they stole an egg or a morsel of bread just to stay alive, were far more worthy of entering those same prisons for a loftier and more sacred cause, which is the "Mother of Causes." The reason lay not only in their physical hunger, but in their profound human loss under the yoke of occupation.

Although the credit for raising the "Red Signal" on the first of November **1954** belongs to great leaders, we must remember that they, too, were youth. Among their most defining characteristics were a burning patriotism, an early political consciousness, and a continuous struggle to rescue the nation

from the claws of a colonialism that had settled until it nearly stamped everything with its own mark: the land, the human being, and history itself. These pioneers were the ones who would fall, one after another, as martyrs, paving the path to freedom with their bodies, their souls, and their prime. However, after them, the credit belongs to the people in its entirety, rising to complete the march begun by those martyrs toward a victory that would be achieved after seven and a half years of a bitter, sacrificial era. It was a time that changed the face of history in my country, in Africa, and perhaps across the entire world.

One of these leaders—the martyr Larbi Ben M'hidi—famously said:

— *"Throw the Revolution into the street, and the people will embrace it."*



The parents Ali Wanisi and Zakia Wanisi,
may God have mercy on them.



The five sisters with their mother at the center



The two brothers of the five sisters, Mustafa and Slim Wanisi



The mujahida Zhour Wanisi in the prime of youth



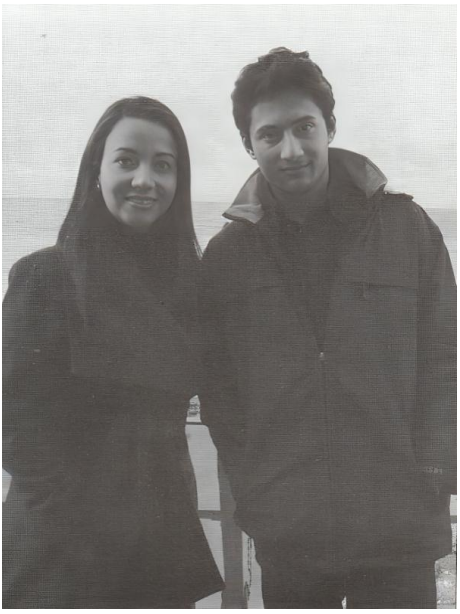
Zhour Wanisi, the mother



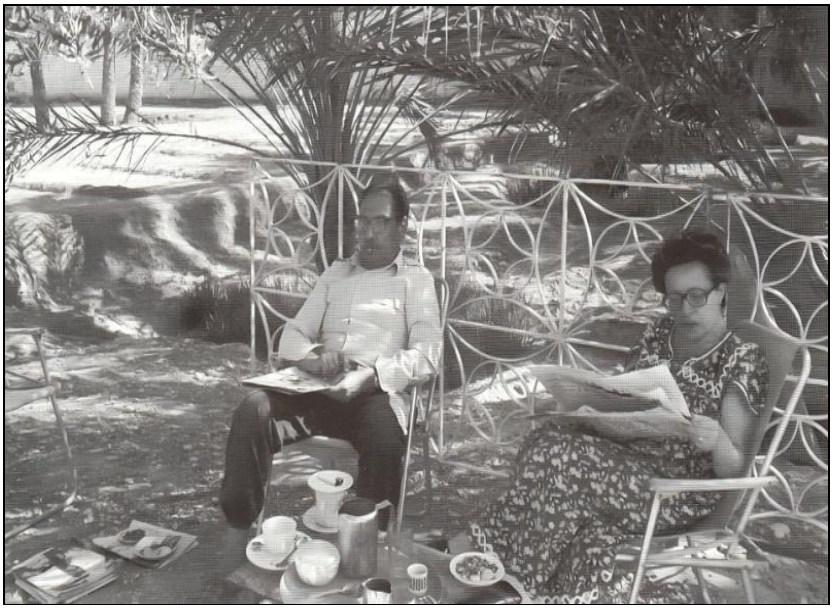
Dr. Hisham and his wife, the doctor



The mujahida Zhour Wanisi with her granddaughter, Dr. Hanaa, in Constantine



The two grandchildren, Hanaa and Riyadh



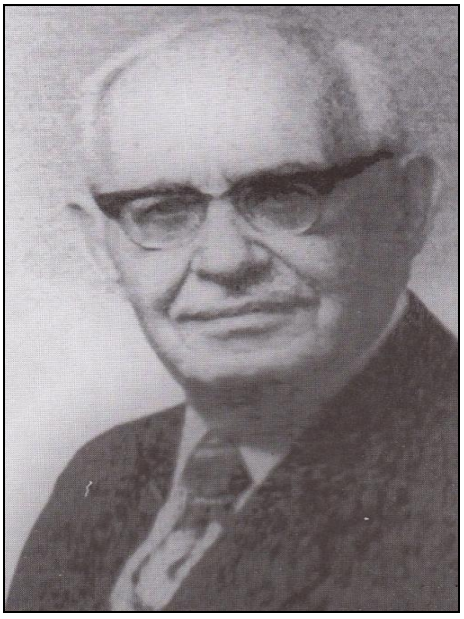
During our migration to the south in the nineties



Zhour Wanisi with her husband, the mujahid Ahmed Jaber, in the Latin Quarter, Paris



Some members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema with the teaching staff at the Education and Instruction School in Constantine



The professor, mujahid, and historian Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani



The Imam of the Renaissance, Abdelhamid Ben Badis



In the class of Sheikh Ahmed Hammani



In the class of Sheikh Sadiq Hammani



In front of the first school for education and teaching in Constantine



In the house of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis in the Upper Casbah of Constantine



Among the female students of the As-Sadiqia school in Al-Madania



With the female students of Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin, Hussein Dey

And so, we found ourselves standing before an event that the Revolution itself had meticulously planned for us. We became a station and a pre-ordained stage for its expansive operations. I admit today that many of the youth, in their initial reaction to the news of the outbreak, were much like me. Or rather, our choice resembled those choices that fall under the domain of "Predestination" and the convergence of circumstances. Our choice was a visceral one, made by the heart long before it was ratified by the intellect.

And thus, we found ourselves—as if by a blend of pure serendipity and fate—confronting a clearly defined event, and we stepped forward to take our assigned places within it.

One of the leaders also said—and he possessed the foreknowledge that he would depart this world as a martyr:

"If martyrdom is written for us, then bear witness to it on our behalf." These were the profound words of the martyr Didouche Mourad.

Driven by the burgeoning enthusiasm of those around me, I began to retrieve and recapture some of the sayings and stances that had grown alongside my very first steps in life. My mind began to store and replay conversations I had listened to by chance, through the thin walls of our home—words from my father, my uncle, our neighbor, and my teacher at school during the harrowing days of the May **8**, **1945** massacres.

Is history repeating its cycles? Or is it the "History of the Longing for Freedom" that never truly abandoned us? We may not always perceive it, but it dwells within the depths of us all. Sometimes it surfaces upon the exterior, and at other times it remains latent, hiding within our innermost recesses.

The beautiful dream, the "Schneider" radio, the soul-stirring records to which I was so deeply attached, the old dialogues... but the "new" element in the matter, which I understand and realize with profound clarity today, is that the name of the "Schneider" radio—which fills our ears today—is similar to many others. The words and the speech that saturate our hearing today are like a great, mythical beast.

That mythical beast that slumbers for an epoch and awakens for an epoch.

History is precisely thus. It plunges into our innermost depths once more, only to awaken and emerge into the light.

I recall the events of our Great Revolution, as years—nay, decades—have slipped by. I hear today the word "Revolution" bestowed upon military coups, or political conflicts, or popular

protests. I listen today to the word "Revolution" as if it were a lingering addiction.

I once possessed a beautiful dress, a soul-stirring record... yet my true attachment was fundamentally to the "newness" inherent in the matter. I understood it with absolute clarity when my mind, heart, and soul were fused with the passage of the days; when my preoccupations underwent a transformation and my trivial concerns vanished one after another, leaving the space for other concerns of far greater value. Their value would be indelibly stamped by the very value of human life itself. This human being, who would become the primary actor and the driver of these events, and the true architect of the concerns of the future.

That momentous and seismic event—the outbreak of the War of Liberation—dwelled within me just as it did with everyone in my orbit. It grew within my soul, gradually displacing every other concern, even as I embarked upon a strange and new mission. This unfolded shortly after I obtained my Primary Education Certificate, for which I had prepared with immense rigor. In those days, such an achievement was regarded as a monumental milestone, especially given the pervasive shadow of illiteracy that then shrouded the lives of most girls. It was the first threshold leading to the chambers of knowledge, whether for the students of the "Free Schools" overseen by the Ben Badis Reformist Movement or those within the formal French educational system.

My certificate was a beautiful, vibrant parchment. At its zenith, the sacred motto was inscribed: "Islam is our religion, Arabic is our language, and Algeria is our country." My full name was written in exquisite, flowing calligraphy, and what added to its splendor was the fact that I had ranked first on a national scale. It bore the distinguished signature of the great scholar and martyr, Sheikh Larbi Tebessi.

The list of successful candidates was long, dominated largely by the names of boys, yet my name sat proudly at the very summit.

Among those successful candidates was Saïd Abadou, who would later ascend to the position of Minister for the *Mujahideen*, as well as Ali Kafi. At that moment in time, that name held very little significance for me, yet fifty years later, it would belong to the man presiding over the High

Council of State during one of the most perilous and sensitive periods in the history of independent Algeria.

The certificate itself was a masterpiece of intricate ornamentation and vibrant hues. However, it did not bear the colloquial phrase "Daqdaq on the Door of Knowledge" found on the certificates issued by the French schools. In our refined language, the correct term is "Daq" (to knock), not the repetitive "Daqdaq." Nevertheless, that particular phrase used to fascinate me whenever I stared at the framed certificate displayed in the home of my dear friend and comrade-in-arms, Safia Ben M'ahdi, who was among those who obtained their certificates from the French educational system.

The pivotal point in my trajectory was that, immediately upon receiving my certificate, I was entrusted with a mission that seemed utterly surreal: to guard and teach the alphabet to young girls in one of the classrooms of the "Free School" in the neighborhood where I resided with my sister—the wife of the school principal. This was at the *As-Sadiqia* school in the "Clos Salembier" neighborhood (now known as Al-Madania)—the same man who had wept with such bitter joy upon hearing the declaration of the Revolution on the first of November, **1954**.

The blackboard was cracked, its paint faded and peeling with age. Yet, the drawings upon it possessed a raw, haunting beauty. I would gaze at them with a mixture of admiration and pity, as if I were silently reproaching time itself. Something vast within my soul yearned for liberation. Those drawings, despite their aesthetic flaws, appeared small when measured against the vitality and the immense capacity I felt within me for achieving something far greater.

The classroom was vast and expansive, notwithstanding its antiquity. Through its high, narrow windows, shy rays of sunlight filtered in, tenderly embracing the little girls as they busied themselves with imitating drawings. The only sound that broke the silence was the rhythmic scratching of shared pencils as the students attempted to replicate nature—a nature that lived far more vividly in their innocent imaginations than it did upon that cracked and weathered blackboard.

It was the heart of winter. The cold breeze was heavy and saturated with the scent of impending rain, and the sky—a shifting tapestry of blue and gray—mirrored the internal state of many people's hearts.

A profound sense of mystery and bewilderment enveloped me. I was as yet unable to form a complete or coherent picture of my new reality. Here I was, embarking on a monumental task without any prior desire or individual will: the task of teaching young girls in a popular school belonging to the "Free Schools" movement.

One morning, someone addressed me:

— "The teacher [So-and-so] will be absent due to her maternity leave; you must substitute for her until she returns to her post."

I did not rejoice at the news, yet I did not offer a refusal either. Even though I felt neither a personal desire nor an adequate professional capability, I viewed it as a temporary duty. Was it not, after all, merely a substitution? If that were the case, then whoever performed the task should not fear the ultimate results; for the results did not belong to them, but to someone else—the one responsible for everything, even while they were away on leave.

Then, a man with stony, rigid features entered the classroom without so much as a knock. I was standing there, my back leaning against an old wooden desk placed upon a worn platform. I looked at him with a mixture of sharp astonishment and intense curiosity.

The man greeted me with a degree of solemnity that I personally found excessive. The little girls instinctively bowed their heads, and he gestured for them to continue their drawing. He did not move from his spot near the door, but instead approached me directly. Then he spoke, his brow furrowed with a renewed sense of intensity:

— "Peace be upon you, madam. May I ask what is your name, and how old are you?"

I replied as I watched him withdraw a gold-nibbed pen from his jacket pocket, preparing to record my answer:

— "My name is Zhour, and I am eighteen years of age."

I answered him with a defiant tone, my face flushing a deep red. I then asked him in return:

— "And who are you, sir, to ask me such a personal question without any introduction? Do you not know that you are standing inside a classroom within a school?"

In my mind, I cursed "Uncle Ali," the gatekeeper—that neglected old man who was supposedly guarding us from thieves and intruders, yet allowed people to enter in this manner without permission or prior warning.

He answered with absolute calm:

— "I am the Inspector."[81]

— "Inspector of what, precisely?"

— "The Inspector of Education."

— "And what do I have to do with the inspection process?"

I replied with a mixture of confusion and a latent fear that I desperately tried to conceal behind a mask of indifference.

— "Are you not the teacher of this class?"

— "No, I am merely a substitute."

— "Very well. But in these moments, you are practicing the mission and the vocation of teaching."

— "Yes, but only for a few days. In truth, I am not a teacher, and I cannot envision myself becoming one someday. I am merely a holder of a Primary Certificate."

At my words, the Inspector laughed—a man who would soon become the director of this entire conversation. He moved the discussion to another point:

— "And what do you wish to become one day, then?"

— "To complete my studies first and foremost."

— "God willing."

He spoke while tapping with his gold pen against the edge of the worn desk. I felt in that precise moment that he pitied my situation, or perhaps he was pitying the state of education itself...

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8 "The venerable educator and valiant mujahid, Ibrahim Mezhourdi—a distinguished officer within the ranks of the National Liberation Army (ALN) who presided as the Inspector of Education for the independent National 'Free Schools'."

Our dialogue concluded there. The feeling of gravity and seriousness increased when the school director entered the room, his apologies preceding him for having missed the appointment with the Inspector. The Director turned to me and said with a shy, encouraging smile:

— *"She actually desires to finish her studies; she does not harbor a love for teaching."*

He added, addressing the Inspector:

— *"In reality, she is a substitute and nothing more, so that these little ones are not left to the accidents of the streets and to aimless wandering."*

— *"But she is fit for the vocation of teaching."*

Thus, the man with the stony, rigid features delivered his verdict one day in late January **1954**. I looked around me in a daze: what had this man perceived in me? I had merely drawn a gold-winged bird on the edge of the desk, yet perhaps he saw in that simple sketch a symbol of potential.

...I found myself suddenly and unexpectedly responsible for the education and upbringing of others. How does such a transformation occur? It happens only within a society striving to ignite a total revolution against every form of oppression, seeking to reclaim everything from its very roots.

Are these scenes a beginning or an end? I find myself wanting to understand, much later, the psychology and the trajectory of a child's life within our Arab nation—specifically that child who is a son of the marginalized popular class, upon whom circumstances have decreed that he shall know nothing of the innocence of childhood. He does not transition into manhood gradually; rather, he emerges as a man from the very

start, in his behaviors, his responsibilities, and even his facial features. He looks upon life with a premature, mature gaze, placing his notebooks into a shoe-shining box in a state of subconscious responsibility, accepting the labor of polishing shoes as a dictated reality of existence.

He is a child tragically divided between two psyches and two stages of life simultaneously: a lost childhood that concludes with weaning, and a burdened manhood that commences with weaning. His life is measured by the heavy contents of the heart, not by the mere count of days and years.

Can we truly ask this child, after such a beginning, to be "normal"? Can we expect him not to be fueled by the ruins of a lost childhood while he stands before us in the clothes of a man?

The old portrait is completed with its stark lines and deep shadows, encompassing what I realized much later regarding the Arab child—be it a boy or a girl. This child yearns for freedom and justice, seeking a normal life, not through the abstract theories of visionaries and philosophers, but through the hard path of misery and the reclamation of childhood via the crucible of revolution.

Albert Camus, the son of the "Belcourt" neighborhood in Algiers, once famously observed:

— "I did not learn freedom from Karl Marx; I learned it from misery."

Notwithstanding this truth, we find our Arab political systems today—even after the era of liberation from colonialism—failing to take all of this into serious consideration. They have failed to build great nations out of

societies that offered such immense sacrifices. These societies had shortened time through their understanding, their consciousness, and their conduct, becoming truly qualified for freedom and prosperity. Instead, and most unfortunately, these systems maintained the status of the "herd" and the "flock" for these societies, leading them blindly to wherever they desired, only to leave them afterward filled with psychological complexes. Their obedience to rulers became blind and unthinking, and their ambitions were systematically deprived of both air and light. They suffer today from a terrible psychological and mental desertification—societies forced to grow in molds that quickly ignite explosions at all levels, only to face one another in a state of sleepless anxiety, while the authorities claim to maintain a "security and law" that did not spring from the soul and self, as is the case in advanced nations.

Then, with the prolonged longevity of rulers upon their thrones, they become utter failures even in the management and guidance of these peoples, allowing foreign hands to intervene as they please within countries that claim a hollow sovereignty. They find peoples far removed from true political consciousness—masses moved like flocks in an indirect manner, relying on the real motives that stir these people, not for the sake of democracy or freedom, but for the sake of protecting foreign economic interests and guaranteeing markets for their goods, weapons, and equipment.

By this observation, I do not mean to disparage or diminish the will of the Arab peoples in any way. The will is always the will, and it is ultimately a part of God's sovereign will. But the reasons, the motives, and the circumstances differ significantly from one era to another.

The little students were quietly absorbed in their drawing. Some had fallen asleep, their heads heavy with the weight of their modest lives. The Inspector moved between the rows, observing their notebooks and occasionally patting their heads with a kindness that contrasted sharply with his stony features.

Most of them were impoverished, wearing worn-out shoes and ragged, thin clothes. Their colors had faded from constant washing. Their cheeks were perpetually flushed, their noses red from the biting cold, and their fingertips were cramped over their pencils—the unmistakable state of those who suffer from cold, hunger, or perhaps both.

I was much like them, watching the Inspector's gaze, which he directed toward the Director as if issuing an irrevocable command:

— *"She is fit for the mission of teaching."*

When he departed from the Director's office, I had not yet fully grasped the gravity of what he had said, despite the many things he had uttered during our brief encounter.

I found myself silently reproaching my own soul:

— *"Shame on you, girl! How can you not comprehend the significance of the Inspector's words?"*

But the Director soon repeated to my ears the conclusion that the man—excessive in his seriousness—had reached.

— *"But she is suitable for teaching."*

Thus the man had decided. January **1954** drew to its close. I looked around me: what had he seen in my being? I had drawn a gold-winged bird on the edge of my desk...

— "...and it is a great honor for you to perform this noble mission."

He fell silent for a moment, then added with a touch of practical reality:

— "As for the salary, I shall consult with the members of the Association. It will likely be a period of service without pay initially, but surely it will be a source of profound honor for you to perform this duty toward your nation."

I found no words to utter in response. I felt a power surging within me, pushing me toward a state of absolute acceptance. I did not want to say no. I felt, in that fleeting moment, that what I was about to embark upon was both a duty and a sacred debt. I recalled my favorite school, whose walls I loved and whose doors were forcibly closed by the colonizer only a few months after the outbreak of the revolution.

I used to know the contents of almost the entire newspaper by heart, much as a child knows the taste of a piece of candy. I used to be proud to read its articles, and for the first time, the newspaper had published some of my own thoughts and reflections within its pages.

My God! Our "Small Wishes" had to make room for the "Great Wishes" that the Revolution would soon demand from us all.

It was our duty to be among the soldiers spreading the Arabic script and national values—the very constants the colonizer was fighting with all its formidable weapons. It was no longer merely about finishing my studies; there was no room for that individual dream anymore.

Without any prior will or conscious awareness on my part, I found myself repeating his final words:

— *"Truly, it is a great honor."*

The evening had begun to cast its long shadow over the streets and the small buildings and shacks of the "Clos Salembier" neighborhood—one of the largest and most vibrant popular neighborhoods in the capital, Algiers. Names of martyr brothers were whispered in the dark: "Atman," "Abdelkader," "Hanifi," "Madani," "Saïd," "Zaman." The winter sun was slowly retreating before a long, lingering sunset. The residents would soon witness the strange news that would spread like a fever. They would all be gripped by fear—a fear that would eventually transform into an obsession, a collective gaze directed toward the radio and the waves that broadcast news from here and there.

Day after day, we would find ourselves being broken down once more, only to be forged into an entirely new shape—a shape that accepted the mission. I felt my soul gaining high wings, vast wings like the wings of planes. Then, a secret flowed between us—I didn't fully understand its origin, but my soul felt the shift. I would perform this new mission.

And I walked back home, feeling smaller and smaller, yet at the same time, carrying an immensely big secret. It would reveal itself day after day: in the humility of a revolutionary stepping toward sacrifice, in the steadfastness of a twenty-year-old *fedayee* as he was led bound to the guillotine, in the bewilderment of a girl who could not get enough of what we were doing, and in the reception of a poor old man to the rays of the sun—rays which he was never stingy with toward any being on earth.

Picking Blossoms Before Their Time

I did not mention at the beginning of these diaries that there are memories that do not arrive by prior appointment; rather, they explode suddenly within us like bursts of raw energy. We find ourselves unable to carry their weight because they shake our very being and make our emotions tremble, transporting us from the present we inhabit back to the past, as if we have become children of another time against our own will.

Memories, due to their sheer intensity, are the contents of a chest whose drawers hold many secrets—some trivial, others momentous. I am not prepared to reveal them all, for certain memories are not fit for public mention. They should remain latent in a secluded corner of our souls, far from prying eyes, hidden and preserved. It is better that they remain shrouded by a thick, protective veil.

There are specifics that we might not wish to reveal because they constitute the very fabric of our private lives. Thus, one possesses the inherent right to hide what they wish. This is both natural and logical; we have the right to safeguard the privacy of our lives.

But as I write and proceed with the narrative, the flow of words, and this open discourse, I find that these are human events containing a life experience shared by many. I have no right as a human being—first out of respect for the reader, and as a writer second—to deprive the reader of these experiences. We all share in these human trials, whether they reside in the life of the writer or the reader.

Therefore, I decided to shatter all taboos and speak with absolute honesty and truthfulness, because what I am crafting

in this biography is a social document concerning women and society.

What are a person's dreams and small wishes worth, even if those dreams were trivial and simple, reflected in the joy over a beautiful dress or a piece of poetry I used to boast of before our neighbor girls? But fate, when it wills, curtails our pride.

Eighteen years of age. I was engaged and married. My only son, Dr. Hisham, was the blessed fruit of this marriage. It was my first marriage, occurring at an age not exceeding eighteen. Today's reader might be surprised: how did people marry so young in the past?

In truth, it was a "substitution" marriage, nothing more, intended to ensure that girls were not left in the streets exposed to accidents and wandering.

Thus, the man with the strange, stony features had decided one day in late January **1954**. I looked around me: what had this man seen in me? Why had he chosen me?

The story of a young girl's heart is a tender one, and every time I attempted to turn my interests elsewhere, my mind, heart, and soul would return to that old dialogue. But the "new" element in the matter, which I understand and realize well today, is that I possessed a great hope and a certain madness for a husband who was both a poet and a teacher. In reality, he was harboring a secret: he was already married and had a child in his own city. He never once mentioned this to us, nor did he even allude to it.

The matter remained hidden until I discovered the truth, not more than a year after our marriage. Life proceeded, but it did not go well. How can a life built upon a web of lies and deceit

continue? How could my father give my life to this man? How could I marry a man while I was still a young girl who hadn't even reached twenty? How could I be a "second wife" to a poor woman I did not even know?

Perhaps some would consider this situation entirely normal and ordinary. But I grew up in a family whose primary capital was honesty, loyalty, and frankness.

I decided to separate from him, despite the fact that I was pregnant with my only son, Hisham. I tried to withdraw, but the husband’s family, his friends, and even my own family tried to dissuade me. But I had made my decision, and there was no turning back.

I lived through that experience with all its bitterness. I suffered from the pervasive lack of respect for women, even while I was still in the prime of my youth. I learned how a man can easily acquire any woman, and how society, according to an ignorant and rigid environment, facilitates that for him. They believe the *Sharia* allows it, regardless of the honesty, purity, and sincerity it requires. Why the lie and the deceit? Why enter homes and treat them as spoils?

In cases like this, we find the victim and the one being deceived is invariably the woman. As for the man, he emerges from it with his pride and "honesty" intact, while the woman is left to pay the ultimate price.

In such social situations, the victim is always the woman. I decided to separate and bear the full responsibility for myself and the child in my womb.

The man tried—may God have mercy on him—to use every possible means of pressure to make me change my decision.

But I remained steadfast. I told him once when he tried to persuade me to retract:

— *"And the child in my womb?"*

— *"This child will be born, and after that, duty and ethics will follow him."*

I did not retreat from my decision, and I resolved to live my life with dignity, following the path of truth and honesty.

I did not merely stand firm in my resolve; I was even confronted by the collective weight of some prominent members of the Ulema Association, who arrived at our home one day in a surprising move. They had convened for a reconciliation session to listen to me personally, for in their eyes, I was still young—perhaps they imagined I was merely swayed by my family's decision, and that I was being pushed toward a path I did not fully comprehend.

Among those notable scholars were Sheikh Abdellatif Soltani, Sheikh Al-Hafnawi Hala, as well as my eldest sister's husband—the poet Omar Shakiri—and my other sister's husband, Abdelrahman l'Aghrib, alongside others whose names I did not know.

I went out to meet them and stood listening as they delivered a long and elaborate discourse, employing Quranic verses, Prophetic Hadiths, poetic stanzas, and traditional proverbs to persuade me. When they finished, I replied with unwavering clarity:

— *"I hold you all in the highest respect, but I will not return to this man, even if the keys to Paradise were held in his hands. That which is built upon deception can result in nothing but further deception."*

And so, his attempts to pressure me were not confined to seeking the mediation of these scholars. He even went so far as to resort to one of the *Fidaiyin* (militant resistance fighters) from the Casbah. This man was in hiding at the home of my comrade-in-arms, Fatima Zighad, in the "Telemly" neighborhood. I was alone with her and her husband, the *Mujahid* Lakhdar Zighad, whose secret hideout we knew. His revolutionary name was Hassan al-Saadi, as I have mentioned in other chapters of these diaries. The *Mujahid* said to him with blunt revolutionary logic:

— "O brother, cease this persistence. Your wife today is searching for Algeria, while you are searching only for her."

Due to his relentless and obsessive insistence on my return, some of his friends even bestowed upon him a nickname: "The Madman of Zhour."[9]

My former husband finally began to take the matter with the gravity it deserved, specifically regarding that wanted *Fidai* militant whose name was broadcast daily across the airwaves of the "Voice of the Land" radio station. Under the weight of these events, he eventually joined the ranks of the Revolution himself, endured the darkness of imprisonment, and ultimately attained the profound honor of struggling for the sake of Algeria's liberation.

It was, by all accounts, a monumental and arduous decision for an eighteen-year-old girl to undertake. Yet, when the final separation from Hisham's father occurred, it was a parting defined by mutual respect, shared consent, and the most

9 The valiant *mujahid* and distinguished intellectual, Mohamed al-Tahar Fodhla—may the Almighty bestow His eternal mercy upon his noble soul and grant him peace

honorable of conduct between the two families. This foundational harmony allowed my son, Hisham, to grow up in an atmosphere of peace and psychological security, nurtured between the embrace of his mother's family and the home of his father's kin.

Immediately following the dawn of independence, I was united in marriage with my lifelong partner—himself a *Mujahid*—with whom I shall soon celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of our union. Our life together has been a warm sanctuary, flooded with honesty and deep affection, and today it is beautifully adorned by our university-educated grandchildren, the children of my only son, Dr. Hisham.

A Coincidence Becomes a Choice

With the unfolding of days, the radiant countenances of my young students gladdened my heart and offered a soothing, restorative balm that helped me forget my personal pained setbacks. Their faces overflowed with a vibrant cheer and a pristine delight, their young tongues repeating without the slightest shadow of weariness, in every hushed whisper and every animated movement:

— "You are the mother, the elder sister, and the hallowed educator... You are the role model leading our souls toward the light. We implore you, realize our dreams for success; lead us to a life that must be exquisitely beautiful and brimming with felicity."

And yet, I found myself overcome by a profound sense of quiet self-pity, notwithstanding the fact that I had heroically transcended my own personal ordeal. I would whisper in the sacred silence of my soul:

— "I, too, my dear ones, am in desperate need of a hand to grasp my own, to guide my steps toward the correct path... for life is a formidable 'Ogre' that shows no mercy to any soul, and manifests a particular cruelty toward the woman."

As the relentless days, months, and years slipped by, hundreds of diverse faces passed before my gaze. I recognized their names in the vast majority of instances, touching those names in the winding, intricate corridors of my memory every single time. Ultimately, I was led toward a mosaic of overlapping smiles; yet they confirmed to me, time and again, that the coming days would carry for me an abundance of love, profound gratitude, and a satisfied conscience. They were smiles that infused me with a steadfast, unshakeable faith in

the sacred mission of the teacher—this very mission at which the Inspector had once laughed with a biting skepticism when he remarked that I was unfit for the majestic mantle of an educator—the very teacher who would subsequently graduate generations upon generations of the nation's youth, discovering through them the profound depths of life and the intricate, multifaceted truths of humanity.

Thus, within the walls of a modest school characterized by a humble architecture and a near-total absence of facilities or resources, the masks were finally lifted against the oppressive colonial education system. My students were the progeny of a destitute popular quarter, their families being simple, hardworking, and illiterate folk. I could never have imagined then that I would later glean from life its most sublime and magnificent meanings. I would witness within them, and within the visceral reality I lived, a sacrifice of unparalleled magnitude: widowed mothers struggling with a heroic tenacity and back-breaking labor to educate their children, and a steadfast father standing firm against the stagnant, regressive mindsets of a mother or a widow to ensure his young daughter attained the light of knowledge.

In every teacher, I beheld a soul that granted its precious time and its brilliant mind without asking for any earthly recompense, as if the act of giving were a sacred end in itself, notwithstanding the formidable difficulty and the weight of the mission.

The psychological and social circumstances of the time eventually imposed a specific, rigorous lifestyle upon the young teacher. I adopted a strict discipline in my life, my discourse, my conduct, my gait, and my every movement—effectively living an age that was not my own at all. From the very

beginning, I was compelled to become a woman of reason; I refrained from laughing without measure like my peers, nor did I weep or dream without the heavy hand of restraint. I found myself exhausting my very being without once rebelling or even manifesting a hint of complaint or a grumble.

One afternoon, a luminary of the Ulema Association arrested my attention. He was the venerable scholar and martyr, Sheikh Larbi Tebessi, just days prior to his hallowed martyrdom. He articulated a profound and magnificent truth while visiting the classroom where I was instructing. He kindly drew my attention to the fact that I had neglected to record the Hijri date upon the blackboard. He concluded his fatherly guidance by declaring with an air of immense pride and visible emotion:

— "*...I am profoundly jubilant, for I behold before my very eyes a generation tasked with instructing the second half of our nation. Is there not a remarkable disparity in age between myself and my pupils? Is not the circumstance we navigate both arduous and fraught with peril? Verily, it is the very struggle coursing through our land that dictates all of these imperatives.*"

While he [Sheikh Larbi Tebessi] endeavored to persuade me of this truth, the Inspector—that man distinguished by his excessive gravity and stony features, who was destined to become a commander within the National Liberation Army (ALN) in the Aurès-N'nemcha peaks—had sought to recruit me into the clandestine struggle from the very inception. The wind howled and roared, seemingly devouring my tears as I strived to inhabit the vigor of a pained and visceral pride. Raindrops were a rarity at the dawn of that summer, and the parched earth hungered for the grace of fertility. The season of

my own life wavered precariously between the sober gravity of the elders and the untamed, vibrant recklessness of youth.

I had become, in a startlingly brief span, a mother to an exquisite child and a pedagogue to dozens of girls. I was an educator against my own will, and contrary to the dreams and yearnings that prioritized the completion of my higher academic studies. Against the dictates of my heart too, I was forced to bid a final farewell to every manifest and concealed dream of my youth. I had been transmuted into a teacher, a mission that commanded a myriad of sacred commitments—foremost among them being the obligation to rise to the intellectual and moral level of my students.

From the window of that sequestered chamber within the school, I would cast my gaze toward the thoroughfares, watching as the school walls yielded to the image of the intersecting streets. I observed the labyrinthine back alleys leading toward those dwellings and the chaotic architecture of tin-shack buildings—colorless edifices, never once graced by the vibrant hues of the sun, which seemed to spread their wings over hearts saturated with a heavy anxiety. These were architectural metaphors for homes inhabited by peculiar dreams and hopes—hopes that felt ashamed to manifest, for they resided closer to a state of profound bewilderment and loss than to genuine aspiration.

The school and the mosque had persisted in an unchanging state since the eruption of the Revolution, with the singular exception of the school director's apprehension and his subsequent deportation to one of the detention camps in southern Algeria, or those unwelcome and intrusive visits conducted by the French officer—the supreme ruler of the entire district at the head of his military encampment in the

"Lasas" quarter. We, the educators, would be apprised of the proximity of his arrival time and again, ostensibly for the purpose of routine administrative oversight. In those moments, we would orchestrate a swift concealment of every history volume, every notebook of nationalistic memorization, and every anthem of defiance, placing instead the *Mushafs* (the Holy Quran) into the hands of our students. We would commence a collective recitation and a rhythmic chanting of the Divine Word, so that its echoes might reach his ears as he conversed with the head of the association, perhaps alluding to his grandfather's alleged support for Islam when he served as an officer in Mostaganem at the dawn of the occupation, and his purported contributions to the *Zawayas* for over a century.

Once the charade of "routine oversight" had concluded, we would once again unveil our hidden books and notebooks, returning to the diverse subjects of our true curriculum—most specifically the history of Algeria and the storied chronicles of the Arabs and Muslims.

The school courtyard remained a vibrant playground for the sun’s rays from dawn until dusk, and a hallowed sanctuary for the young students in particular; for even these little ones had been touched by an early awareness of the Revolution and its unfolding events. These children, in their modest and variegated raiment, possessed a burgeoning noise during their intervals of rest—a clamor that seemed to know neither the sting of poverty, the gnaw of hunger, nor the shadow of fear.

During those interludes, and in the quiet spaces between classes, I began to truly live my day. That "Other Life" was one I only fully came to comprehend through the companionship of one of my colleagues, whom we called "Awawesh" (Aisha).

Aisha was a tall, broad-shouldered young woman of striking presence. I appeared beside her like a fragile bird beside an ostrich; yet, beneath her formidable frame resided a delicate, sensitive soul that thrived exclusively upon affection and the ethereal language of hearts and emotions. Her word was her primordial nourishment—a single utterance that possessed the power to render her either the most jubilant of souls or making her the most miserable of souls. As vast as the physical disparities were between us, every difference of spirit, essence, and thought seemed to dissolve into a seamless, harmonious unity.

In those quiet intervals, I would be in the company of "Awawesh" or Aisha, suspended between daydreaming and wakefulness, as if we were collectively awaiting a narrative—a story whose magnitude or specific content remained shrouded from us. Yet, we harbored an unshakeable conviction that it was approaching with an inevitable momentum, destined to manifest as a lived reality after our long-cherished dreams and our wandering ruminations. We waited and waited, day after day, but the answers remained stubbornly scarce until we reached a state of near intellectual and emotional exhaustion.

Despite the despair and the grey monotony that frequently draped the days and hours, the event that finally arrived shattered every vestige of routine and repetition. What used to render the hours interminable and the days seemingly wasted was the mission of teaching—with its rigid, recurring syllabus, its unyielding schedule, and the subjects that were fresh to the students but recycled for us teachers. There was that persistent daily nightmare of exercises and the mounting piles of homework, which awaited judgment by the red pencils that never remained new for long; they quickly blunted and eroded,

transforming into numbers and zeros that brought a fleeting joy to the diligent and a lingering sorrow to the lazy.

At that specific juncture, and at that tender age, I discovered the profound depth and the daunting difficulty of this mission—its inherent nobility on one hand, and its significant peril to the teacher's mind and nerves on the other.

Every time I instructed the students in that famous poem by Ahmed Shawqi concerning the educator, asserting that he *"was nearly a messenger,"* I would be overcome by a surge of silent indignation and a sense of grievance. Instead, I would find myself reciting the verses of the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Tuqan, who offered a defiant counter-argument to Shawqi, sarcastically refuting his idealism in the concluding lines of his poem:

"O you who seek a path to self-destruction, find it... for the teacher lives not for long."

When I read those words, I felt a sense of visceral joy instead of indignation, as if I were triumphing for Tuqan, who had composed his verses out of raw experience and bitter expertise, scoffing at Shawqi who seemed to know nothing of this mission—a mission that thrives upon the illumination of minds at the total expense of the teacher’s own vitality and life.

How arduous and taxing was this mission within a modest classroom in a destitute popular neighborhood! Its inhabitants regarded the Arabic language as a sacred constant of their national identity and a hallowed value that had been systematically stolen from their ancestors since the very moment the colonizer first set foot upon their hallowed soil.

A New Birth

The event was approaching, but it appeared to be moving in a singular direction—at least as far as I was aware at the time. It was converging upon me. I found myself wondering: what was I to do? My dear friend Aisha had to share this event with me, just as she had shared the long odyssey of our labor as educators in this school. She had been my sovereign partner in everything; prior to this day, she had shared the waiting, the dreaming, the expectations, and the haunting fear of what the coming days might bring.

—"Shall we truly live to see our country liberated and experience the pure joy of national independence?"

This was her constant, echoing question—one she repeated almost daily as we received news of death and the hallowed martyrdom of loved ones whom we knew and whose families we held dear. How, then, could I be begrudging or stingy toward her today? How could I withhold from her a share of the culmination of those expectations and questions—the very fruit of our shared waiting and our collective dreams?

In truth, I possessed no choice in the matter. It was not a question of a modest meal shared in the school courtyard—which frequently consisted of nothing more than a tin of sardines or a few fragments of orange or apricot—nor was it about a beautiful handkerchief we might exchange, nor a story, a novel, or a collection of poetry we vied to read until its pages were worn thin. It was not even about the private, intimate wishes we once hoped to fulfill together one day.

The matter for me was of an entirely different nature. It was a momentous event, a discovery of many things and matters that fundamentally altered my perception of everything,

compelling me to view myself and my surroundings through a fresh prism, guided by new conditions and standards. Abruptly, everything was transformed; every word and every whisper attained a newfound weight and resonance. I discovered, as the days unfolded, that a human being could be born anew—a rebirth that mirrored the original, as if my previous existence had to be surrendered without hesitation or resistance, as if it were a destiny that had been ordained long ago.

Aisha said to me, as she signaled her farewell in the late afternoon, heading back to her home situated in close proximity to the school:

— "Are you not afraid of the solitude within these school walls?"

— "But I am not alone," I replied, "the clamor leaking from the street outside fills my thoughts."

— "Sometimes," she noted, "solitude pierces through all the shouting and the noise of the world."

She spoke those words and looked at me with a touch of pride. I had achieved my aim; I had intended only to hint to her, to signal my embrace of this solitude for a matter both grave and sacred—as if it were a reality I had already been initiated into.

Aisha departed, leaving the iron gate of the school ajar. "Uncle Ali," the gatekeeper, often surrendered to a brief nap after the noon prayer—a slumber that harmonized with the coolness of the mosque's atmosphere. He had flung open all its windows, enjoying a sweet rest upon the thick carpets. He felt secure about the school and those within it, harboring no fear as long as the gates were secured from the inside.

But Aisha had left the gate open deliberately; perhaps she was sensing everything now. She had offered profuse apologies for not staying with me, reiterating that her home was but a stone's throw from the school.

Aisha vanished at the bend of the road, and just then, "Hamo" appeared—handsome, slender, with light footsteps, wearing white athletic shoes that added to the nimbleness of his movements.

I received him with an inquiring look:

— "Hamo, did anyone see you?"

— "No."

— "And Miss Aisha?"

— "She didn't see me; she was at the turn of the street when I reached it."

—"Splendid, take a seat. You are breathless; did you run all the way here?"

I sat beside him, my eyes anchored to his lips, yet his gaze was drifting toward the distance, entirely indifferent to my palpable tension or my scrutiny. He was carefree, his attention fixed on a spot where the tail of a rat peeped from beneath the platform. He let out a sigh:

—"It is the Hero Rat, as we call it."

We, the teachers, would appear and disappear at will, much like that creature. How Aisha used to delight in pointing it out to me while she was leading the girls in memorizing *Surat Ash-Shams*.

Aisha, after turning the classroom into a melodic chorus of shouting—herself and her students included—would often comment on the sight by saying:

— *"This rat has a passion for light; it loves the Sun."*

I gently turned Hamo's head toward me, and he said with a playful smile:

— *"Do you not have cats?"*

— *"If we had cats, would the rats have remained?"*

Then, in a tone of gentle rebuke, I asked:

—*"Come now, do you not realize you are on a mission? What did your father tell you?"*

— *"He gave me these to deliver to you."*

Hamo pulled a notebook from beneath his white cotton shirt and handed it to me, adding:

— *"My father tells you: next Tuesday, the truck will depart."*

I took his face between my hands and kissed him warmly. He remained blissfully oblivious to me and to the grave weight of his mission, which he had performed with perfection, all while following the movements of the "Hero Rat."

Hamo was but ten years old, the only child of his parents, and the brother with whom I worked and under whose responsibility I fell. His full name was Al-Siddiq Mansouria, hailing from the rugged Bu Taleb mountain region, nestled between the Saliha Bey district and the Aurès mountains.

Hamo left me, darting out like an arrow. He left me browsing through the notebook with exquisite care, as if I were leafing

through the pages of a Sacred Book. But he soon returned, panting once more, and asked:

—"And what do I say to my father?"

— "Nothing, only convey my greetings of peace."

He did not reply, but I heard the heavy door slam shut, and I could hear "Uncle Ali," the gatekeeper, seeing him off with colorful insults and shouting:

— "A generation of the end of time, deterred by nothing since childhood!"

Then he entered to deliver a lecture to me on the absolute necessity of securing the door from the inside, warning me of evil people and theft, among other pieces of advice.

— "Ah, if you only knew, Uncle Ali, who the generation of the end of time truly is."

I whispered that to myself as I embraced the "Notebook of Trust." It was a green-colored notebook, its pages emblazoned with the official seal of the General Command of the National Liberation Front (FLN). The ink of the seal was green, and the receipts had been signed by the political officer in blank. My task was to fill those receipts, one by one, with the names of the contributors in support of the logistical efforts of the revolution. That notebook contained data that were, in fact, testimonies of participation in supporting the cause—a witness for everyone who embraced such work, serving as a source of profound duty and pride on one hand, and a source of silent terror on the other. Yet, in the fervent, enthusiastic atmosphere of those days, it was duty and pride that reigned supreme in my heart.

The happiness and pride I felt then were immense. Such responsibilities could only be entrusted to those who were loyal and worthy of absolute confidence. Above all else, it was the Weight of Responsibility. My mission transcended everything I knew of other roles: school director, head of an association, teacher, guard, colonial soldier, or even an officer. It surpassed all these because it was a journey into the unknown—unknown today and unknown tomorrow. There was no hope of ever knowing its ultimate results. The foundational rule of revolutionary work at that time was:

—"Execute first, then Discuss"—if there was even any room for discussion, which was a rare luxury for simple soldiers like myself.

It was a responsibility that transcended words and actions as they were known in the environment I lived in. It even transcended my own self, for I had no right to think about it except within the framework of this silence, secrecy, and concealment. When one of these receipts was delivered to a contributing militant, they would immediately withdraw back into a world of secrecy and silence. All of this possessed no tangible identity, no recognized existence, save for a profound sense of duty and pride—yet it was a feeling that was forbidden from crossing the threshold of the soul, destined instead to be submerged in that same world of secrecy and silence.

Adherence to strict secrecy was one of the most vital conditions for the success of the revolutionary struggle in my country.

I recall an instance when we read the morning newspapers, which carried the photograph of one of our brothers, a mujahid from the neighborhood: the martyr Abdelrahman Laala. The

news announced his execution by the guillotine. One of our officials issued a stern directive: we were to go and offer condolences to his mother, my Aunt Warda, in the Al-Nathour neighborhood. However, he commanded us to swear to her upon the Holy Quran that her son, Abdelrahman, had not died—despite the evidence of the photograph—based on the sacrosanct belief that martyrs never truly die. Our oath, therefore, was no falsehood.

Upon hearing our words, the grieving mother ceased her weeping and wailing; she cleared her face of sorrow and let out a resounding ululation for the "Groom of Martyrdom."

Aisha said when she returned, laughing:

— "Uncle Ali almost struck me because I was convinced by what he said, and I left the door open upon my departure."

— "I, too, narrowly escaped a blow from his hand, after having already received the lash of his tongue."

I spoke those words as I carefully avoided delving deeper into the conversation, then added:

— "Did you catch a glimpse of your friend, the Hero Rat? She appeared to me as well, despite not having heard a single verse of Surat Ash-Shams or Surat Al-Qamar."

She replied, laughing:

— "But she ventured out toward the sun itself; why should we begrudge her the right to light and life?"

—"No, my dear," I replied, feigning a gravity that might have been sincere, "we must eradicate these creatures from the school and its vaults. I feel as though we ourselves have not yet

evolved beyond this stage of base existence, dwelling as we do beneath a single roof with them."

Indeed, a few days later, we teachers—accompanied by our students—launched a sweeping sanitation campaign throughout the entire school. In place of dust and gravel, we planted jasmine shrubs, roses, the "Queen of the Night," and various other saplings and blooms. The students and teachers brought these from their own homes; we purchased nothing, for we lacked the funds for such luxuries. To this day, those shrubs remain lush and flourishing; I see them every time I pass by the school to visit my brother, who still resides in that very neighborhood.

In that state of anticipation for whatever "new" the days might bring—both in my private, secret world and in that broader reality we all shared—and amidst the conjectures and expectations we had grown accustomed to since the Revolution's outbreak, we continued to live our lives with striking normalcy. But it was a life lived truly: we laughed, we rejoiced, and we memorized sentimental songs with the same fervor we held for national anthems.

We hungered for whatever our Eastern poets composed in tribute to our Revolution, and for the broadcasts from Arab radio stations, most notably *Sawt al-Arab* from Cairo. We attended weddings and celebrations; we breathed, we played, and we did so without dwelling on fear, peril, or even the specter of death.

It was as if we had entrusted our destinies to the hands of Fate itself, which remained capable of safeguarding them amidst the daily occurrences we lived or heard of—fedayeen operations, martyrdom, torture, and the agonizing cases of

widowhood and displacement stretching along our borders with Tunisia and Morocco, or even within France itself.

We savored the sun's rays in the schoolyard, rejoicing with every bud that blossomed in our modest garden. We vied with one another in watering the plants and discovering every new shoot or lush, green leaf. We were nurturing life within a plot no larger than ten square meters. These were the hopes we dared not speak aloud. Despite the specters of torture, killing, and incarceration looming over our minds and hearts, and despite this natural impulse for continuity and existence—and perhaps the resilience that everyone was required to possess—the paths of the Revolution remained long, arduous, and far from their end.

My joy was profound when the head of the school association arrived one morning, clad in his white suit and golden spectacles. He was Al-Haj Ahmed Yagour, whose son Mohamed Yagour had attained martyrdom. He came to inform me that the association's board had decided to grant me a monthly stipend, starting that month, in the amount of three thousand old francs—equivalent to roughly thirty dinars today. This came after a year and a half of practicing a mission that I had neither desired nor sought. During those months, I had mastered the arts of teaching, guidance, sanitation, and horticulture, among other tasks. I had also performed other missions—ones I had never known before, and about which no one had ever told me. These were not found in the books we competed to read, nor in the novels we devoured with passion, nor in the stories and tales of the people. Perhaps this was because such deeds only thrive and grow within the world of secrecy and silence.

During this interval, I was subjected to all manner of treatments and peculiar reactions to which I was entirely unaccustomed. I faced reprimands, received praise, heard rumors, and was even placed under constant surveillance and scrutiny.

One of the revolutionary officials in the neighborhood once said to me, after I had candidly admitted that my mastery of Arabic was far superior to my French:

— "Then you are unfit for this mission."

He spoke with a biting tone, only for another colleague to intervene, attempting to dissipate the tension:

— "Let us assign this sister to one task, and that sister to another."

He meant me, and he sought to clear the air. I did not know these men, but I was stunned by such a harsh judgment after the dedication I had shown. Yet, my bewilderment did not last; I understood that matters in this arena do not yield to social courtesies. The paramount objective was to be assigned any other work—to never remain without participation. The competition for the sake of the homeland was both noble and fierce. Truly, it was the only capital that mattered, and none traded in it more than the graduates of the Free National Schools.

I was like a student who had sat for an exam and failed, spending the following days waiting for that official to offer an apology for his sharp remark. But my wait was long—not because he was arrested, but because he was being subjected to torture without ever betraying his comrades or associates,

myself included. Yet, he never once thought to apologize, neither to me nor to anyone else.

He was, like so many others among my comrades, like a machine driven by invisible forces. They concealed everything, even their ordinary human sentiments.

Thus a human being lived and met their end, often unaware of the purpose of their existence or the cause of its conclusion until much later. The individual dissolves into the collective, and almost no one draws attention save for a precious few. In those hours and days, it was not only the targeted or the captured who stood alone; the very atmosphere was heavy with the scent of defiance.

As the days unfolded, a power erupted within me—stronger and more resolute in its commitment to the path of struggle. This time, it was a path chosen with absolute determination, not one forged by mere chance or circumstance. This was particularly true as we were startled one morning by the absence of one of our colleagues, Bahia Salmani. We soon learned that her mother had been arrested following a raid, a disappearance marked by the grim shadows of interrogation and torture. I felt no fear despite my deep concern for her, for she operated within one cell while I worked in another, as dictated by the revolutionary organization.

Then, a blow fell that shattered our hearts and dissolved us in grief—Aisha and I. That young woman with the ever-cheerful smile, and all the inhabitants of our neighborhood, were rocked by the news that her brother Mustafa—a handsome young man in the prime of his twenties—had been arrested. He and every member of his cell were captured, only to be subjected to

torture, tried, and sentenced to death by the guillotine in a brief, harrowing span at the Barbarossa prison.

With such terrifying speed, they were accused of forming a commando unit responsible for most of the operations within our neighborhood and outside it.

The veils over my secrets and those of Aisha were lifted following the execution of her brother Mustafa, the one she cherished above all others. There was no longer a need for excessive secrecy; the sheer force and acceleration of events possessed the power to alter every plan and reservation. The weight of secrecy had vanished.

The sheer scale of the unfolding events had eclipsed the need for concealment; such cataclysms alone possess the power to shatter the fortresses of fear, the hesitation of the soul, and even the unyielding dictates of reason.

When would the mist of uncertainty finally dissipate? This was the question that hung in the air—sometimes whispered as imminent, other times vanishing into the unknown. A profound ambiguity and a heavy silence began to characterize the conversations, the commentaries, and the very conduct of everyone.

The colonial broadcasting apparatus exerted its utmost might to persuade the masses that order would inevitably be restored in favor of the empire upon which the sun supposedly never set in Africa. Its gazettes and propaganda machines fabricated hollow triumphs over the revolution and its heralds everywhere, as if every revolutionary had been martyred and the rebellion were drawing its final, rattling breath. The common folk, unversed in the cynical stratagems of psychological warfare, remained torn between a desperate

belief and a gnawing doubt. Only those tethered to the revolutionary cells found a modicum of reassurance, yet they lacked the capacity to comfort the general public for fear of exposure. The eyes of colonial intelligence monitored every movement, every dwelling, and even the softest of whispers. Indeed, the struggle within the labyrinthine veins of the city proved far more treacherous than the open defiance of the mountain peaks.

As the days blurred and the scent of death became a constant companion, the lingering taste of these times was as bitter as colocynth, seeped deep into the marrow of the soul and the chambers of the heart.

One morning, a colleague at our school spoke with a quiet finality:

— "The hour of our parting draws near."

With a forced lack of astonishment, I asked:

—"And for what reason? May it be for the best, God willing."

He answered me, his eyes glazed with a hollow void :

—"*My family has sent for me; my father and my eldest brother have attained martyrdom in the recent upheavals in North Constantine*."

I replied in a hushed, despairing breath:

— "And what is it you intend to do for them?" "I shall do nothing," he said, "save for following in their footsteps like so many others. As I bid you farewell today, I go to join the ranks."

My colleague spoke those words without a trace of fervor or pride, as if he were simply succumbing to a destiny already

etched in the stars, every detail of which was already known to him.

As our eyes met in a silent, surrendered understanding, he departed. I whispered to myself:

"He, too, shall meet his end, unaware of the purpose of his life or the cause of its conclusion until much later."

As I walked back home, my steps heavy and labored, I felt smaller and younger than ever before. All my actions seemed trivial when measured against the colossal secret I carried—a secret that would reveal itself day by day: in the humility of a revolutionary treading toward the altar of sacrifice, in the unwavering resolve of a twenty-year-old commando as he was led, bound, toward the blade of the guillotine, in the bewilderment of a young girl who could never truly grasp the magnitude of our deeds, and in the quiet reception of a destitute old man to the sun’s rays—rays he shared with every living being on earth without reservation.

A School for Education and a Center for Commando Operations

The summer vacation period arrives, yet the pervasive scent of death does not dissipate. Every passing day, fueled by a gnawing dread and the sudden panic of falling into the clutches of the police, nourishes this grim atmosphere; for we carry within us the very evidence that could condemn us indefinitely to the harshest of fates.

The summer heat remains urgently present, playing across our world like an obstinate and pampered child. Within the school walls, every soul awaits the vacation with a heavy and melancholic heart, as if it marks the onset of a wearying separation rather than a season for respite, recreation, and fun. Indeed, everyone harbored a secret wish that the school term would never cease. We faced two full months bereft of any outing, picnic, or gathering—most specifically among our sisterhood of colleague teachers.

How the tears of our young students multiplied as the school year drew to its final close! They wept because their fathers or mothers had been spirited away to cold prisons or desolate detention camps, or they had vanished to destinations unknown to their children, perhaps buried in nameless graves whose locations and dates remained a dark mystery.

My dear friend Aisha was among those mourners; her grief was quiet, heavy, and profound—smoldering like fire beneath the ash for her beloved brother Mustafa. My own sorrow was no less acute, compounded by a persistent state of tension and a suffocating fear for this precious freedom that I felt slipping away with every movement and every departure from the house. I live within the sanctuary of my sister's home, surrounded by her children, yet perpetually shadowed by the

relentless gossip of people—that social discourse that never truly ends, regardless of the gravity of the circumstances. My sister and I inhabit this world alone, bereft of any male presence—regardless of the nature of that man—vulnerable to the unchanging societal narratives regarding the perceived weakness of women and the supposed strength of men. Notwithstanding this, the Revolution and its enduring momentum managed to dismantle many of these antiquated concepts, especially as its fires intensified; for there were numerous situations where the woman proved herself far more resilient and courageous than the man, and in certain instances, her very life or death rested entirely within her own hands and depended solely upon her individual fortitude.

My sister remains perpetually tethered to that terrifying and visceral memory: the day the colonial authorities led her husband, the school director, away to prison. In her vision, any seemingly suspicious movement within the house could lead her husband's head directly to the blade of the guillotine, notwithstanding the fact that in moments of actual, physical peril, she frequently manifests a bravery that far surpasses my own.

As I make my way back from the school, ostensibly awaiting the summer recess, the faces in the thoroughfares appear as mere kinetic movements, stripped of any inherent meaning. It was as if I were wandering through a city of glass, its inhabitants crystalline figurines of such transparency that they concealed everything while revealing nothing. The shoe-shiner, with his kit balanced upon his shoulder, seemed to proclaim through his searching gaze that he was with me and of my kind. The owner of the tobacco cart seemed to echo this sentiment as he pushed his cart with a visible and pained effort. Even the

man wearing that sardonic, knowing smile seemed to announce that he was with me and shared my purpose. And that aged woman resting upon the pavement, seeking a fleeting rest from a long trek, seemed to be whispering:

— *"I am with you, I am with you, despite my frailty and my advanced years. In our current state, my life is of no substantive consequence. It has never been worth a thing while our youth perish and we are left to endure our own self-infliction."*

They were being subjected to the cruelties and the savagery of the Middle Ages. These old women would go to their rest only to shake off the dust of life time and again, just as they had shaken it off every single day within the "Monsieur Jack" workshop.

Thus the days drifted by for us, seemingly ordinary, their events etched upon the brow of destiny, as the saying goes. Even when my sister's husband was apprehended in the dead of night, we remained entirely ignorant of his fate for a full year, searching for him relentlessly across every security directorate and gathering center.

Or consider the time when the school where we instructed young girls was transformed into a center—I shall not call it a lair or an underground vault, for it was far removed from the daily bustle of students and teachers—where we concealed certain wanted commandos from the neighborhood before facilitating their passage to nearby destinations. These were mujahideen whose clandestine activities had been unearthed by the police and the colonial administration, such as the martyr-militant Ibrahim Fardi, whom we smuggled first through Al-Harrach and then into the Green Mountains, only for him to attain martyrdom in the very first battle he engaged in. Or the

martyr Mohamed Yagour, whom we smuggled to Djelfa, where he was subsequently martyred in an operation with the Bellounis group against the National Liberation Army. It was a tragedy of profound regret, for he and his comrades were unaware of the rift between this man—their leader Bellounis, who had bartered his soul and principles to the colonial forces—and the leadership of the M.N.A. movement headed by the historical figure Messali Hadj.

Notwithstanding those tragic divisions, when the nation was finally liberated, these individuals were recognized as martyrs in full possession of their rights and sacred honor; for they were, in truth, victims of internal conflict and betrayal at a time when their singular objective remained the liberation of the homeland, much like their brothers among the martyrs of the National Liberation Army and Front.

I recall also the times I accompanied one of our kin, Fatima Zighad—who, to this very day, has not attained her rightful recognition as a *mujahida*. We would, in those clandestine hours, deliver many trusts—vessels containing weaponry, currency, and medicines, alongside classified documents and missives—to individuals whose identities remain a mystery to us even now.

Or consider when Fatima took the perilous risk of sheltering one of the commando leaders of the capital, within the historical Fourth Province, in her cramped dwelling in the Telemly quarter. He was the *mujahid* Hassan al-Saadi, whose name was being broadcast daily by the colonial administration over the "Voice of the Land" radio as a wanted man. I was the sole soul privy to this secret, for I was a frequent weekly visitor after Fatima’s husband had been led away to prison. I would provide him with packs of cigarettes every week—not for her

husband, nor for myself—while he endured the most savage forms of torture, yet never once did he confess his secrets to his wife, nor to me. That commando remained hidden in my friend Fatima's home for over three months, until we finally facilitated his passage to a sanctuary in the town of Boudouaou, where he was disguised as a blind man, a white cane in his hand and dark spectacles masking his eyes.

Or when the leadership of the Front in the Fourth Province enlisted us within our neighborhood in Al-Madania for the total oversight of the citizens' welfare, particularly the families of the *mujahideen* and martyrs, during the historical eight-day strike. We supplied them with food and various provisions to ensure they would not be driven to break the national strike out of sheer material necessity.

Or when the leadership recruited us as well for the success of the massive national demonstrations on December **11**, **1960**. We organized and prepared in the shadows, first by acquiring bolts of colored fabric and then meticulously sewing them into flags. We prepared the boys and girls, whether they were the students of our school—the free As-Sadiqia within the Al-Madania district, the French institutional school, or the vocational training center. At this juncture, I am compelled to embark upon a brief analytical pause to document a literary and sociological issue that sparked considerable discourse. This arose among those who did not truly comprehend the visceral nature of the Revolution save through the prism of the media and disparate reports—both accurate and otherwise—precisely because they remained far removed from the arena of the daily, blood-drenched struggle. It was a conflict waged between the hellish occupation apparatuses and a citizenry that was offering the supreme price of freedom from the very blood and

souls of their young sons, their youth, and their fathers stationed beyond our borders.

Certain voices among these observers inquired:

"How is it possible for a mother to bid a final farewell to her martyred son with trills of joy (ululations)?"

They characterized this phenomenon as a poetic exaggeration and questioned the validity of recording such scenes within our literary texts.

I declare here, without the slightest tension or hyperbole: if the writer is indeed the one ordained to record human reality through their creative innovation, then they are duty-bound to remain uncompromisingly honest in their realistic depictions. The Algerian creator is distinguished in their work by the fact that they were living their community's raw reality, intimately experiencing their fellow citizens' profound feelings, searing pains, and luminous hopes. They were writing from the visceral reality of the wounds, for they lived them, coexisted with them, and interacted with them with every fiber of their being. Their work did not emanate from the realms of mere imagination or hollow dreams; for the lived reality was far more monumental than anything that could be imagined. Therefore, their creations achieved distinction during specific epochs of the nation’s political history, just as those stages distinguished their creative output and positioned it among the loftiest forms of human artistic innovation—predicated as it was upon eternal values, at the zenith of which stand the freedom of peoples and their hallowed dignity.

Indeed, the trill of joy with which Algerian mothers escorted their martyrs was a resonance of a singular and extraordinary kind—a unique vocal tapestry that gathered within its chords

the depths of pain, the heights of hope, the weight of tears, the fortitude of patience, the fire of defiance, and the majesty of dignity.

All these varied events and multifaceted operations I have detailed—whether they were minute in scale or monumental, perilous or seemingly ordinary—were, in absolute reality, merely passing occurrences that intersected with my path by a stroke of serendipity, entirely devoid of prior deliberation or meticulous preparation. For the structured organizational activity I was then performing was in my capacity as a member of a clandestine cell belonging to the First Province within the Aurès region. This unit was presided over by the official responsible for my person and others, among whom was his own spouse, the mujahida "Zahra Hafiz," whose revolutionary *nom de guerre* was "Al-Awda" (The Return, or The Steed). He was the valiant mujahid Al-Siddiq Mansouria, of the First Province. He possessed a vast network of militant cells in every major metropolis that were under his direct stewardship, as he subsequently confirmed to me long after independence, alongside my brother and parliamentary colleague, the mujahid Mustafa bin Al-Nwi (Murad).

Al-Siddiq Mansouria was a man of tall stature and possessed a handsome countenance; however, a notable feature was that half of his teeth were fashioned from gold—a trend of that specific era, notwithstanding my personal distaste for such a display in either gender. His educational background was modest; perhaps the extent of his learning was the memorization of the Holy Quran, though he struggled with the fluid articulation of its verses.

Despite these modest beginnings, after Algeria achieved its sovereign liberty and I had ascended to the rank of Minister of

National Education, Al-Siddiq Mansouria graced my ministerial office as a visitor and well-wisher, arriving without the formality of a prior appointment. I received him with the profound warmth and reverence befitting a comrade-in-arms who had once held responsibility for me—with the visceral joy of a sister reuniting with a brother with whom she had navigated the darkest of days and endured the rigors of severe torture. He had never once confessed against me or his wife, nor had he even whispered our names to his inquisitors.

Once the initial courtesies had concluded, he solicited my assistance in appointing him as the principal of a primary school in his own neighborhood. I responded to his request with a gentle firmness, explaining that such a designation could only be fulfilled under specific statutory conditions, academic qualifications, and other mandatory legal requirements.

He responded to my words with a vibrant laughter that revealed his golden teeth, remarking:

— "But you are the Minister, and surely you possess the sovereign prerogative to alter the very laws themselves!"

Notwithstanding his simplicity, I can never consign to oblivion those days when we convened daily within the sanctuary of his elegant residence, apartment number **27** in the Al-Madania district. His son, Hamo, was the progeny of his first spouse, "Kharfiya," who did not hail from the Aurès peaks. It was Hamo who served as our courier, apprising me of meeting dates or functioning as a vital messenger between me and his sire, carrying missives and clandestine reports tucked within his white cotton shirt, as I have previously recounted.

As for his second spouse, Az-Zahra, she was entrusted with the perilous task of concealing the financial contributions we

garnered, alongside vital medicines and diverse donations of raiment and footwear destined even for civilians in those remote mountain hamlets that sheltered and sustained the mujahideen. My specific mission alongside her was to meticulously inventory every singular item and document it within a report composed in the Arabic tongue. I would subsequently escort those provisions to the First Zone, Third Area of the First Province—most specifically to the rugged peaks of Bu Taleb and Jebel Nasser. We traversed those paths in a transport truck whenever that dedicated member accompanied us, navigating through the Ain Azal region and the village of Qeiqba with the heroic assistance of the mujahideen from the Hassasna region in Awlad Ali.

It transpired that when Al-Siddiq was eventually apprehended, he was subjected to the most excruciating and savage forms of torture. One of the mujahideen, among those whose identities remained veiled from us, issued a stern counsel that we should immediately distance ourselves from the neighborhood and the capital in its entirety. Consequently, Az-Zahra set out for Tlemcen to seek refuge with her mother, while I embarked upon a journey to rejoin my family in Constantine.

In Constantine, I collaborated with my cousin Ibrahim, who practiced the craft of photography. He was frequently engaged in the clandestine labor of developing photographs for the mujahideen of the Second Province, and I used to assist him, He remained an unyielding fortress of silence, never once betraying his comrades or associates to his inquisitors; and thus, the clandestine and atmospheric trajectory that spanned the years between **1955** and **1958** was heroically preserved.

After an interval of three months, the secondary phase of investigation and instruction alongside Al-Siddiq reached its conclusion. I was subsequently entrusted with a new mantle of responsibility by a high-ranking official within the First Province—the political officer and mujahid, Mohamed al-Sharif Abbas, who was destined to become the Minister for Mujahideen following our national independence. He issued a sovereign mandate for me to persist in my labor and assume a fresh and daunting charge.

I clutched the missive with hands that trembled from a mixture of visceral dread and pained anxiety, directing my steps toward one of the militants within our cell: the mujahid Moussa bin al-Sabu'. I found him, as was our customary arrangement, within the sanctuary of his shop. The investigator and the sentinel remained at their posts, and we continued to conceal vital and diverse trusts within that space on every occasion, ensuring that no shadow of suspicion would ever be cast upon him or his place of business.

The small envelope reached his hands. He read its contents with a focused intensity, then cast a searching gaze upon my person and declared:

— "Madam, while it is an undeniable truth that you are the esteemed educator of our progeny, I must implore your pardon; for I find it fundamentally impossible to labor under your direct responsibility."

I inquired, caught between a sudden bewilderment and a rising fear:

— "Is it solely because I am a woman?"

He responded, averting his countenance from mine as if to shield his own discomfort:

— *"Indeed," he replied, "for you are a woman—fragile, slight, and seemingly too frail to bear such a formidable weight."*

Destiny willed, in the years following our national independence, that he [Moussa bin al-Sabu'] would name one of his offspring "Zhour" in my honor—a poignant gesture of profound admiration; for his initial reaction toward my leadership had never been born of malice or ill intent. He subsequently succumbed to the dictates of the sovereign cause and embarked upon a period of successful collaboration alongside me.

That transpired in the year **1960**. My involvement with that specific clandestine cell was suspended for a brief duration. I did not, however, permit my precious time to be squandered; instead, I directed the current of my activism—entirely without my own prior choice—toward the Fourth Province, specifically within the Al-Madania district. There, I operated under the stewardship and responsibility of the *mujahid* Khair al-Din Takharbousht and his brother Saleh Takharbousht until the very dawn of our liberation. It was Mr. Khair al-Din who would eventually become the inaugural head of the Bir Mourad Rais municipality following independence.

I recall today, with profound reverence, those with whom I collaborated, whether directly or through indirect channels, within the First Province:

– The *mujahida* Houria Karkoush, then a devoted student at the Al-Fath school in Sétif.

– The *mujahid* Abdelrahman al-Qadhi, based in the Ain Azal region.

– Mukhtar Mansouria, the cousin of our brother Al-Siddiq Mansouria.

– Abdullah bin Zeita.

– Emhamed Chihawi, whom we provided with sanctuary for several days within our residence in Al-Madania, Al-Bahiya building, apartment number **27**.

– Ahmed Al-Matroush.

There were countless others whose names I once held in my heart, souls who crossed my path during a fleeting assembly or a rapid operation, only to eventually fade into the mist of passing years.

And then, there was the last among them, the noble martyr Mohamed Al-Qairouani, who took an extraordinary pride in my formal testimony regarding his revolutionary endeavors. He concluded his final missive to me with these immortal words:

—"Until we meet upon the banquet of glory, I bid you the salute of the Revolution and the hallowed greeting of Jihad."

Perhaps numbered among the most striking and paradoxical events I recall today—which exerted a profound and searing impact upon my soul at that time—was an occasion when I was in the company of our brother *mujahideen* upon the rugged peaks of Bu Taleb mountain. I was alongside the official overseeing our cell, Mohamed al-Sharif Abbas, during a massive popular assembly following one of the decisive battles. When he formally requested that I ascend and deliver an oration before the gathered throngs, I addressed him with a startled hesitation, declaring:

— "But they possess no understanding of my formal Arabic tongue!"

He flared with a sudden and righteous indignation, retorting with a sharp finality:

— "Verily, they understand far more profoundly than you could ever imagine!"

Years later, following our national independence and upon my ascension to the sovereign rank of Minister, he dispatched to my presence a photograph captured while I was delivering that very speech. He accompanied it with a congratulatory note, commenting with a sense of shared pride:

— "Behold, this is your likeness in the days when you functioned as a valiant mujahida and a devoted social worker."

Believe me when I say that, notwithstanding the lurking shadows of fear and the myriad complexities and hurdles that perpetually confronted my path, I was inhabited by a state of profound jubilation and immense pride in my activism. This was particularly true as I was engaged in the strategic recruitment of a formidable phalanx of sisters, among whom were:

- Al-Hajja Aisha, the spouse of Ahmed Al-Sufi.
- Atiqa Azzaoui, known by her evocative title (Al-Kahla).
- Rabia Moussaoui.

I also recruited many of the young female students from the As-Sadiqia school within the Al-Madania district, foremost among them being Drifa Chekairou (Radia Zarrouki).

I must not permit it to escape the record that following the formal ceasefire, which concluded a revolution that had endured for seven and a half grueling years, my father—may the Almighty bestow His infinite mercy upon him—escorted me

on a symbolic visit to the historic Aurès region, specifically to the historical Third Zone, where the *mujahideen* extended to him an extraordinarily warm and fraternal welcome. The first spouse of Al-Siddiq, "Kharfiya"—the mother of Hamo—honored my father with a magnificent display of hospitality.

She personally took a lamb, bound it, slaughtered and skinned it, and completed the butchery in under a single hour. She subsequently presented it to the spouse of the militant political officer "Si Mohamed al-Sharif Abbas"—the mujahida Malika—who meticulously prepared the celebratory feast for us. All of this unfolded before the stunned eyes of my father, who was moved to a profound state of admiration for everyone present, most especially for Kharfiya. He remained anchored to the memory of that visit, cherishing its radiant echoes with a great felicity until the very twilight of his existence.

Perhaps the noble reader might pause to inquire:

— why was my father so intent upon escorting me on this journey, when he himself hailed from a lineage of countless mujahideen and martyrs, and had personally endured the cold rigors of arrest and interrogation? Why did he feel this need, he who was intimately acquainted with the visceral world of jihad and revolution?

The answer, to my mind, is essentially simple. I desired, in absolute truth, to provide my father and my entire family with a tangible and irrefutable proof. I wanted them to comprehend that my frequent departures and late arrivals—often in direct and pained defiance of their strict mandates—were never born of a desire for play, leisure, or aimless wandering. Instead, they were consecrated to an extraordinarily noble and sacred mission. The Almighty honored both

the *mujahideen* and *mujahidat* during the most transformative and hallowed epochs of Algeria's modern history.

Thus, we find the woman once more—in both the past and the present—perpetually compelled to furnish the most rigorous evidence and testimony of her unblemished integrity and her purity in every singular stride she takes or behavior she adopts. In stark and pained contrast, the man is never once asked to provide justifications, interpretations, or proofs for his movements or his silences.

Poetry as a Bastion for the Sacred Cause

One momentous day, my eldest sister was graced by a missive from her spouse, then held captive within the Sidi Chahmi detention center in the western reaches of Algeria. Tucked within the envelope were two concise yet formidable poems: the first was authored and signed by her husband, the poet Omar Chakiri, while the second bore the venerable signature of the scholar and poet, Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun.

When a look of sheer bewilderment crossed my sister's countenance upon discovering the second poem—she being accustomed exclusively to the verses of her husband—I addressed her with a gentle composure:

— "*I implore you, read the letter first, so that we may fully comprehend the heart of the matter*."

My sister meticulously read her husband's message until she reached a significant passage that declared:

— *"Manifest no surprise at the inclusion of the poem by Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun; rather, take both of these compositions—you and Zhour—and ensure the students at the school commit them to heart and memory."*

We had already cultivated a long-standing custom of having our students memorize a myriad of nationalistic poems. Among these were the indomitable verses of the Revolution's poet laureate, Moufdi Zakaria, which were frequently smuggled out to us signed under the evocative pseudonym "Ibn Toumert." These sacred texts were brought to us from the shadows of the prison by Professor Mohamed Lehcen Fadhla, who also held stewardship as the director of the "Fontaine Fraîche" Free School in the capital.

We orchestrated the fulfillment of my sister's husband's request with a solemn devotion, for those two poems were remarkably concise and seamlessly integrated into our curriculum of poetic memorization.

The venerable Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun subsequently related the genesis of these two poems to us following his release, during a visit we paid him at his residence in Saint-Eugène (present-day Bologhine) to offer our felicitations on his safe return. Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun recounted:

— *"We never once permitted our pens to fall silent or ceased the composition of poetry, even as we were being shuttled from one desolate detention camp to another. Yet, the specific catalyst for the birth of these two poems was the Great Sheikh, Larbi Tebessi. Just mere days prior to his hallowed martyrdom, the Sheikh dispatched to our presence a message of congratulation for the blessed Eid al-Adha on behalf of the presidency of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema. Within its lines, he issued a fervent call, urging us never to abandon the writing of poetry, notwithstanding that we were then navigating a period of profound psychological strain and withered morale. We were even denied the right to congregate within the camp courtyard or to hold sessions for literacy and instruction. Furthermore, certain detainees were being coerced into saluting the French tricolor as a mandatory condition for their release, or to avoid various forms of excruciating physical and psychological torment.*

We initially received his missive with a touch of indifference and met its central theme with a certain coldness; yet, we eventually found that very letter to be the divine catalyst for our poetic impulse. Thus, we responded to his greeting through

these two poems. Among the resonant lines of Sheikh Omar Chakiri's poem were the following:

Eid is the day when Islam shall reign supreme,
Eid is the day when the banners shall flutter high.

Eid is the day we behold Algeria sovereign and free,
Resonating with a noble standing and a voice among the nations."

"Eid is no true festival while the sacred bonds of Islam are severed,
And its peoples, unlike any others, endure the pained sting of injustice.

Eid is no festival while the noble people of the land remain shackled,
Leaving their children, their women, and their orphans to suffer in silence."

Among the visceral lines in the poem composed by Sheikh Ahmed Sahnoun were the following:

"Seek not to prolong my blame, nor solicit my song,
For I am entirely consumed by the labor of shattering my chains.

Shall I sing while my very tongue is mute and bound?
With a suffocating collar tightening relentlessly around my neck?

Shall I sing while my hands are held in heavy shackles,
And my feet are burdened with fetters wrought of cold iron?

Shall I offer a song for one whose nation has fallen,
From the heights of glory into the pained humiliation of slaves?

For one whose hallowed homeland has become a prey,
Torn asunder between the fangs of wolves and the maws of lions?

I shall not sing until the sanctuary of the land is liberated;
Only when it is freed shall I raise my anthem once more."

Thus, poetry faithfully discharged its hallowed mission during the Revolution, whether it was the eloquent classical form or the vibrant folk tradition, composed in the noble Arabic tongue or the ancient Amazigh language.

A Debt to Repay

When the revolution of my homeland erupted, the foundations of a conscious and awakened alphabet began to reveal and clarify themselves within the soul of every Algerian—man and woman alike. The intricate threads of the national tapestry appeared in vivid and radiant hues, awaiting the hand of a master creator to weave them into history. A burgeoning desire and a spirited competition to embrace the national cause took root, spanning across the vast expanses of both time and space. It became the primordial preoccupation and the foremost obsession, fueling the revolutionary tremors and the manifestations of resistance and refusal at every conceivable level. This movement cascaded through a gargantuan and defiant uprising, whose singular and total devotion was to Algeria and the sacred freedom of Algeria, above all else—regardless of the perceived grandeur of theories, the weight of political policies, or the specific affiliations of parties and associations.

Here, I am reminded of a philosopher's profound maxim:

—*"Universal or ultimate truth is far too magnificent to be revealed to humanity in its entirety within a single epoch, regardless of the level of progress or civilization attained by that age."*

For this reason, a sense of profound and majestic awe always overcomes me when I contemplate the act of writing about the role of women in the revolution and the life of Algeria. I am struck by this trepidation even though I personally lived through and experienced two great outbursts of this vibrant existence. Any record of the woman’s role must acknowledge that every individual—praise be to God—had

their rightful share in the struggle, whether during the fires of armed combat or in the aftermath following the restoration of our national freedom and the arduous stage of laying the foundations and building the pillars of the sovereign state. I navigated through the various phases of the struggle from an age that permitted me to do so—an odyssey of a woman that commenced in her earliest childhood, subsequently finding her place as a companion and a complementary force alongside other female militants and *mujahidat* who preceded us in years and experience.

In the Great War of Liberation, we lived within a state of magnificent cohesion and seamless harmony, where our roles and responsibilities were perfectly integrated from our eastern frontiers to our western borders, from the far reaches of the south to the northern shores, and across the entire expanse of our cities and rural hinterlands. Indeed, there were those who were the vanguards of jihad and armed struggle even before our time, as I have previously noted, including those who participated in the liberation of Tunisia alongside our brethren. Among them was the pioneering *mujahida*—or rather, the leader of the *mujahidat* before the very outbreak of our revolution in **1954**: Mrs. Leila Moussaoui, a daughter of Jijel, and her sister, a martyr who fell upon the soil of Tunisia.

There were also those who preceded us through their profound contributions to the national movement within various political parties, such as the *mujahida* Mrs. Mamiya Chentouf from Relizane, and the *mujahida* Mrs. Menouba Khaled Khodja from Constantine, or those who accompanied the rebellious youth to the rugged peaks of the mountains from the very onset in **1954**, such as Gurim Belkacem and other legendary militant leaders as Kada.

The roles and missions of women integrated and flourished with the passage of days, weeks, and years during the Great War of Liberation. She was the woman stationed in the thoroughfares and upon the sidewalks, acting as a silent sentinel monitoring the movements of the enemy. She was the one who flung wide the doors of her home and prepared her entire household to serve a unit of *fedayeen* suddenly and for protracted durations. She was the one who carried equipment, garments, strategic reports, clandestine pamphlets, and a myriad of diverse secret documents transporting them from one location to another, traversing both military and psychological checkpoints. She was the one who cinched a bomb around her waist, braving various forms of harassment and public humiliation. She was the one who braided bullets into her own tresses; she was the one who acted as a vital and secret conduit for communication between the revolutionary cells within the great cities. And when her cover was compromised or a comrade was arrested and subjected to torture, she would set out for the rural areas, the rugged mountains, and the liberated zones—leaving behind her family, her husband, and her children—to participate directly in the grand battles, enduring wounds or attaining martyrdom. She was the one who cooked, washed, and fed—with back-breaking labor—the provisions for the *mujahideen* units. She was the one who thrust her entire family into the furnace of battle, welcoming their martyrdom with the nationalistic ululations of joy. She was the one who faced divorce or expulsion from the home because of these noble choices.

I am not here to serve as a formal chronicler of history; I could never possibly monitor or document the entirety of the activities and struggles of women in my land. My only desire is

to record her visceral reality during the Revolution with absolute sincerity and unblemished honesty.

Therefore, within these emotional margins—which bear no relation to the clinical or mechanical process of recording history—I do not claim that I will make the reader of these stations stand before a comprehensive or ultimate truth. I have only lived through my own life—this brief span of years—and nothing more than that.

Yet, the distinction of this life is that it unfolded during one of the most momentous and defining eras in the history of my nation and its people—a stage of struggle for self-assertion, an era of striving for noble human values that our people had been deprived of for so long: their freedom and their dignity.

History never records, throughout its distant or near stages, that this people ever accepted a *fait accompli* or succumbed to despair. Rebellion against injustice, the revolution against oppression, and a sacred longing for the better were among the most paramount features of the human spirit in my land. Its revolutions and uprisings were many, and none of them erupted merely for the sake of bread or material deprivation—as colonial analysts are fond of claiming—but rather, they were revolutions for the sake of freedom and dignity.

Among the many distinctions of the November Revolution was the indelible mark it left upon my own life and the lives of the *mujahideen* and *mujahidat* during this vital and transformative stage.

In the history of any nation possessing an ancient civilization, there are grand civilizational stations that leave their fingerprints upon the minds of successive generations. These stations subsequently transform into something akin to an

intellectual and historical phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of society and the constraints of history.

Therefore, we find that any error in judgment at one of these stations—whether by denying it its due consideration or placing it where it does not rightfully belong—is a fundamental mistake in evaluating a part of this nation's very civilization.

Civilizational symbols and ideals necessitate profound study and analytical dissection, for they will inevitably become a source of eternal inspiration for the future.

The November Revolution was, in absolute truth, a spring from which the woman drew her negated existence and her squandered power. It cleansed both the heart and the tongue, and was characterized by action, thought, and conduct—marginalizing, for a time, those stagnant ideas and rigid, diseased mindsets toward the woman and her role as a human being who must enjoy the full measure of rights and duties.

The path of the revolution in my land was long and arduous, reaching its final battles in November **1954**. Throughout a century and a quarter of struggle against the various forms of French colonial occupation, the woman’s presence was dense and palpable, both materially and morally.

Since the very dawn of history, the woman has been present. When the man went hunting, proud of his stride and his physical prowess, the woman followed, burdened by the heavy tools of the chase so that he might enjoy his prize later. She was the one who effectively secured the prey, recording yet again that she was the master who guaranteed the family’s sustenance, and thus her sovereign authority over all its members was a lived reality.

Thus was the division of labor established at the dawn of history: the man reserved for himself the most noble of tasks and bequeathed to the woman the most menial and arduous of labors.

When scholars and scientists subsequently explained this phenomenon and analyzed its roots, highlighting this inherent human inequality, they were accused of attempting to alter the cosmic order, distorting human nature, and inciting women to rebellion [10].

I mention this with a sense of profound grief and dissatisfaction, for our own history has provided us with pioneering and wise positions for women in the struggles for dignity.

Take, for instance, "The Kahina," the Queen of the Aurès. She fought the Arab conquerors on one hand, yet blessed her sons to embrace Islam on the other, after she realized with her profound wisdom, through her wisdom, that these conquerors did not resemble, in any manner, the piratical marauders who had previously crossed her lands. They were a people carrying a message of goodness, love, and human justice.

One of her sons asked her:

"And why do you advise us to embrace Islam while you persist in war against the Muslims?"

She replied with eyes tearful yet proud:

"A Queen, my son, knows only how to meet her death!" [11].

Then she mounted her steed, having surpassed the age of eighty, to die as a queen, setting a legendary and immortal

10 The Story of Civilization, Part I, by historian Will Durant.
11 History of the Arab Maghreb, by Dr. Mohamed Ali Debbouz.

example of holding fast to principles on this earth, regardless of the ultimate outcome.

Generations later came the heroine "Lalla Fatma N'Soumer" to ignite a fierce revolution alongside the *mujahideen*, spending her life in more than five cataclysmic battles. She was subsequently nicknamed by the French generals themselves as "The Vanquisher of Generals."

She was a military commander in every true sense of the word, punishing the hesitant among her soldiers by placing henna upon the crowns of their *burnouses*, symbolically likening them to those women who shirked their duty. Between this icon and that, the historical memory records the names of thousands of anonymous *mujahidat* and female heroes, who remain unknown in the vast majority of cases.

I seize this opportunity to recall that while what women provided within the cities was a tapestry of heroism and sacrifice, no matter the magnitude of their grandeur, it cannot overshadow the pioneering role performed by women in the rural areas, the plateaus, and the deserts—despite their illiteracy and the arduous conditions of their lives.

The difference between the two roles was found not in their inherent value or positivity, but in that profound modesty, self-denial, and altruism that characterized the sacrifices of the woman in the countryside.

The *mujahida* within the rural regions did not receive a material return or compensation for her jihad and her sacrifices, as the *mujahida* in the cities might have. This was due to her ignorance of her own rights and her innate simplicity. Following the victory of the Revolution, she returned to the sanctuary of the family, acting as a mere complement to

her husband, her son, her father, or her brother. It was as if her days of arduous struggle were but a station that passed, and she would inevitably resume her place in seeking those rights and privileges—were she even aware of them—at a time when her condition of self-denial made her satisfaction and pride in participating in the liberation of the homeland her greatest reward, alongside her material and moral rights.

Therefore, during my years in the media, I frequently wrote that the true face of my people and my country is not to be found in the major metropolises, but rather in the depths and the roots. The late leader, commander, President, and *mujahid* Houari Boumediene, used to follow my articles in *El Djeich* magazine during the **1960**s, manifesting his interest and directing me with these brief words:

"I have read your latest article; it was beautiful. Persevere in your writing, and focus more intensely on the condition and the station of the woman in the countryside. For she is the one whose wings have been clipped and whose rights have been stolen."

Notwithstanding all that, one of my *mujahideen* comrades said to me one day, as we sat together in the university lecture hall at the Institute of Arabic Literature during the first light of independence:

The state had provided us with the necessary conditions to enroll in university studies, after our education had been halted by the fires of the Revolution. A fellow *mujahid* and militant colleague remarked during a heated debate:

"These ideas are undoubtedly correct; the woman has performed her role in the most magnificent manner possible. But the day has finally arrived for her to rest, and to be served

by the man. He shall repay her for her grace and beauty; enough of her suffering within the house, as a spouse, and in the raising of children—a blessing she was deprived of during the years of fire. She must now catch up with herself."

Notwithstanding my university companion's good intentions—and indeed, what could bring more joy to a woman than the things he mentioned?—as I listened to him, I found myself imagining that her contribution and her sacrifice were being viewed as a debt she had extended to the man. It was as if her struggle were a loan he was returning to her today, predicated on the assumption that he alone was supposed to struggle and fight. I imagined him, once again, attempting to monopolize for himself the love of the homeland, the longing for freedom, and every beautiful deed or noble thought.

Finally, I mention today with a sense of pride the positions of the women in my country toward their just causes. I do not distinguish between her and the woman across the entire Arab world. History shall inevitably record that the victories of the woman in my land were also realized thanks to the material and moral support and solidarity provided by the woman in the Arab world, as well as those women who supported liberation movements throughout the entire globe.

I say this while being fully aware that the world at large does not differentiate in its perception of us as women; the path of struggle in this field remains long, arduous, and challenging.

The Fatimas

"Fatima" is the moniker that colonialism bestowed indiscriminately upon every Algerian woman, just as "Mohamed" was the name it disparagingly assigned to every Algerian man. Perhaps they acted thus to spare themselves the labor of individual recognition, treating us as mere nameless subjects who did not warrant the dignity of a unique identity. Yet, we are Muslims, and in that sacred truth, every one of us is Mohamed, and every one of us is Fatima. Colonialism failed to grasp the honor it inadvertently conferred upon us, nor did it realize the profound meanings of unity and solidarity it was planting within our collective consciousness as a people. We would one day stand as a singular, unbreakable rank and a unified power. They would find no artifice capable of conquering us or severing our bonds, despite their hellish forces, for we were all Mohamed and we were all Fatima.

Freedom in my homeland, across the span of a century and a third, was a nectar denied to everyone—to the Mohameds and the Fatimas alike. Perhaps the degree of suffering under this state of subjugation differed between man and woman. The man was enslaved by the occupier, yet he was at least able to manifest his dominion over the inhabitants of his own hearth: his wife, his daughter, and his sister. It was those closest to him upon whom he could exercise his residual authority, so that the woman endured a multiplied and layered slavery: first from the father, then from the husband, and even from the son before he had fully attained the stature of manhood.

Male children remain the offspring of the woman alone so long as they are small—weeping, requiring care, and demanding incessant effort, nurture, and attention. Yet, once

their garments dry and they grow into vibrant young boys who no longer crave a woman’s care—at the precise hour when they can be paraded with pride before the eyes of others—they are abruptly transformed into "Sons of the Father," and the father alone. They begin to absorb the traditions of their sires, whether by choice or through the quiet coercion of custom. Should a man desire to separate from his spouse, he demands custody only of the male child; as for the daughter, he manifests no such claim, even if she is at an age where she understands the profound meaning of fatherhood far more deeply than her brother.

The "Fatimas" within my vast Arab homeland represented a project for Life, yet it was a life all too frequently aborted before its very birth. The factors of its miscarriage were sown within its primordial components; the elements of survival became so intertwined with the elements of mere existence that the former triumphed—much like white blood cells that, while ostensibly protecting the body from malignant diseases, ultimately extinguish every rosy hue of life.

Notwithstanding all this, the "Fatimas" of my land have ignited the imaginations of poets, writers, researchers, and historians, thanks to the manifold forms of courage they displayed across various arenas of conflict against French colonialism and its disparate ideologies. In every sphere, she held a station of honor: she bore arms as a combatant in the rugged mountains, the vast plains, and the pulsating cities; she healed the wounded, taught the ignorant, and eradicated illiteracy among the ranks of the children of martyrs and *mujahideen* in the rural hinterlands, the deserts, the detention camps, and the cold solitude of prisons. She spurred the son, the husband, and the brother to take up arms and

engage in the most noble of battles. Amidst all this, she preserved the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the family and society during the darkest of hours, drawing and weaving the dreams of society and its vibrant aspirations into the threads of a *burnous* and a *qashabiya*—a protective cloak that shielded against the harshness of nature and fortified the soul against the most brutal attempts at cultural normalization.

One day, the colonizer attempted to play its final card to bring the woman to her knees, having finally realized that she was a pivotal architect of all the Revolution’s victories. When this attempt was made, the woman's response was nothing short of magnificent, historic, and defiant.

It occurred when the spouse of the French General and mass-murderer "Massu," accompanied by a group of women from a specific Algerian social stratum—those who were legally "assimilated" and accustomed to a life of privilege at the agonizing expense of their own people—staged an event on May **13**, **1960**.

On that French national occasion, and through the megaphones and channels of the various French colonial media, the General's wife issued a call for the Algerian woman to cast off her veil—that traditional white *hijab* or the black *M'laya*, which she characterized as a badge of backwardness and ignorance.

She invited them to join a massive procession culminating at "Africa Square" (formerly the Forum), where veils were to be burned in a theatrical, staged scenario intended to signal the Algerian woman’s supposed yearning for liberation and progress, following the example of the "advanced" women in the motherland, France.

What do you think was the result?

Not a single Algerian woman responded to the call, save for the General's wife's small circle of associates. On the contrary, even those women who had never previously worn the veil donned it on that day. It was a day marked by an absolute and resounding refusal, a visceral defiance against the final stratagems of colonial policy.

The "Fatimas" of Algeria proved yet again that freedom is an indivisible whole; it cannot be offered to individuals or sectors while the people and society remain under the heavy yoke of colonialism, and that Algeria is unequivocally not France, nor could the Algerian woman ever be reduced to a French identity.

Thus, the "Fatimas" of my homeland were pioneers through their stances and their sacrifices, notwithstanding the wretched and deteriorating conditions in which they were forced to dwell. As for the colonizer, he was left stunned by the resilience of the woman and the magnitude of her sacrifices.

Their collective resolve eventually converged with the spirit of our militant comrade, the *mujahida* Jamila Bouhired, and her five companions who lay under the shadow of a death sentence—where, through the "Radical" voice, they articulated their vision as follows:

"We must honor the revolutionaries of Algeria alongside Algeria's 'Fatimas'—Kahina, Fatima, Meriem, Jamila, Zahia, Wahiba, Khaira, Safia, Zuleikha, Zineb, Fadhila, Khadidja, Al-Jawhar, Hassiba, Werda, Amina, Safia, Yasmina, Zhour, and thousands of others. They were like a radiant necklace of pearls in an epoch where darkness and intellectual stagnation nearly eclipsed everything."

Today, I reflect with delicate touches upon the folds of memory, weighing reality against the dream. I behold visages that remain, in their essence, militants—yet they are faces weathered and exhausted by the relentless burdens of life. I compare them with the reality of pained mothers before their little ones—before that grand reality which once triumphed over this bitter existence. Their faces appeared small before the nightmare—with its trivialities and its monumental crises—wiping the dream from the "Green Vision" and leaving behind fractured, yellowed visages like the leaves of a melancholic autumn. These were faces stretched, broken, and expanded for the dream, yet perhaps unable to fully absorb the dream's monumental weight.

Some remember and begin anew in a stubborn and unyielding struggle, while others have allowed the visions and the ages to blur, mixing their smiles with their tears, in the midst of this nightmare the cold blade of the guillotine continues to descend with chilling regularity upon the vibrant threads of the Green Spring, yet it remains fundamentally powerless to extinguish its light; for thousands of new births sprout from that very soil. The bodies and wombs burn with the fire of sacrifice because they birthed heroes, and for them, death does not bring a terminal rest. Thus, truth is transformed into legend, and legend crystallizes into truth, both fused and synthesized within the very body and spirit of the *mujahida*. She stands as a radiant epicenter within the profound and sacred depths of this hallowed land. Fact becomes inextricably intertwined with myth, and Time itself evolves into a majestic and eternal tribunal, within whose hallowed sanctuary the registers of indictment and the myriad files of accusation are incinerated and melted away into nothingness.

Within the magnificent and overarching embrace of all these forces, the Woman, the Revolution, and Freedom stood as a singular, absolute, and immutable truth. They were, in their divine essence, the alpha and the omega.



With President Ahmed Ben Bella at the dawn of independence; on the right is Fatima bin Osman and Zhor Zerari



With President Houari Boumediene at the Presidency of the Republic in 1971



The twins, Uqba and Tariq, who were the reason I became a teacher



With the mujahida Khadija Khayar al-Asfar at Aisha Secondary School



With the writer Assia Djebar in Berlin, Germany



At the Women's Union conference, featuring Djamila Boupacha and Louisette Ighilahriz



Between the mujahid Ali Haroun and the late Professor Mohamed Yessaad in Germany



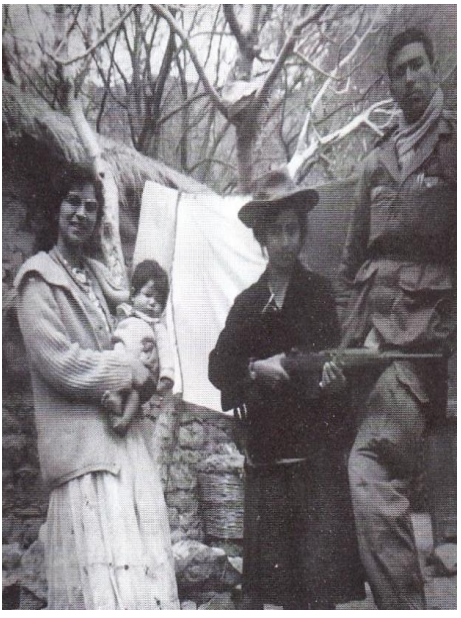
With my teacher, the late mujahid Abderrahmane Chibane



The mujahida Zhour Wanisi flanked by the mujahid Mohamed Cherif Abbas and the mujahida Zarifa Chékir



The brothers Mohamed Cherif Abbas and Zhour Wanisi



The mujahida Zhour Wanisi flanked by The mujahid Mohamed Cherif Abbas and the mujahida Zahra Hafiz



The mujahida Zhour Wanisi delivering a speech to the citizens at Jebel Ouled Nasser This photograph was gifted to me by the mujahid Mohamed Cherif Abbas as a congratulation upon my appointment to the Ministry



The mujahida Fatima Zighad and her husband Lakhdar Zighad before his arrest



The martyr Abdelrahman Laala



With the teachers at the vocational training center



With the mujahida Baya Salamani



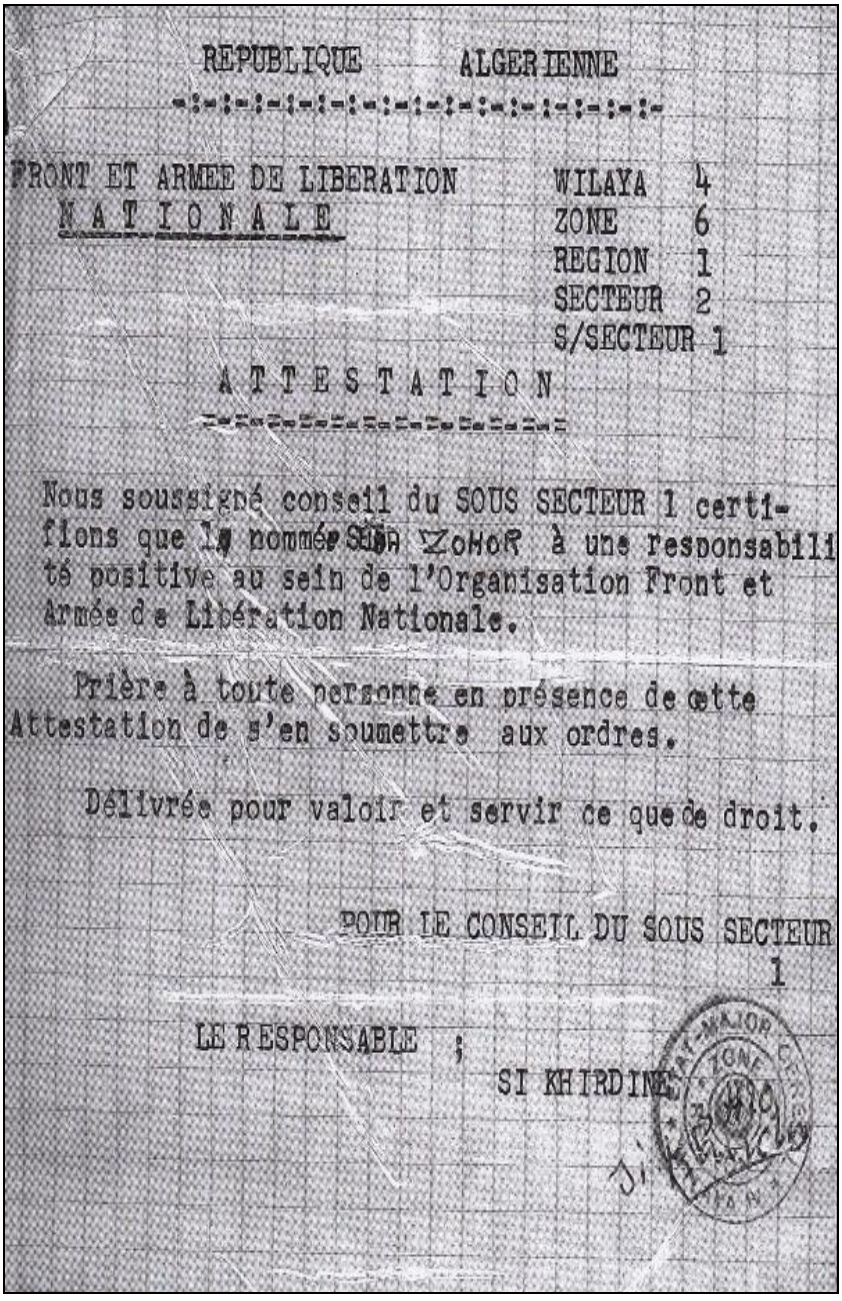
The militants after the demonstrations of December 11, 1960, in front of the Palace of Nations in Geneva



The eminent mujahid, Major Ibrahim Mezhoudi (wearing the hat), standing centrally among an assembly of illustrious leaders and martyrs: Lakhdar Ben Tobbal, Abane Ramdane, Krim Belkacem, Amar Ouamrane, and Amirouche during the Soummam Conference. This historic photograph was captured by the martyr Larbi Ben M'hidi



The militant Mohamed Fares, President Ferhat Abbas, and the mujahid Abderrahmane Benhamida at Diyar al-Mahsoul



REPUBLIQUE ALGERIENNE

FRONT ET ARMEE DE LIBERATION NATIONALE

WILAYA 4
ZONE 6
REGION 1
SECTEUR 2
S/SECTEUR 1

ATTESTATION

Nous soussigné conseil du SOUS SECTEUR 1 certifions que le nommé [illegible] ZOHOR à une responsabilité positive au sein de l'Organisation Front et Armée de Libération Nationale.

Prière à toute personne en présence de cette Attestation de s'en soumettre aux ordres.

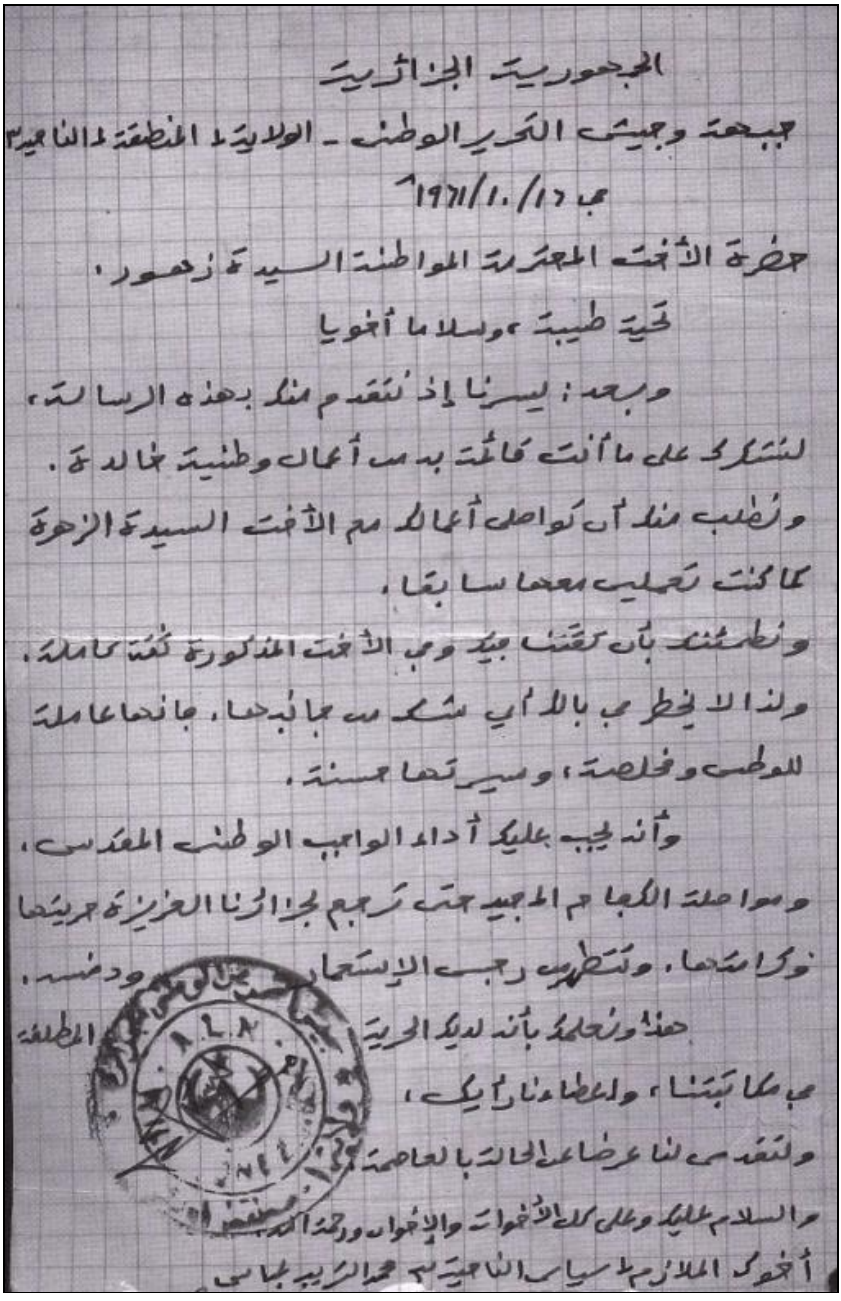
Délivrée pour valoir et servir de que de droit.

POUR LE CONSEIL DU SOUS SECTEUR 1

LE RESPONSABLE ;

SI KHIRDINE

A certificate of revolutionary service issued by the mujahid Si Khair al-Din Takharbousht



الجمهورية الجزائرية
جبهة وجيش التحرير الوطني - الولاية الخامسة - المنطقة الثالثة
في 17/10/1961

حضرة الأخت المجاهدة المواطنة السيدة زهور،

تحية طيبة، وسلاما أخويا

وبعد: يسرنا إذ نتقدم منك بهذه الرسالة، لنشكرك على ما أنت قائمة به من أعمال وطنية خالدة. ونطلب منك أن تواصل أعمالك مع الأخت السيدة الزهرة كما كنت تعملين معها سابقا.

ونطمئنك بأن تقنين جيد وحب الأخت المذكورة تقنا كاملة، ولذا لا يخطر ببالك أي شك من جانبها، فإنها عاملة للوطن وفلاحة، وسيرتها حسنة.

وأنه يجب عليك أداء الواجب الوطني المقدس، ومواصلة الكفاح المجيد حتى ترجع بلادنا العزيزة حريتها وكرامتها. وتطهر من رجس الاستعمار ودنسه.

هذا ونحمد بأنه لديك الحرية المطلقة في مكاتبتنا، ولنطلع على رأيك، ولتقدم لنا عرضا عن الحالة بالعاصمة.

والسلام عليك وعلى كل الأخوات والإخوان وتحياتي

أخوك الملازم السياسي الناحية الثالثة محمد الشريف عباس

A letter from the mujahid Mohamed Cherif Abbas to the mujahida Zhour Wanisi



الحكومة الدستورية الجزائرية — هيئة الأركان الحرب العامة
الولاية الخامسة الناحية الجنوبية
الجزائر في: ١٥ ديسمبر ١٩٥٨م

الى الحاضنة ز ١٩٢

سلاما وبعد:

أسعدت لدى بسالتك هذه على رفاقك الذين زيدوا وشدوا هي بادرة طيبة، تنبئ بيننا وشهادة لمجد القتال يا نائب القائد فأنت مكانا في ارضنا المقدسة.

هذا ولك فيفاق، واهنيك الوطن من صميم القلب - ع - ب

وانا في سعيد بهذه الشهادة فالاوسام متصلة في ظل العلم الوطني.

المنزة

وتقبلوا مني فائق التقدير وسلامي الخالص.

ان الكبير تحية القتال وسلام الجهاد.

الناحية الجنوبية

A certificate of revolutionary service from the martyr Mohamed Al-Qairouani



The martyr of the guillotine, the commando Mustafa Al-Sghir



With the sister of the guillotine martyr, Aisha Sghir



The young mujahid Hamo to the right of his mother, Zahra Hafiz



Louiza Madani, sister of the three martyrs after whom the district of Al-Madania was named: Othman, Abdelkader, and Al-Said

Sidi Fredj

Forty years have cascaded through the river of time since the first radiant dawn of our independent Algeria. I stood amidst the surging throngs of our people to commemorate the fortieth jubilee of our liberation, my soul drifting back to that ethereal day in **1962**, when the very first celebrations of a free Algiers erupted in a fever of joy. The leadership of the Front had then issued a sovereign directive for the masses to converge upon the shores and the ancient, whispering forests of Sidi Fredj. It was a choice steeped in a profound historical irony and a sense of ultimate poetic justice; for it was upon those very sands, a century and a third earlier, that the French armadas had first anchored their vessels of aggression to inaugurate their dark invasion of our land.

I recall with visceral clarity the odyssey of the people reaching that hallowed forest—every vehicle was a vessel of overflowing jubilation, and every throat was a clarion for the resounding cry: *"Long Live Independent Algeria."* I shall never consign to oblivion the image of a young man, lithe and vibrant, who spontaneously animated the festivities with the evocative chords of his guitar. That youth was none other than the artist who would later become the legendary "Al-Ghazi," then barely twenty years of age.

Today, I find myself posing a haunting inquiry: in what state does this anniversary return to us? The world has shifted its axis with a startling violence, and we no longer inhabit the lives of the *mujahideen* as we once envisioned them. Those initial years following our liberation were a garland of magnificent victories across all horizons; yet, the recent years carry a far

different weight, marked by jarring new variables and significantly starker shades of a cold reality.

They inform us today that the entire world exists in a state of relentless, feverish flux—a chaotic momentum where humanity appears to have forfeited its very soul. Those momentous issues that once defined our existence are no longer regarded as "issues"; beauty itself has been cast out as a pariah. Eternal values, sacred symbols, and the authentic revolutionary ethos are being systematically relegated to the dusty archives of "illusions," dismissed with a chilling clinicality as mere "wooden language."

In the eyes of this new world order, concepts such as freedom, distinction, and cultural specificity no longer hold a shred of substantive meaning. They have been ruthlessly supplanted by a "Loyalty" that borders on the threshold of absolute servitude. Globalism, which once whispered a promise of human connection, has morphed into a formidable imperialistic choir. It is a crime of nomenclature; for Globalism today demands a singular and unyielding allegiance to one dominant pole, regardless of whether one belongs to the First World or the "Tenth."

The harvest of this unilateral dominance is a pervasive tide of both verbal and physical violence—a curated form of terrorism. From this solitary pole of power, the methods of struggle are dictated to the weak. Infants are slaughtered and families are decimated—all under the hallowed banners of religion or creed. Entire nations are shattered by the impact of missiles, their ancestral lands torn asunder, punished with the arbitrary cruelty a tyrannical parent might visit upon a helpless child. Raw power and systemic injustice have been enthroned as the mistresses of every situation. The humanistic dialogue of

intellect and justice has been silenced, replaced by a "Democracy" of modern, artificial specifications—imposed by the cold steel of tanks, the violation of invasions, and the cowardice of economic blackmail. It is a new brand of occupation, one that manifests respect for neither history nor culture, meticulously paving the way for a subjugation of a profound and different kind.

The Daughter of the Shore and Umm Kulthum

When the first morning of our hard-won independence finally broke, freedom descended upon our land like a radiant bride whose dowry had been paid in the hallowed blood of generations. A third of our population had been directly touched by the fires of the struggle, yet they embraced this new era with a serene and resolute readiness. The profound exhaustion of the warrior was instantaneously replaced by an unparalleled zeal for the majestic labor of rebuilding.

Our universities and academic institutes flung wide their doors to the *mujahideen*—men and women alike—inviting them to complete the studies that had been so abruptly halted. Were these not the very students who had abandoned their desks in **1956** to answer the clarion call of the Revolution? Their sacred motto had been:

—"No education without freedom, and no degree without dignity."

For them, martyrdom was a garment they were all prepared to wear with pride, for in their eyes, it was a fate far more beautiful than any corpse could ever be.

The paralyzed institutions and dormant administrations of the state began to stir with life. Even schoolchildren were recruited to organize the scattered files and archives, meticulously sorting through what had survived the "Scorched Earth" policy enacted by the retreating and vengeful occupier. The National Library, that hallowed sanctuary of our national intellect, stood as a silent witness to this betrayal, its walls still scorched by the malice of the occupation's final hours.

The villages and hamlets, decimated by the cruelty of forbidden "Napalm" bombs, began to receive their displaced children once more. Throughout the long years of colonial terrorism, these souls had known nothing but the pained bread of exile; now, they returned to kiss the very dust and ashes of their ancestral homes, knowing that their visceral longing would never be extinguished.

Ruins and scorched earth narrated the harrowing story of a brutal and asymmetrical war—a monumental struggle where the scales of justice and truth were never permitted to balance.

What was the meaning of this ruin? This widespread devastation? This suffocating smoke and grey ash that choked the horizon? What of these tears that stubbornly refused to dry? What of the orphaned thousands, the widows, and the bereaved who peopled our land?

Could all of this truly be the ordained price for a people who simply yearned for the freedom of their soil and the restoration of their sovereignty? Could a nation that claimed to be the architect of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity be the singular designer of such profound human misery?

Never mind. Algeria is independent. The scattered souls of the nation are reuniting at last upon the liberated soil. From the shadows of exile, the cold solitude of prisons, and the remote peaks of the mountains, they return—their faces washed by tears that have witnessed the final victory. It was the majestic return of an entire nation from the abyss of a distorted history. Their souls were finally released from the dungeon of a relentless and cruel time. The masks of falsehood were at last stripped from the radiant face of Truth.

The homeland was reclaiming its prodigal sons. Within the corridors of the colonial octopus, they returned to the fold of glory, signing their names with their authentic identity upon the immortal pages of history. The militant Abdelrahman Aziz sang his warm, resonant anthem:

"O Mohamed, congratulations to you... Algeria has returned to you."

Was it not a visceral truth that every man in Algeria had been dubbed "Mohamed," and every woman "Fatima," by the children of colonialism throughout the long eras of occupation? I did not fully grasp the profound and majestic weight of that song until I lived through a moment of vivid and crystalline clarity.

It occurred when the sovereign Algerian state resolved to pay a hallowed tribute to those figures—both brothers and friends—who had fortified the Revolution with their intellect, their media presence, or their material sustenance. It was a gesture of profound national gratitude.

In November **1962**, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Revolution celebrated in independence, I was bestowed with the honor of accompanying a group of distinguished Arab ladies invited for the festivities.

Among my guests were the world-renowned scholar Dr. Aisha Abdelrahman, known by her celebrated pen name "Bint al-Shati" (The Daughter of the Shore), and the illustrious Iraqi poet Atika al-Khazraji. Most of the delegation resided at the Hotel d'Angleterre and the Hotel Alleti (present-day Hotel Safir), for the Aurassi had not yet been built. The Hotel d'Angleterre, situated on the street bearing the name of the

martyr Mustafa Ben Boulaïd, would later be tragically decimated by a terrorist bombing in the nineties.

Honoring these friends was perceived as both a national and a moral imperative. I recall addressing some of them at the airport:

"Your wager upon us, and your unwavering trust in our sacred cause, has finally reached its fruit. Here we stand, rising to the level of your expectations. Algeria welcomes you today as free and noble masters of your own destiny."

I shared a particularly intimate bond with Dr. Aisha Abdelrahman, whose literary and scientific research in the Egyptian *Al-Ahram* newspaper was legendary. I was privileged to accompany her on a tour through the historic regions of eastern Algeria.

The moment Dr. Bint Al-Shati stepped off the plane, before even offering formal greetings to her hosts, she knelt and prostrated herself upon the tarmac in a magnificent gesture of devotion, kissing the very earth of the airport while whispering with a choked voice:

"O Mohamed, congratulations to you... Algeria has returned to you."

When I witnessed this visceral scene, I reflected deeply on the startling contrast with another "Star of the East," Umm Kulthum. Years later, when asked by Algerian journalists why she had never graced our country with a visit, she had responded with a chilling detachment:

—"Because I am only invited by Presidents and Kings."

I was repulsed to my very core by her answer. She seemed entirely ignorant of the fact that the revolutions of peoples are

never to be measured by the hollow patronage of rulers. The Algerian Revolution was a unique and unparalleled popular uprising. It was a ransom paid not merely for the honor of the Algerian people, but for the honor of the entire Arab world and all free peoples across the globe.

I realized then that Umm Kulthum's stature was fundamentally neither political nor nationalistic, notwithstanding the elaborate legends woven around her by the machinery of media and publicity.

Despite this, may the Almighty bestow His mercy upon all those who recognized—and even those who failed to recognize—the true and sacred value of a people's uprising.

A New Kind of Struggle

The grand festivals of victory finally reached their conclusion, and for a vast multitude of *mujahideen* and dedicated militants, it served as the definitive signal to pivot toward new, and frequently entirely voluntary, missions. We were no longer tethered to a single institution or a narrow mandate; we were now irrevocably bound to the sacred and monumental task of the reconstruction of a sovereign nation.

The very fabric of life had to be meticulously reorganized from the debris of war. We inaugurated this era by conducting an exhaustive survey of the families of our martyrs, gathering the orphans who had been left adrift into specialized care centers. We undertook a rigorous inventory of the widows and the disabled, and we labored with a tireless zeal to provide housing for the thousands of refugees who were then surging back from the eastern and western military bases. Upon their return, they found their ancestral villages utterly demolished, their family homes lethal with mines, and public utilities entirely non-existent—even within the boundaries of some of our more prominent metropolises.

The entirety of that first summer was a season of boundless jubilation, yet within our souls, we carried the sober awareness that an enduring and permanent joy could never be anchored upon ruins alone. As the melancholic breath of autumn approached, the institutions of education and national upbringing had to be made ready for the children. The vast majority of these little ones had spent the grueling war years either within the suffocating confines of detention camps or in the harsh isolation of the mountain peaks, far removed from the sanctuary of any classroom. To confront this formidable

challenge, the leadership orchestrated an intensive and rigorous training program for teachers. It was a demanding forty-day session, held at the "Dar al-Moualimin" (Teachers' College) in the heights of Bouzaréah.

The stewardship and the absolute responsibility for this monumental operation, as well as the entire union organization, fell to the late unionist and valiant militant Mohamed Fares, alongside the esteemed *mujahid* Abdelhamid Mehri. I was numbered among the graduates of this transformative session, emerging from the Teachers' College after having practiced the noble art of teaching for others—both those who were already educated and those who hungered for the light of knowledge.

Indeed, such institutions—most specifically those dedicated to the formation of teachers within the Western tradition, and France in particular—left a profound and significant impact upon our minds. They were regarded as a monumental gain and a vital pillar for the training of educators and professors. Frequently, these very schools had served as the fertile ground and the primary launching pad for a distinguished number of writers and luminaries of letters in the West, and indeed, here in our own Algeria.

The transition was remarkably swift, yet it empowered us, as a newly independent Algeria, to open the first academic year following our liberation for our children. Among those entering the gates were souls who were encountering a school for the very first time in their lives. It was the "Algerian School" of our most radiant dreams—the Free School presided over by the Algerian teacher, rather than the French official. Within that training session, we functioned simultaneously as both the educators and the learners.

We accepted the gauntlet of the challenge and we emerged triumphant. we left no shadow of a room for colonial derision to sneer:

— *"They are nothing without our hand; they are fundamentally incapable of orchestrating a successful school entry for their progeny."*

The Algerian tricolor was raised high over our educational institutions alone at that time. It was a school entry of a unique and distinctive character; indeed, the flag was hoisted upon every housing block, upon every weathered wall, and upon every car and bus. Even within the sanctuary of the homes, the visceral longing for knowledge had become our supreme and most hallowed symbol.

Forging a Civil Society

In the immediate aftermath of our hard-won independence, the landscape of "mass organizations" as we comprehend them today was yet to be fully articulated. Instead, there emerged vibrant popular committees representing every vital social stratum: labor committees diligently preparing for their inaugural founding congress (with the exception of the Workers' Union established in **1956** by the martyr Aissat Idir), and the General Union of Algerian Students (UGEMA).

The diverse committees for women, farmers, and youth were forged within the very furnace of the Revolution. The "Women's Committee," in particular, possesses a chronicle of its own. It originated as a series of organized assemblies under the direct and rigorous supervision of the Revolutionary leadership, held in a state of absolute, clandestine secrecy. At that juncture, we were navigating the delicate stage of the ceasefire, yet official independence had not yet been formally proclaimed.

A small, select vanguard of *mujahidat* received the formal summons from the National Liberation Front (FLN) for the "Independent Zone." These calls to duty were issued with the same unyielding clandestine rigor that had characterized the years of war—bearing the signature of our brother *mujahid* Boualam or Seddik. We would convene within the sanctuary of relatives' homes in the Belcourt neighborhood, or within the storied halls of the "Dar al-Babour" (The Ship House), so named for its unique architectural resemblance to a majestic steamship.

We were few in number during those nascent hours. I recall with clarity the visages of Fatima Zekkal, Chama Boufedji, Safia

Ben M'ahdi, Louiza Ben Bouali (the mother of the martyr Hassiba Ben Bouali), Sekina Ait Saada, Anissa Rajimi, Anissa Haj Hamo, and others. Perhaps certain names have drifted into the shrouded recesses of memory—for the relentless passage of years has a way of eroding the most meticulous records. It was an era when every eye and every thought was focused toward the horizon of the future, toward winning the ultimate wager of national sovereignty.

As some of us were barely navigating the spring of our twenty-fifth year, we were entrusted with multifaceted roles: the establishment of the Women's Organization and the building of the FLN's Youth wing. This latter organization would subsequently be rechristened as the "National Union of Algerian Youth" (UNJA) by President Houari Boumediene, intended to function as a unifying and formidable framework for the nation's youth.

To this very day, I still cherish the original draft of the founding manifesto of this organization. I penned it alongside the *mujahidat* Safia Ben M'hidi and Chama Boufedji within the Al-Madania neighborhood, following the direct sovereign mandates of the FLN leadership. There was a *mujahid* for whom I harbored a deep affection; he bore the same name as my sire, and he regarded me with a paternal tenderness. He was Captain Ali Lounisi, the primary architect behind the vision to integrate me into both the Women's Organization and the Youth wing simultaneously. He was accompanied by the *mujahid* Mohamed Wakid, who was tragically assassinated mere weeks after independence. While 'Si Ali' Lounisi survived that dark attempt on his life, the incident resulted in the unfortunate postponement of an operation we had meticulously planned for the city of Blida to energize a massive

popular festival. This committee served as the foundational seed before it was joined by other sisters who emerged from prisons within the homeland or returned from exile in France, Tunisia, Morocco, and Cairo.

Following the historic milestone of July **5**th, **1962**, once the foundational arrangements had been solidified, we embarked upon the mobilization of these active forces—most notably women and youth—through popular rallies and neighborhood assemblies. These committees were organized based on precise responsibilities and rigorous internal statutes. We began our preparations for the first congress of the Women's Union, an event that was subsequently delayed until **1966** due to the political transition that took place.

Every evening, upon the conclusion of our daily professional obligations—the vast majority of us were then serving within the sectors of education or administration—we would convene. Our headquarters was situated on "Minerville" Street (present-day Cherif Hamani Street), in the vicinity of the Palace of Justice.

We formed a diverse and rich mosaic of characters; for many, it was their inaugural encounter. There were those among us possessing an Arabic education, and those with a French formation who spoke only that tongue. Conversely, there were the Arabic-speakers who knew no French, and those who occupied the spaces between. There were the "Conservatives," the "Liberals," and the "Moderates." Yet, notwithstanding these varied backgrounds, our differences never once soured our relations or manifested as a rift; for we were all *mujahidat* belonging to one army and one unified Front. We were moving in the shadow of those decisive slogans:

"Independence is not an end, but a means to loftier goals," and *"The only hero is the People."*

Perhaps I recall those days with such vivid intensity because I was almost the solitary figure who possessed both an eloquent mastery of the Arabic tongue and a beautiful calligraphic hand. I was the one who meticulously penned the slogans—those gargantuan banners in a pristine and elegant Arabic—that served to reclaim our authentic identity and our sovereignty before the eyes of the world. Was the Arabic language not one of the most radiant manifestations of our restored soul? After the long dominance of the Latin script, the Arabic letter now stood tall and proud upon every facade.

What remains most significant today was that unyielding discipline and the sacred commitment to our "Revolutionary Oath." We met every single evening, regardless of the severity of the weather, driven by a profound mutual respect and a selfless devotion that elevated the service of the nation above every other consideration. We were tirelessly mobilizing women across the entire national territory to take up their new, hallowed roles.

The struggle within the "Mass Organizations," even amidst the formidable constraints of the single-party system, proved to be an essential and vital chapter of our collective experience. It allowed the Algerian woman to forge a profound and unbreakable bond with the myriad concerns and aspirations of society. Through this intimate and daily interaction, we earned the supreme honor of truly belonging to the people and sharing, with all sincerity, in their tribulations and their hopes.

We functioned as the vital and strategic conduit between the political leadership and the grassroots base, particularly

within the framework of the state's emerging institutional structures. We tirelessly and fiercely championed the gains and rights of women at the most senior echelons of authority, ensuring that her voice was not merely heard, but woven into the very fabric of the nascent nation.

Our contributions during those transformative years were manifold. We organized and presided over a series of influential conferences and seminars, both on the domestic and international stages, which garnered for the Algerian woman a prestigious global status and a renowned reputation for activism and intellectual rigor. I recall with particular vividness and pride the "International Women's Forum" we hosted in the capital of Algiers in **1968**.

Notwithstanding the monumental scale and the surging attendance of the event, the forum emerged as a resounding triumph of organizational brilliance. Consequently, the Women's Union earned the profound respect of diverse global cadres. It served as a primary and foundational stride in championing the sacred causes of African and Arab women—most specifically the struggle of the Palestinian woman.

The forum was graced by a magnificent and far-reaching assembly of women hailing from across Africa and the vast expanse of the Arab world. I evoke today, with a profound and crystalline clarity, that the Palestinian delegation was comprised of a distinguished vanguard of militant sisters: Tauhida Wafi, the sister of the militant Abu Khalil, who served with honor as the inaugural Palestinian Ambassador to Algeria; Mrs. Nabila (Umm al-Lutf), the noble spouse of the militant Abu al-Lutf; Mrs. Umm Jihad, the devoted consort of the illustrious martyr Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad); Mrs. Najlaa Saad al-Din (Umm Nasser); and Mrs. Jamila Umm Sabri. Their

collective presence added a layer of sacred gravity and revolutionary fervor to our assembly, weaving the struggles of our two peoples into a single, unbreakable tapestry of sovereign solidarity

Despite the monumental attendance, the forum was a triumph of organizational brilliance. Consequently, the Women's Union earned the respect of diverse global cadres. It served as a foundational stride in supporting the causes of African and Arab women—most specifically the struggle of the Palestinian woman.

We were also the pioneers in the historic project to establish the "Maghreb Women's Union" in **1970**, in the city of Rabat. The Algerian delegation was presided over by Safia Ben M'ahdi, the Tunisian by Radhia Haddad, and the Moroccan by Princess Lalla Fatima al-Zahra, while the Mauritanian delegation was headed by Aisha Touré. Our delegation included the General Secretary Safia Ben M'ahdi, myself, and the lady Cherifa Quwaqwaq, a pillar of our educational system as the principal of the Hassiba Ben Bouali Lycée in Kouba.

I recall that Rabat conference with great vividness; the hopes pinned upon it for "Maghreb Unity" were monumental, forged in a spirit of absolute courage and free from any prior restrictive agendas. However, our proceedings reached a somber and sudden end with the news of the passing of the late leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. The program was immediately suspended, and all cultural festivities and celebrations were halted.

Due to my fervent interest in the cause of Maghreb unity, an event occurred years later where I was invited by my dear brother Mustafa Ben Loucif—during my tenure as Minister of

Social Protection—to deliver a lecture on the necessity of Maghreb unity before the Defense Ministers of the Arab Maghreb at the Ministry of National Defense. It was a successful endeavor, and I received written congratulations from every individual minister present, including the Algerian Ministry of Defense.

As I previously mentioned, we convened every Saturday evening to meticulously prepare our weekly reports for the *mujahid* Hussein Ait Ahmed, who was then overseeing the Mass Organizations, and subsequently for his successor, the *mujahid* Said Maazouzi.

I recall today that I was a member of the committee tasked with founding the Union's official periodical. I was responsible for the Arabic edition, while Sister Zhor Zerari presided over the French edition. Our fellow sisters affectionately dubbed us "The Two Zhors," a nickname the media was swift to embrace.

Eventually, our sanctuary for meetings became an office within the Government Palace—an office that had been set ablaze by the retreating and vengeful French forces. Their archives had been reduced to piles of ash; what remained of precious documents was but a charred heap, some of which were salvaged by the hands of our people.

It was a protracted and highly sensitive journey. I came to the profound realization that the nature of struggle shifts according to the specific stages that nations and peoples navigate, and the ultimate goals they strive to achieve. Values such as raw courage and bold initiative sometimes recede, only to surge again, yet the values of profound knowledge, professional expertise, and intellectual capacity eventually claim the foremost rank in the hierarchy of needs.

The destruction of a bridge with a bomb—intended to thwart the enemy's passage—is far easier than the arduous, constructive act of rebuilding it, or restoring its pillars so that students may cross toward their schools in the pursuit of light and knowledge.

The sovereign state eventually provided us with the necessary conditions to join university studies, after our formal education had been so violently halted by the fires of the Revolution. I recall when the academic competitions and university entrance exams were organized; they were specifically designed for those whose roles in the armed struggle had prevented them from fulfilling their academic aspirations. The requirements were remarkably high: expertise, seasoned knowledge, and formal diplomas. Every stage of struggle carries its own specific and unyielding mandates.

Following a meeting of our preparatory committee at the Government Palace, presided over by the leader Hussein Ait Ahmed, we looked at one another, and some said:

—"You... you... and you are candidates for the Constituent Assembly."

I turned toward my friend Safia Ben M'hidi, suggesting she represent the "educated" woman, before she gestured toward others who represented a different path.

I spoke then, and without much effort, I took the podium. I offered my apologies and firmly declined the nomination. I felt then—being only a holder of an elementary certificate—that I was not yet qualified for such a monumental and sovereign responsibility. My consciousness was complete: my place was not in the halls of parliament, but in the lecture halls of higher learning.

While some chose to accept the post despite their lack of formal qualifications, I selected the arduous and more noble path of the university. I was successful in all the exams, including the "Best Voice" competition for radio in Cairo. Although I was prepared to travel to Cairo for training, I ultimately chose the University of Algiers instead. My choice was not a personal whim; it was a profound conviction.

I followed the counsel of the *mujahid* Ibrahim Mezhourdi. After he settled in the Clos Salembier neighborhood, the Inspector who had once deemed me unfit for teaching became the very man who propelled me toward study. He perceived the "Golden Bird" within me. I relinquished my career as a teacher for a season—a sacrifice fraught with pain, yet one guided by a long-term vision.

In **1977**, I was elected to the first National People's Assembly—the inaugural legislative council following independence. I contested the seat in the district where I resided, Hussein Dey. It was a "clean" campaign, a genuine movement of the soul. We, the militants of the grassroots, were the vanguard. It was an authentic democratic experience; at least for our district, the results were a faithful mirror of the people's sovereign will.

Thus, the nature of struggle assumes diverse and multifaceted forms. At times we stood as candidates, and at others, we were the ones soliciting the votes of the masses. I recall my district—the "People's Quarter"—where I conducted my campaign amidst the rugged stairs and the winding alleys of the common folk.

When we rose to introduce ourselves, the response was a silence heavy with profound respect, followed by a thunderous

and visceral roar of applause. The masses possessed a visceral thirst for the truth and for the words of those they deemed worthy of their absolute trust. The very air was fragrant with the "Scent of the Revolution." It was an era when the voice of an individual was not yet drowned out by the din of wealth or the taint of corruption. Integrity and patriotism were the only currencies capable of truly moving the human heart.

I must also evoke the presence of President Houari Boumediene during those transformative years. I felt his pervasive influence particularly when I was appointed as the director of the "Al-Jazairia" (The Algerian Woman) magazine.

I recall the many members of parliament during that distinguished era—both *mujahideen* and *mujahidat*. It suffices to name but a few: Si Rabah Bitat, Si Hamimi, Si Said Yazouran, Mahmoud Guennez, Si Othman, Mohamed Boukhalfa, Hussein Al-Saadi, Mohamed Al-Mili, Othman Al-Saadi, Mouloud Amziane, Ammar Moahoub, Saliha Jafal, Zouia bin Hammadi, Zahra Gharib, Fadhila Mesli, Baya Hussein, Baya Al-Hashimi, Abdelkader bin Saleh, Rabah Boucif, Mohamed Al-Salih Boudiaf, and myself. There was also a group of promising youth, such as Abdelaziz Belkhadem.

The parliamentary work of that first term was a pioneering experience. Its human essence was drawn from the very ranks of the *mujahideen*. Their modest wealth, their storied revolutionary history, and their unwavering faith in the nation's constants served as the foundational pillars of the Assembly.

I recall a day when I was summoned to the President's office. I sat before Si Rabah Bitat, who addressed me in a tone of gentle inquiry:

—"Sister... I have noted your steadfast insistence on using the national language in all your interventions. Your Arabic is eloquent, as I well know, but my office lacks a secretary who masters the tongue with your proficiency."

I responded with a modest smile:

—"Mr. President, it is a source of pride for me. If my mastery of the language is deemed sufficient, then it is more than enough."

He laughed kindly and said:

—"Your response suggests a certain hesitation. No matter; I only hope that you will correct for me..."

He always used the poignant phrase: *"My Arabism."*

What profound humility was this? What noble insistence? Such gestures were no less significant than our formal titles and academic certificates. I recall a conversation with some fellow *mujahideen* during the solemn period of mourning following the passing of President Houari Boumediene. My role as a member of the Council and the State was to safeguard the nation's path according to the dictates of the Constitution. It was an era when presidential elections had to be organized with utmost care. This responsibility did not mean I would retreat from the essential struggle—the delicate balance between various factions. From my position and within my powers, I sought to unify all media efforts to illuminate these matters for the people. What, then, was the prevailing opinion?

The consensus was clear: we were bound to fulfill the principle of the people's sovereignty through their rightful representatives. This was exactly what the Algerian Constitution mandated at every historical juncture. Si Rabah,

may God have mercy on his soul, was a profound believer in equipping the nation with enduring and stable institutions. He served for forty-five days—the crucial interim period between the death of President Boumediene and the ensuing elections. During that time, he labored tirelessly, day and night, consulting, debating, and presiding over the electoral process until a new president was chosen to safeguard and govern the land, notwithstanding the formidable obstacles, ambitions, and pressures that shadowed those moments.

The Solidarity Fund

During the inaugural five years of our independence, we engaged in a battle of an entirely different nature: the "National Solidarity Battle." It was during this period that the leadership established the "Solidarity Fund," a strategic initiative aimed at overcoming the staggering economic crisis bequeathed to us by the departing colonial regime.

The primordial objective of this fund was to reclaim and reconstruct what the colonial administration had systematically plundered as they packed their baggage for departure. They had ruthlessly emptied the public treasury, looted vast sums of currency, and seized precious metals from both sovereign banks and historical museums. They had stripped the nation of everything of intrinsic value, from irreplaceable ancestral murals to sacred historical artifacts. Even the National Library, that sanctuary of our collective intellect as I have previously mentioned, had been set ablaze in a final act of colonial malice.

It was a crisis of truly monumental and terrifying proportions. It was within the crucible of those trying years that the noble vision for the "National Solidarity Fund" was birthed. The project emerged as a resounding and monumental success; for the Algerian people, across every singular sector of society, responded with a staggering and spontaneous rate of contribution that defied all expectations.

The women of Algeria, notwithstanding their often modest and humble material means, rose to the clarion call of national solidarity with a magnificent and heroic spirit that mirrored their resolve during the years of war. They did not merely donate their meager financial savings; they offered up their

most precious heirlooms—their gold, their silver, and the very symbols of their ancestral heritage.

Every single stage of that grand operation functioned as a vibrant and living portrait of selfless sacrifice. It was far more than a mere, clinical financial transaction; it was, in its essence, a profound and sacred renewal of the "Revolutionary Covenant." I recall with a sense of immense duty being personally entrusted with the stewardship of overseeing this process within the hallowed halls of the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowments).

Among the myriad of faces and gestures of giving, one specific image remains indelibly and poignantly etched within the very sanctuary of my memory, overshadowing all others.

She was an elderly woman, her frame weathered by time and nearing her eightieth year. Every single morning, for the duration of a full month, as I directed my steps toward the Ministry, she would stop my progress. She sat with a quiet dignity near the gateway of the "Al-Hashash" mosque, nestled within the vibrant Souq of "Jama' al-Yahoud" in the heart of the Casbah, where she made her modest living selling boiled and seasoned chickpeas to the passersby.

She would address me in a voice that carried the delicate tremor of an old, yet unyielding, spirit, asking with a palpable and anxious concern:

— "My beloved daughter, I implore you to tell me, is the sanctuary of the Solidarity Fund still open for contributions?"

I would reassure her with a tender gravity:

— "Yes, noble mother, it shall remain flung wide open throughout the entire month."

I discovered later that she had been meticulously setting aside a portion of her meager and hard-earned daily earnings from selling those chickpeas, saving every singular coin specifically to donate to the national cause. To my eyes, that simple woman had bestowed a wealth far greater than those who had offered their bars of gold and their treasures of silver. To her, and to me, those small metal coins were, in truth, the "Pure Gold of the Human Soul."

When the hour arrived on the final day and I at last accepted her humble donation, she was transmuted into the happiest of people, her face radiating a celestial joy. I felt a sharp, pained lump in my throat as I witnessed her felicity.

I found myself asking then—as I frequently find myself asking today with a heavy heart:

—Does my beloved homeland truly live through a crisis of economic resources? Or is the true crisis one of Trust and Credibility?

The visceral and magnificent response of the ordinary citizen in those foundational days served as the primordial and most potent fuel for Trust and the anchoring of national Credibility. It was the indomitable spirit that had survived the scorching fires of the Revolution and had been nurtured by the sacred memory of our monumental sacrifices. It was a covenant perpetually nourished by the unyielding principles of the Revolution—a sacred and absolute loyalty to the memory of our martyrs.

Becoming a Secretary for Al-Madani

In absolute truth, it was a mere serendipitous stroke of fate that rendered me a private secretary to the venerable scholar Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani, who at that historical juncture held the sovereign stewardship of the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowments). Coincidences, as they so often do, work their quiet wonders in our lives without our conscious realization. In the momentous month of November **1962**, during the inaugural official celebration of the Revolution following the dawn of our independence, I attended the solemn ceremony hosted at the majestic "Saint George" hotel. Like every dedicated *mujahida* and militant who had been graced with an invitation, I was inhabited by a profound sense of national responsibility to be present at such a hallowed assembly.

It was within those vibrant halls that I encountered two cherished friends who were then serving as secretaries within the Minister's Diwan: the valiant *mujahida* Habiba Meddaci and our sister Fadhila Fara'. While present within the hallowed precincts of the Diwan, I was privileged to meet the General Secretary of the Ministry, the esteemed *mujahid* Al-Tahar Al-Tijini. The reception hall at the Saint George was nothing short of immense, its architecture whispering of bygone eras, yet it seemed barely sufficient to contain the myriad of guests; for there were delegations present from every singular corner of the vast Arab world. I found myself positioned among a group of noble women who had only recently arrived from the deep heart of the nation’s interior.

The august reception hall at the Saint George was characterized by a monumental vastness, its architecture

echoing with the grandeur of bygone eras, yet it appeared barely sufficient to contain the myriad of honored guests who had converged upon it. There were diplomatic delegations gracing the occasion from every singular Arab nation, alongside a vibrant ensemble of noble women who had only recently arrived from the deep reaches of the interior provinces

Suddenly, Ahmed Ben Bella entered the hall, accompanied by a distinguished guest from sisterly Egypt. He moved with a focused purpose toward Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani. The scholar Al-Madani was at that moment standing in the company of an Egyptian guest, likely an associate of the General Secretary of the Arab League, Abdelkhaleq Hassouna.

It was within this setting of national triumph that I met the scholar Al-Madani once again. He was the man who had fostered my very first nascent literary strides by publishing my stories within the hallowed pages of the *Al-Basa'ir* newspaper. He received my presence with an immense and visible fatherly pride, proclaiming to the assembly:

— *"Behold! She is not merely a valiant mujahida; she is a writer of distinction and a genuine woman of letters!"*

Subsequently, he addressed me with a tone of sincere and fatherly concern:

— *"And pray, what is it you are occupied with in these days, Zhour?"*

I responded with a modest and serene smile:

— *"Aside from my ongoing revolutionary obligations... I am occupied with nothing, sir. The nascent government has yet to offer vocational paths for those of us who emerged from the 'Free Schools.' I find myself currently without a job. My*

steadfast intention is to join the university, should the Almighty so will, and provided I successfully navigate the competitive entrance examinations."

He regarded me with a gaze that blended a profound compassion with what I perceived as a purposeful request.

— "And what would your thoughts be regarding joining my staff here at the Ministry?"

I looked at him with a mixture of immense gratitude and startled bewilderment.

— "It would be an absolute honor, sir—but in what specific capacity?"

He replied, patting my shoulder with a fatherly tenderness:

— "You shall function as my private secretary, entrusted with the stewardship of my personal correspondence and all my strategic dealings with Arab entities specifically. Your command of the Arabic tongue is exquisite, as I well know, and my office currently lacks a secretary who truly masters the language with such refined proficiency."

Thus, I embarked upon a journey of service alongside this monumental man that would endure for over two full years. Following that epoch, I returned to the noble vocation of teaching and resumed the pursuit of my university research. May the Almighty bestow His infinite mercy upon his soul; for every singular time he read a narrative or a treatise I had published, he would shower it with praise and issue a fatherly command that I must never, under any circumstance, permit my pen to fall silent. Within the sanctuary of his ministry, I was privileged to encounter a myriad of illustrious intellectuals, dedicated educators, and venerable scholars, such as the

poet Al-Hafnawi Hala, with whom I shared a series of poetic debates that I cherish to this day.

The Ministry of Awqaf, at the very first light of our independence, stood as the solitary institution that flung wide its doors to the "Arabized" vanguard—those proud graduates of the Free Schools and the seasoned veterans of the Arabic tongue. The remainder of the administrative apparatus remained almost entirely "Frenchified" in its leadership and its thought, notwithstanding that historic and resounding oration by President Ahmed Ben Bella wherein he proclaimed, with a fervent repetition that echoed more than ten times:

— *"We are Arabs... We are Arabs."*

I finally bid my farewell to the Ministry of Endowments when the sovereign government at last yielded to the definitive recognition of the educators from the "Free Schools" belonging to the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema. This hard-won recognition was eventually secured, albeit reluctantly, through the formidable and tireless crusade of the *mujahid* Abderrahmane bin Hamida, who championed their cause with absolute resolve during his tenure as Minister of National Education. Significant roles were also played in this victory by the *mujahid* Abderrahmane Chibane, then a member of the Constituent Assembly, and the *mujahid* Ibrahim Mezhourdi—the very Inspector who had once wisely counseled me to prioritize the completion of my university studies above all else.

My four sisters and I were all vibrant participants within the educational landscape, serving either as devoted teachers or as the presiding principals of various academic institutions. Every one of us benefited from this historic governmental integration.

I fondly evoke the memory of our weekly family assemblies, convened every holiday at our patriarch's residence. We would share a warm midday repast, only to consecrate the remaining hours to recounting the latest chronicles of our respective schools, our beloved students, and our various administrations. We spoke with an unbridled fervor, each of us vying with the other to detail the triumphs and achievements of our week. We discovered an immense and refined pleasure in these intellectual exchanges, for a moment casting aside the crushing exhaustion and the monumental weight of teaching and the endless, wearying labor of grading.

While my mother would absorb our spirited dialogues with a beautiful blend of passion and quiet patience, my father would frequently remark with a radiant and playful smile:

— *"Verily, this is nothing less than a high-level educational seminar! Pray, why does the state administration not compensate me for providing the venue for such a distinguished forum?"*

We would all erupt into a joyous and unified laughter, yet we remained perpetually steadfast in our solemn affirmation that the mission of education was the very lifeblood of our existence. It was a noble and sacred message, cherished and upheld despite the myriad inherent hardships and the meager material stipends that accompanied such a hallowed calling. It was within the context of these modest rewards that I recall an instance when a certain teacher vaunted her motives before my eldest sister, proclaiming with an air of misplaced superiority:

— 'Were it not for the sacred cause of Arabization, I would never have remained within the instructional ranks.'

My sister, ever poised, retorted with a touch of biting sarcasm and a weary smile:

— 'As for me, I labor today for the sake of the salary; as for volunteerism and altruistic service, I have already discharged that hallowed duty long before the dawn of independence.'"

The High Committee for Educational Reform

In the pivotal year of **1972**, I was graced with a formal invitation from the Ministry of National Education. At its sovereign helm during that era was the distinguished *mujahid*, Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, who appointed my person to represent the vanguard of secondary education teachers upon this high commission. Simultaneously, the National Union of Algerian Women selected me as their official representative within its National Council. Thus, I occupied a dual and formidable station within this committee: I functioned as a professional representative and a political one, effectively embodying two distinct yet harmonious voices of the nation.

Within the hallowed halls of the "Zighoud Youcef Palace," I attended the inaugural session of the committee, a majestic assembly presided over by the late President Houari Boumediene. The committee itself was a multifaceted and magnificent tapestry, drawing its members from every vital sphere of the State: political, economic, cultural, and social. It was an assembly of titans, comprising eminent doctors, venerable professors, educational specialists, and luminaries from a myriad of other disciplines. I recall names that were the very pillars of Algerian thought, such as Dr. Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, Sheikh Abderrahmane Chibane, Mustafa Lacheraf, Ahmed Hammani, and Dr. Abdellah Cheriet.

On this august and high-level committee, there were only three or four women in total. Following the official inauguration and a brief, pensive respite in the Grand Hall of the Palace, the profound deliberations commenced within a general session of the entire body.

The general dialogue regarding these foundational topics was of paramount importance, particularly before the commission was formally partitioned into smaller, specialized sub-committees. It was palpably clear even during those initial exchanges that this committee would be engaged in its monumental labors for a protracted duration, given the sheer gravity of the sacred subject at hand: the meticulous nurturing of future generations and the unyielding anchoring of our national constants in the wake of restored sovereignty. This concept of "Sovereignty" carried profound historical meanings and far-reaching civilizational dimensions that had to be decisively elucidated for the entire citizenry by those entrusted with drafting the ultimate political strategy to achieve it—namely, the assembled members of this distinguished commission.

The profound deliberations commenced, though the atmosphere within the hall was initially marked by a noticeable reservation and a palpable caution among certain delegates regarding the overarching "Policy" that should rightfully govern the national educational system. I recall today a peculiar and startling episode that unfolded during those intense debates: a fellow member rose to address the floor, asserting with an air of absolute, dogmatic certainty that:

— *"The educational system of our nation must be anchored upon two distinct legs: Socialism and Islam."*

I felt a subtle, involuntary smile tug at my lips—a visceral reaction born of immediate intellectual dissent. I shifted in my seat and raised my hand, entirely undaunted by the formidable and heavy silence that had descended upon the chamber. When the Chairman graciously granted me the floor, I

projected my voice with a tone sharpened by biting, yet sophisticated, irony:

"By no means, sirs. Such a conceptual vision is fundamentally impossible to realize in practice. It would inevitably manifest as the flawed policy of a cripple; for one leg shall surely be found shorter and vastly weaker than the other."

A sudden ripple of mirth and astonished laughter cascaded through the grand room. I knew not whether they laughed at the sheer audacity of my person or the piercing truth of my metaphor, yet I persisted with a solemn gravity that entirely ignored their amusement:

"Socialism is merely a socio-economic mechanism—a transient political trajectory born of a specific mortal era. Islam, however, is an eternal pathway, a sacred civilizational identity, a visceral belonging, and the very quintessential marrow required for constructing the human essence in a sovereign land that has heroically reclaimed its faith through monumental and blood-stained sacrifices."

Following that intervention, I fell into a pensive and heavy silence. A sudden tremor of pained regret washed over me, and I questioned the impulses of my own heart:

"Why was I so swift to respond? Why did I hurl myself into such a confrontational posture before these men? Why... Why?"

Yet, as the moments passed, I realized it was not truly an hour for regret. I have always been thus—entirely unafraid to voice a conviction I hold dear. In truth, I frequently weigh my words from every conceivable angle before I speak. But I noticed then that the current of the dialogue had shifted; it had taken a more profound, earnest, and serious turn. It gladdened

my spirit and whetted my appetite for recording in my hallowed notebook all the ideas that I admired, and those that deserved a rigorous and scholarly rebuttal.

Unfortunately, it became evident that some were utilizing a momentous subject such as this merely as a vehicle to curry favor with the seat of sovereign power through their strategic interventions and stated opinions. Individual and fleeting temporary interests were being whispered in the corridors. Even "Socialism" was, at that specific historical juncture, a pervasive fashion in its early stages for us and for much of the world.

Then there were those who sought reform merely for the sake of reform itself, as if the process were a terminal goal. Their position was that reform should never be halted; it must remain a perpetual, constant state. The fundamental truth, however, remained that we were bound by a sacred oath to provide nothing but the absolute best for the burgeoning upcoming generation. The true and noble goal of this commission was to define a sovereign political path for the majestic building of the new human being. It was a mission to construct visionary programs and rigorous research that kept pace with the relentless march of the age. It was a mission to develop modern pedagogical methods and to meticulously train the trainers and the educators themselves.

We had to realize that these tools of reform were not merely instrumental means; they constituted a vital, autonomous field of their own. Notwithstanding all of that, the national educational policy must remain forever rooted in its foundational principles and its ultimate civilizational goals. It is a field that should never alter its essence with every transient change of ministers or officials.

There exist national constants: our unique identity, our authentic personality, our storied history, our sacred religion, and our noble language. These remain the immovable pillars and the sacred bedrock of the nation. Reform must launch toward everything new—toward modern technologies, toward the wonders of science, and toward the acquisition of various global languages—without bound or limit. Yet, it must launch from a solid, unyielding base that shields our collective soul from wavering and loss.

In short, we desired to contribute to the enrichment of globalism, not to allow globalism to ruthlessly swallow us. We did not wish to melt away into others. We did not demand that others be like us; therefore, we were under a moral obligation to remain authentically ourselves.

When the High Committee for National Educational Reform was established, and I was among its members in those final years, I was struck by a pained realization. I whispered to my soul:

'It is a profound regret that these very individuals are the ones destined to be employed in the future for the service of political generations, rather than being consecrated to the authentic and sovereign formation of the nation's children.

When the morning of Algeria's liberation at last broke and our land was redeemed, I was a young woman in the radiant prime of my twenty-fifth year.

I recall that I was, at that historical juncture, a woman who had already navigated the pained and arduous trials of a fractured union; my only son, Hisham, was then a mere lad of five years of age. Across the grueling expanse of the Revolution and into the ethereal dawn of our restored independence, a myriad of suitors had come forward, seeking the honor of my hand in marriage. Yet, to every single one of them, I had offered a resolute, unyielding, and definitive refusal. My articulated justifications for these rejections were, on the surface, ostensibly simple: I claimed that my heart and my intellect were entirely subsumed by the sacred fire of the Revolution, the feverish anticipation of our final victory, and the hallowed, lifelong longing for freedom. Yet, within the profound and quiet recesses of my soul, I was acutely aware that these reasons served merely as a sophisticated cloak for a more visceral flight from reality. I remained haunted by the harrowing echoes of my inaugural experience, paralyzed by an instinctive and primal dread of being "stung twice" from the very same burrow. That initial, bitter chapter of my life had etched an indelible and pained scar upon the sanctuary of my psyche.

Yet, it remained an indelible imprint—a visceral mark that propelled me toward a state of perpetual reflection concerning the conditions and the existential causes of women, both within the sacred borders of my own nation and in the vast world beyond. I came to the agonizing and profound realization

that the woman, in stark reality, is the one ordained by Fate to pay the staggering price for all human errors; she is the one who bears the burden of the orphans, the blight of pervasive ignorance, and the heavy, suffocating weight of collective complexes—be they historical or otherwise. Verily, Destiny did not bestow upon every father the requisite depth of wisdom to grant his blessing for a marriage such as mine to a man like "Abu Hisham," predicated solely upon the sterile merit of a professional certificate. My own father, in his noble simplicity, was content with the man’s primary school certificate; for he possessed no intimate knowledge of his ancestral village or his city.

My father’s conviction was not merely predicated upon the testimony of my sister's husband; rather, it was anchored in a singular, sovereign truth. He knew, with an unshakeable certainty, through the shared experiences and the noble words of those he trusted, that the suitor was a man of unblemished and exquisite character. In his eyes, that was the only credential that truly mattered.

No matter, the years have passed since **1962**, and the celestial fragrance of victory still permeates every corner of our existence. I was in my office at the Diwan, and the scholar and Minister of Awqaf, Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani, came to me—the man who had witnessed my becoming a teacher and who knew that the individual who had pushed me to reach the age of seventeen, because I had drawn a gold bird on the edge of the desk and he had encouraged me to continue my studies and encouraged my becoming a teacher—he had returned once again.

I responded with a smile born of a gentle bewilderment, then stood in his company as we transitioned together to the

sanctuary of the Diwan's private salon. He addressed me with an aura of kindness and an exquisite politeness:

— "*In the unfolding chapters of your life, my dear daughter, circumstances are once again compelling me to intercede*."

I replied with the due reverence befitting his station:

— "*No matter, sir. It is a great honor for me. Indeed, you have never once intervened except when it was in my absolute and ultimate interest.*"

He responded with a serene and earnest composure:

— "*I shall enter directly into the heart of the matter. I possess an intimate and dear friend—a man of unshakeable honesty and noble character, a scion of an illustrious lineage from the province of Biskra, specifically from the noble family of the Emir Abdelkader. He is a valiant mujahid who has beheld your presence several times during our various cultural committee assemblies. He has expressed a sincere and hallowed desire to seek your hand in marriage. I have personally sought the counsel of the elders, and they have bestowed their unequivocal blessing upon this union*."

He paused for a measured and thoughtful interval, then added:

— "*He places no restrictive conditions upon you. His singular and most fervent wish is for a life partner who shares his revolutionary history and possesses noble ethics. I behold all of these virtues embodied in your person, my daughter.*"

I found myself plunged into a profound silence. Al-Madani observed me with a vigilant eye, his features reflecting a deep and genuine concern as he awaited my response. At last, I spoke my truth:

— "*But sir, I implore you never to forget that I am the mother of a son, Hisham. He is the most hallowed treasure of my existence; in my heart, his well-being is of greater magnitude than a thousand marriages*."

He offered a smile of profound fatherly reassurance and replied:

— "*I am well aware of that truth, and he is as well. He is intimately cognizant of every singular detail regarding your life, and in his eyes, your motherhood is perceived not as a burden, but as a magnificent addition to your inherent worth*."

I formally petitioned for a designated interval of reflection—a duration not to exceed three months. I did not offer an instantaneous acceptance, yet I resolutely refrained from providing a refusal. I felt an urgent necessity to commune with my own soul and weigh the gravity of the decision. Three months! It is but a fleeting ripple in the river of time, yet it provides sufficient space for the spirit to undergo its own trial. What details, I wondered, must I learn regarding this man?

My mother subsequently addressed me with a quiet, yet firm resolve:

— "*My daughter, only yesterday you were perceived as but a child, yet today you stand as a mature woman in the eyes of society. The smoke of the Revolution has begun to clear, and the interests of the people have returned to focus upon the personal spheres. Yes, you were a vibrant young girl, but today you are a woman of established standing and the pride of your kin. Do not permit yourself to become a stationary target for suspicion or idle gossip. I shall not impose a refusal upon your will, but I must reiterate my profound concern for both you and*

your son. I implore you, do not cast a refusal from the very onset."

I absorbed my mother's counsel with concentrated interest, yet I found myself locked in a fierce internal debate. I was torn once again between the crushing pressure of my own ruminations and the external push toward the finality of a decision. Perhaps it was a path we did not initially desire.

Yet, the passing days are, in absolute truth, the only healers capable of unraveling even the most complex of dilemmas. What of that state of profound confusion and hesitation I endured before finally uttering a "Yes" or a "No" to my venerable teacher—the man who never once ceased to intercede within the pathways of my existence by way of coincidence? Ultimately, when I analyze those interventions through the prism of hindsight, I find them to have been entirely characterized by goodness and a profound blessing. It is the sovereign hand of Decree and Fate that directs our strides, forging for us this specific path or that, notwithstanding the meticulous measures we imagine we are taking to control our destiny.

For circumstances subsequently led me to be reconciled with Ahmed, observing him through the prism of a suitor who sincerely desired my hand in marriage. What ensued was a profound period of mutual discovery, harmony, and nascent affection. This was further bolstered by two full years of close cooperation and shared effort—not only between the two of us but encompassing the bond between him and my only son, Hisham, and the deepening union between our two families.

We were wedded, as if by a magnificent alignment of destiny, on the eighth of March **1964**—International Women's

Day. To meet the expenses of the wedding, my husband secured a loan from my revered teacher, Mohamed al-Salih Ramadan (may the Almighty grant him His mercy). We spent a modest week, rather than a full month, on our honeymoon, traveling between the cities of Oran and Tlemcen. From a jeweler in a vibrant popular neighborhood, we purchased two simple white rings to serve as the physical token of our eternal covenant. We found a serene respite during the afternoon hours within the courtyard of its grand mosque, lingering at a threshold that held a hallowed significance for my father. At that juncture, we lacked even the material capacity to secure a hotel room for more than a single night.

I discerned in Ahmed an indomitable will, a fierce determination, and an unyielding persistence toward both his professional endeavors and his scholarly pursuits. Despite the grueling and bitter experiences he navigated during the Revolution... he remained a stalwart and sincere son of the nation. He imparted to me, in turn, the profound lesson of how a woman must hold herself in high esteem so that she may command the respect of others, and how her dreams should be nurtured to flourish without impediment, achieving her goals through honorable means.

Who, then, has the audacity to claim that every Arab man is a labyrinth of complexes, inherently selfish and antithetically opposed to the rights and triumphs of women? Verily, to engage in such totalizing judgments and absolute generalizations is an act that contradicts the very essence of genuine culture and civility. Today, as we mark the forty-seventh anniversary of our union, I confess that he was the very wellspring from which all these paths diverged. I have been his companion, his daughter, his wife, and his mother as well. I

navigated with him the most grueling of days and celebrated the most radiant ones. The Almighty has blessed us with grandchildren who are today university-educated, the progeny of our only son, Dr. Hisham. Our shared existence was a garden interwoven with roses and brambles; I stand today, by the grace of God, profoundly content with all that we have harvested and all that we continue to reap.

My Fatimas

Gibran Khalil Gibran once articulated a sublime truth when he remarked: *"Your friend is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving."*

Throughout the tumultuous years of the Revolution and the subsequent dawn of Independence—eras that cascaded with a breathless velocity—I made the acquaintance of a myriad of brothers and sisters. Within the hallowed sanctuary of my heart, many of them have indelibly carved their names, etched with an aura of profound honor and enduring esteem that time can never diminish. Among this valiant vanguard were the *mujahidat* Fatima Zekkal, Hassiba Taqalit, the virtuous Zahra Hafiz, Khadija Khairi, and many other radiant souls.

Let us pause to reflect upon the persona of Fatima Zekkal, whom we affectionately christened "My Fatima." Prior to her apprehension and subsequent incarceration, she was a vibrant intellectual force within the national radio, presiding over distinguished literary segments under the immortal pseudonym "Madame Bovary"—a name borrowed from the celebrated masterpiece of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert. She possessed a masterful and fluid command over both the Arabic and French tongues.

Upon emerging from the shadows of prison in the year **1958**, she joined our ranks in the "Clos Salembier" district (present-day Al-Madania). There, she persevered alongside us upon the arduous path of the struggle. Notwithstanding the administrative coercion that forced her to report to the police headquarters every week to assert her presence and demonstrate her innocence—as she steadfastly refused the

path of flight or escape—she remained a pillar of our movement. Our profound acquaintance and intimate friendship endured well beyond the horizon of Independence, where we stood together as prominent architects and foundational pioneers of our nation's mass organizations.

She was the daughter of a monumental figure within the national movement, Mohamed Zekkal, who had sustained grave wounds that ultimately led to his passing during the historic and cataclysmic demonstrations of May **8**, **1945**.

Following the dawn of independence, my beloved Fatima persisted in her vocational journey within the radio, albeit in a renewed capacity. Together, we meticulously crafted and presented a guidance-oriented program, a visionary endeavor aimed at awakening and mobilizing the Algerian woman for the nascent stages of life within our emancipated nation.

We used to deliver the broadcast with a spontaneous flair, bypassing the censorial pen of the authorities. Indeed, were we not the vanguard representing a triumphant leadership? We stood as pillars of an Algerian state reclaimed from the abyssal darkness of the colonial era. Ours was a patriotic broadcast anchored in the hallowed principles of a victorious revolution, teeming with youthful exuberance and the majestic pride of victory. The program's signature tune opened with a folk melody, composed and tuned for this noble endeavor: *"Two thousand greetings, two thousand peace, to the free Algerian daughter."*

To this day, I retain its melody, humming it time and again; yet the name of the lyricist has slipped into the recesses of oblivion, much like so many other things that have perhaps been lost to the relentless passage of time.

Joining us in the presentation of this program was the distinguished and capable broadcaster Khadija Ismail—known by her radio pseudonym "Samia"—while the direction was overseen by Said Zekkal, the younger brother of my dear Fatima, as everyone fondly addressed her.

It was during that very period that I took part in a competition for the training of female broadcasters in the Arabic tongue. I engaged in various other contests, driven by an ardent desire for self-cultivation. I emerged successful, and it was ordained that the victors be dispatched to Cairo for a rigorous internship at the "Voice of the Arabs" (*Sawt al-Arab*) station, aimed at fulfilling the institutional requirements of our national radio in this vital field.

Notwithstanding my success, I refrained from embarking on that journey. I chose instead to cross the hallowed threshold of the university. Was this not my long-cherished dream—the very one for which that stony-faced inspector had once mocked me? That man who seemed destined to perpetually intervene in the various trajectories of my life.

Fatima Zekkal stood as one of the most preeminent and distinguished feminine visages within the dual arenas of revolutionary struggle and media. Her formidable political consciousness, her extensive professional expertise, and her unyielding patriotism instilled in her a sense of profound apprehension. She was keenly sensitive to the myriad perils that the nation was navigating in the wake of independence—most specifically the upheavals and conflicts that transpired within the Third Historical Province, when certain leaders rose in a dissent that has persisted in its echoes to this very day. Fatima, with a clarity of vision that surpassed many of her

peers, had grasped the true magnitude of those internal strifes that imposed themselves upon the "Brother-Adversaries."

During that epoch, we used to convene at her residence in the Hydra district, alongside the illustrious leader Krim Belkacem. Notwithstanding the myriad pressures and seductive temptations of the time, she never once deviated from the national trajectory. Nor did she ever exert any pressure upon my own person; rather, the voice of wisdom and the dictates of reason were the sovereign rulers of her every response, her every word, and her every deed.

Her Amazigh roots only served to fortify her strength and her unyielding loyalty to our national identity. She emerged as a magnificent ambassador for the Arabic language and our Arab-Islamic civilizational belonging—a conviction she had likely absorbed and distilled from her foundational upbringing within the "Free Schools."

I cherished her deeply, and she reciprocated those sentiments with equal fervor. She manifested a profound admiration for my unshakeable persistence in finalizing my academic studies, despite my professional duties as an educator, my marital obligations, and my myriad responsibilities as a mother. She would perpetually remind me of my "self-made" character in the pursuit of knowledge, notwithstanding the intricate complexities of life. Furthermore, she was the one who constantly propelled me toward the vanguard in every festival we organized to sensitize the masses to the requirements of the era following independence, and she held a profound appreciation for my aptitude in oratorical and political discourse. Moreover, she revered the foundational principle of the common folk: communicating in the authentic language of the people—the Arabic tongue. She frequently

designated me—notwithstanding my own reservations—as the official voice on behalf of the committee members tasked with preparing for the Women's Congress. This eloquence, however, became a source of significant grievance for me, inciting hostile repercussions from certain individuals who favored hypocrisy and duplicity in their social and professional interactions, particularly among the officials. Furthermore, despite their history of struggle at various junctures, they remained tethered to the legacy of colonialism and its language by lingering threads of an inexcusable nostalgia.

I was firmly convinced at the time that the conduct of a revolutionary militant must be characterized by absolute purity, clarity, and veracity—a spirit entirely divorced from every manifestation of corruption, deceit, or sycophancy, most especially when standing before the simple citizenry and the people at large. This is the paragon that the people should aspire to emulate and the path they ought to follow.

One momentous day, we sought an audience with Brother Ahmed Ben Bella, the President of the Republic, within his chambers at Villa Joly. In those transformative days, our meetings with him were almost a daily occurrence. As a collective of sisters, we arrived to apprise him of a resolution we had adopted in our capacity as the preparatory committee for the Congress. The mandate was as follows:

—"Certain individuals have erred and committed a myriad of transgressions for the sake of their own private interests. Upon deep reflection, the overarching majority of this committee deems that these sisters can no longer serve as our representatives, whether within the hallowed borders of the homeland or beyond."

The consensus was absolute, yet it was articulated through my own voice. This reality led those sisters, the subjects of the committee’s resolution, to regard me with a visceral and enduring hostility thereafter. They never consigned to oblivion the words I uttered in the presence of the President, notwithstanding the manifest truth that I spoke on behalf of the entire collective; it was never merely the progeny of my own private ruminations or a solitary judgment I had made alone.

My dear friend "Fatimati" addressed me then, perceiving my profound distress at their treatment:

— *"Pay them no heed, my sister; for they are but the transient accidents of history."*

Whenever public rallies were convened, Fatimati was meticulously careful to carry small cubes of sugar within her handbag. She would offer me one periodically, ensuring that I would not succumb to exhaustion from the labor of speaking, nor would my voice falter or grow hoarse. We still had a myriad of other quarters ahead of us, awaiting further rallies, activism, and fervent oratory during the mobilization and awareness campaigns aimed at the founding and establishment of the nation's mass organizations, foremost among them the Women's Organization.

We were locked in a state of unceasing labor, exerting monumental effort and spending long, weary days and nights far removed from our families—often finding ourselves unable even to seek the sanctuary of sleep within our own homes.

When the shadow of illness fell upon Fatimati, in the days preceding her passing, she would reach out to me several times a week. I would converse with her as though she were not

afflicted at all; for her malady, however grave and perilous, possessed no power to wither the iron resolve of her will or disturb the profound serenity of her faith.

My Fatimati... she remains eternal, enshrined forever within the hallowed sanctuary of my mind and heart.

The First Friend

My foremost companion and most cherished confidante during those years was Safia Ben M'ahdi—a *mujahida* who hailed from the very heart of a storied *mujahid* family. Her lineage was a living testament to the refined civilization and the ancient traditions of old Algiers. On her maternal side, she was anchored to the noble "Baya" family, and through her father, she belonged to the illustrious and venerable "Al-Tahar" family.

The bond of friendship that united us was of a profoundly intimate nature, characterized by a sacred closeness that transcended the mere passage of years, notwithstanding the fact that she was my senior in age. She possessed a fountain of tenderness and a rare, genuine kindness that compelled me to cling to her as one would to an elder sister. I found in her a sanctuary where I could reveal the most delicate whispers of my soul—those intricate details of my inner life that I often found myself unable to utter even in the presence of my own blood sisters.

This extraordinary friendship blossomed during one of the most arduous and defining periods of my existence. It was a bond that flourished through its own specificity, growing stronger through a state of total integration and seamless cooperation across every field of our shared endeavor. Our relationship was never confined to the narrow boundaries of two individuals; rather, it expanded to encompass our families, intertwining our lives until we effectively became a single, unified entity. We both shared the common soil of the Al-Madania neighborhood, and we both dedicated our lives to the noble vocation of teaching. The momentous events of the Revolution served as the furnace that forged us into one family,

standing as a resolute and unbreakable front against the oppressive machinery of the French colonial administration.

I vividly recall the myriad of profound and sacred secrets that we shared during the arduous years of the Revolution. While we both belonged to the same overarching revolutionary organization, our specific operational cells remained strictly clandestine and separate from one another. This was the hallmark of our struggle—a trust so deep it did not require the disclosure of details that might jeopardize the mission.

In those historic and momentous days of December **1960**, during the height of the great popular demonstrations, we were there together, amidst the surging tide of the masses. When the colonial police launched their brutal crackdown and certain brave militants from our neighborhood were apprehended and subjected to the most heinous forms of torture, the interrogators desperately sought to uncover the "organizers." In a moment of legendary defiance, those tortured heroes looked their executioners in the eye and pointed toward our streets, declaring:

—"Go to the neighborhood and knock on any door... you will find that every single one of us is an organizer."

Safia and I each carried our own heavy burdens of secret operations, never breathing a word to the other out of a shared commitment to the movement's safety. We remained in this state of "disciplined silence" until the ceasefire was officially declared on March **19**, **1962**. Only then, as the sun of independence began to rise, did the veils finally lift. We discovered that while we had been sitting together daily, sharing bread and dreams, we were also guarding the same fortress from different towers. This realization only served to

deepen our bond, for we knew that our friendship was forged not just in affection, but in a mutual respect for the sacredness of duty.

The dawn of national independence granted us the magnificent opportunity to labor side-by-side in a myriad of vital social, political, and cultural endeavors. Together, we were the architects who helped found the Women's Union and established the very first women's magazine in Algeria—***Al-Jazairia***—which served as the authentic voice of the Union, of which Safia was elected as General Secretary in **1969**.

Safia bestowed so much of her life and her spirit upon this noble nation. She sought nothing for herself—no titles, no riches—save for the eternal serenity of a clear conscience and the treasure of beautiful, untarnished memories. Her selflessness was absolute. I recall with profound respect that even when she was offered high-ranking positions and prestigious offices within the educational field, she chose to decline them with a characteristic modesty. She was a woman of deep conviction who believed that her service was a debt of love to the homeland, one that required no repayment in the form of worldly status.

Our friendship remained a lighthouse throughout the shifting seasons of my life. Even in the moments when I faced my own personal storms or internal conflicts, Safia was always there—the serene, steady voice of reason and the compassionate heart that guided me toward peace.

The Organized Mind

Hassiba Taqalit emerged as another foundational figure among the *mujahidat* whose paths intersected with my own—a woman who possessed a remarkably disciplined, methodically organized, and surgical intellect. She operated with the indomitable precision and the relentless drive of a grand, finely tuned machine, seemingly untiring in her total devotion to the cause. She navigated the convoluted administrative labyrinths, the murky waters of bureaucracy, and the myriad complexities of emerging state life with a graceful ease that bordered on the extraordinary. Such was our absolute collective trust in her capabilities that she was habitually entrusted with the most arduous, intricate, and sensitive tasks within our preparatory committee—missions that required not only a sharp, discerning intellect but also a steadfast and unyielding heart.

Whenever we convened within the council chambers, Hassiba and her vibrant sister, Zahia, possessed a wondrous, almost magical ability to dissipate the heavy clouds of our labors. Their radiant wit and spontaneous, infectious humor functioned as a soothing balm, making us momentarily forget the grueling hardships of our massive responsibilities. They infused our sessions with a much-needed spirit of camaraderie and joy, proving that the struggle for a nation did not preclude the grace of laughter.

Hassiba was a rare and magnificent synthesis of profound, clinical intellect and visceral, human compassion—a woman who thought with the clarity of a sage while feeling with the depth of a mother's heart. She was a central pillar of the preparatory committee, laboring tirelessly to weave the intricate grassroots networks that would define the Women's

Union. Even when the political winds of the nation shifted with startling violence following the "Revolutionary Correction" of June **19**, **1965**—led by Houari Boumediene against the regime of Ahmed Ben Bella—she remained an unyielding bastion of steadfastness, anchored to her principles like a mountain amidst a storm.

In those turbulent times, Hassiba demonstrated a clarity of vision and a moral fortitude that many others found difficult to maintain. History, in its final, impartial, and cold audit, demands such unwavering considerations. We, as a collective, were never mere partisans of individuals, nor were we captives to the intoxicating cult of personality; rather, we were devoted partisans of the Nation and the State itself. To Hassiba, and to those of us who shared her unshakeable conviction, allegiance was a sacred debt owed exclusively to the hallowed homeland—a loyalty that transcended the transient rise and fall of ephemeral political figures. We remained singular and focused in our ultimate purpose: the building of enduring state institutions and the total mobilization of the Algerian woman within the fabric of a sovereign nation.

As we reflect upon the political landscape that unfolded under the aegis of Houari Boumediene, we navigate through a myriad of debates that continue to echo—discourses concerning the perceived deficit of democratic participation and the assertions of individualistic governance that were whispered in the shadow of his leadership. Yet, the passing days have unequivocally demonstrated that contemporary colonialism, in its cunning and metamorphosed guises, frequently orchestrates its invasions of sovereign nations and its subversion of ancient civilizations under the noble pretense of "Democracy." The methodologies of subjugation have

evolved; where they were once shrouded in secrecy, they have now emerged as an unabashed and overt phenomenon, visible to the global conscience.

The establishment of stable, enduring institutions was a goal from which we resolved never to deviate; for we understood that whereas individuals and private alliances are inherently transient, the homeland remains the only constant reality. On the eve of our independence, as we were diligently weaving the grassroots networks of women's cells and preparing for our inaugural national congress, we also functioned as a formal committee representing the vanguard of these burgeoning forces. We contributed our voices to a vast array of Arab and international forums and summits. Our presence was marked by an unwavering sense of dignity, and our conceptual framework was deeply rooted in the resounding principles of a victorious Revolution. We bore the unmistakable features of a monumental people, carrying within our souls values that not only satisfied the requirements of our mission but won the profound admiration and appreciation—and even ignited the quiet envy and jealousy—of many who observed our progress.

Following the conclusion of one of our intensive foreign relations committee deliberations, Hassiba—acting in her official capacity as our director—turned to me one evening and declared with a resolute finality:

—"Zhour, you must prepare yourself to serve as the radiant voice of the Algerian woman at the inaugural Asian-African Women's Congress in Cairo."

I was momentarily mesmerized by the sheer weight of this announcement. Cairo once again? What was this sudden, breathtaking turn of events? My heart began to race with a

jubilant fervor. Yet, a practical and grounded anxiety surfaced amidst the excitement, and I responded with a modest sincerity:

"But Hassiba, I am merely a humble educator, and for six months now, the sovereign government has yet to formally integrate us into its professional ranks. How can I possibly undertake a diplomatic journey to the majestic city of Cairo when I do not even possess a proper pair of shoes befitting such an international stage?"

A sudden cascade of mirth and affectionate laughter erupted from all the sisters present—a collective laughter that resonated as the definitive and unmistakable voice of solidarity, as if they were collectively proclaiming:

"We are all that very woman!"

Perhaps the reader of today might pause and inquire with a touch of modern skepticism:

"And what of the official mission stipends and travel expenses that are rightfully granted to any individual entrusted with a task of state?"

In those early years, during that ethereal and improvisational dawn of our newfound independence, such administrative matters were neither systematically organized nor governed by the rigid and formal legal statutes that prevail in our current era. Indeed, the very nature of those times meant that events were unfolding with an extraordinary cadence of swift momentum and spontaneous ingenuity. It was an era wherein the sheer prestige of being designated for a national mission served as the ultimate selection criteria, a time when the honor of service far outweighed the pursuit of those

material privileges so meticulously sought after in the present day.

Never mind the administrative void. On the following dawn, I was greeted by the sight of an envelope resting upon the committee’s desk, with my nomenclature inscribed upon its surface. Within resided a sum of currency—not sourced from any official state treasury or "People's Fund," but emanating undoubtedly from the very pockets of my sister-activists. I sought no explanations, and no words of origin were offered; it was a silent, hallowed pact of solidarity. I accepted their contribution with a heart full of gratitude, for that sum proved sufficient to help establish the foundations of our first national organizations and trade unions.

During those inaugural stages, we operated entirely devoid of an official budget. For a protracted duration, we met our operational costs through our own meager resources, funding the labors of the congress preparatory committee from our personal savings. We carried this burden without a whisper of complaint or the slightest grumble, for we were resolute in our desire that our service to the nation remain a matter of untarnished and sacred honor in all circumstances.

Thus, I embarked for Cairo. Our delegation was a true sisterhood of struggle: Safia Ben M'ahdi, Zlikha bin Qaddour, Leila Chérif Zhar, and myself. It was the holy month of Ramadan in the year **1964**. Our bewilderment was profound when we discovered that the vast majority of our fellow Arab delegates at the conference were not observing the fast!

Within the context of the Algerian spiritual and social conscience, failing to observe the fast was perceived as a transgression of the highest order, notwithstanding our status

as travelers. We remained steadfast in our prayers and our abstinence, for we understood that in the sociological and analytical reality of our nation's modern history, the fast was far more than a mere religious ritual; it was a defiant form of civilizational resistance against the colonial system—a hallmark of our restored national identity and our sacred religious belonging.

Upon our majestic entrance into the grand assembly hall in Cairo, we were greeted with a reception that defied all description. A thunderous, rhythmic, and sustained applause surged from every corner of the chamber, echoing through the rafters—a visceral and heartfelt tribute to the indomitable spirit and the epic, unparalleled sacrifices of the Algerian woman. It was within this intellectually vibrant and emotionally charged atmosphere that I was granted the distinct and hallowed honor of personally meeting Dr. Suhair al-Qalamawy, the formidable and venerable head of the Arab Women's Union.

Furthermore, I made the acquaintance of Amina al-Said, the illustrious journalist and visionary editor of the celebrated *Hawaa* (Eve) magazine. This encounter proved particularly significant, as she would subsequently become a devoted patron of my nascent creative endeavors, providing a prestigious platform for the publication of my early literary output. Within that same crucible of activism and thought, I had the immense privilege of engaging with other noble and pioneering figures of that era, such as the dedicated Karima al-Said and the intellectual provocateur Nawal al-Saadawi, Hikmat abu Zaid

During the proceedings of this inaugural congress—my first to be convened beyond our sovereign borders, the First Afro-

Asian Women's Conference—the Embassy of the People's Republic of China orchestrated a grand banquet held specifically in honor of the Algerian delegation. In a magnificent gesture of esteem for the Algerian women, every delegate was presented with an exquisite tablecloth, intricately hand-embroidered by Chinese artisans rather than by machine. To this very day, I continue to cherish my gift, safeguarding it as a hallowed and honorable memento, notwithstanding that it has now become threadbare and worn with the relentless passage of time.

Seven Years of Blessings?

Our indomitable fervor in establishing the nation's social and political institutions was matched only by our unwavering vigilance as women regarding certain political undercurrents and ideological shifts within the leadership. I recall with poignant clarity the period when armed rebellion erupted within some of the historic provinces; at that momentous juncture, the Algerian *mujahida* adopted a stance that was as noble as it was strategic. She maintained a principled neutrality in its political distance, yet manifested a profoundly positive humanitarian intent toward those internal strifes. We, the unified collective of women, orchestrated massive and resounding demonstrations in the city’s grandest public squares, our voices ascending in a singular, evocative chant that echoed through the corridors of history:

—"Seven Years of Blessings!"

This was far more than a mere ephemeral slogan; it was a visceral invocation for peace—a profound and sacred prayer that the "seven years of arduous war" we had so painfully endured should be followed by an era of divine grace, enduring stability, and the magnificent work of national reconstruction.

Port Said Square was transformed into my majestic pulpit; I was chosen as a keynote orator for a monumental rally where the inhabitants of the Casbah, Bab El Oued, and the surrounding districts had converged in their countless thousands. I was entrusted with this grave responsibility alongside two esteemed sisters of the struggle: the mujahida Zohra Drif-Bitat and my cherished confidante Hassiba Taqalit. They arrived at our residence in a state of high and urgent purpose, awaiting my return from the evening classes I

conducted at the "Diyar al-Saada" primary school. We dedicated that entire night to a state of feverish preparation, meticulously drafting the proclamations and manifestos we would soon deliver to the expectant and surging masses.

At that historical threshold, the mujahida Zohra Drif was in the delicate and hallowed stages of pregnancy. My mother received them both with her characteristic maternal warmth as they awaited my return. We were then dwelling in an apartment within the "Diyar al-Shams" housing project—a place that, during those hours, became a crucible of historical preparation. This quarter, which was a vibrant and densely populated quarter, distinguished by its architecture of four-story residential blocks.

Yet, it possessed the distinct and wearying hardship of lacking elevators—a logistical deficiency that imposed a heavy and exhausting physical burden upon Zohra, who was then navigating the arduous final stages of her pregnancy. My mother was moved to a profound state of maternal sympathy and compassionate concern for her, observing her every movement with a vigilant eye. It was not long thereafter that Zohra finally gave birth to a radiant daughter, whom she chose to christen with the name "Jamila"—a poignant tribute of honor and revolutionary solidarity dedicated to her venerable comrade-in-arms, the legendary Jamila Bouhired.

That monumental rally emerged as a landmark event of historical proportions. Hundreds of thousands of women converged upon Port Said Square, arriving in successive waves and disciplined echelons to solidify our ranks. We took turns ascending the podium erected in the very heart of the square—a stage that had once been reserved for grand musical concerts and colonial displays during the vanished era of French

occupation. From that heightened vantage point, we addressed the masses with words woven of wisdom and patience, managing affairs through the clear prism of reason. Our voices functioned as a clarion call for an unwavering loyalty to the sacred memory of our martyrs, and a fervent appeal for a sovereign Algeria to be governed with a profound intellect and far-reaching foresight, as a hallowed tribute to their glorious and immortal legacy.

Following the conclusion of these evocative speeches, we embarked upon a majestic procession, directing our collective steps toward the "Zighoud Youcef" Palace—the venerable seat of the Constituent Assembly and the Parliament of the people. We marched with hearts overflowing with faith and a spirit of absolute conviction, our voices rising in unison to resonate with that eternal and rhythmic chant:

—"Seven Years of Blessings!"

It functioned as a piercing and soulful lament, an urgent and collective plea to shield our nascent nation from any further bloodshed, agonizing tears, devastating loss, and unnecessary sacrifices offered merely upon the altar of individual leadership or personal prestige. We remained steadfast in our profound conviction that the only true and hallowed struggle should be one dedicated solely to the ultimate liberation of our land and the definitive expulsion of the occupier—never a base conflict waged for the sake of acquiring transient seats of power or establishing ideological hegemony.

Such was the analytical prism through which we, as dedicated female militants and guardians of the Revolution's spirit, perceived our roles and responsibilities. Perhaps our vision at that time possessed a certain quality of idealistic

simplicity, yet it was a vision that unequivocally placed the sacred security and the enduring stability of Algeria far above every other secondary consideration. We were acutely aware that we, as women, had already paid the lion's share of the staggering price for all that had transpired within the nation and among its people throughout those seven and a half years of trial by fire—a cost of such immense and visceral magnitude that certain men, unfortunately, seemed incapable of fully comprehending its weight without engaging in this kind of internal conflict, even if its results yielded nothing but misery for the common citizen.

Perhaps those men were anchored in truth regarding some of their perspectives, as I came to perceive with the maturity of later years. Yet, this can never serve as a justification for inciting further discord in the wake of a blood-drenched revolution whose objectives were as clear as the dawn. The ultimate truth is never a singular, absolute possession; there are those who harbor the illusion that they are the sole architects of everything, while in reality, they create nothing of substance. They seem to forget that Algeria is far greater, and its revolution far more monumental, than any narrow geographic estimations or their limited popular calculations.

The Bold Cigarette

The mujahida Baya Hocine was a luminous figure among the "Six Sisters" condemned to death by the merciless French military tribunal in Algiers during the height of the Revolution. She endured the cold solitude of imprisonment, the rigors of interrogation, and the savagery of torture, all while she was still a dedicated student at the Faculty of Medicine.

She was the youngest among that hallowed circle, carrying within her no burden save for the blossoming hopes of her seventeen years. Yet, the vibrant spring of her life was abruptly transmuted into an unbearable inferno, for its mistress had chosen to offer the very prime of her youth as a sacrifice upon the altar of the Revolution.

Baya was distinguished by a remarkable and distinct boldness in her stances following the dawn of independence. She possessed a sharp, critical eye that challenged any action that did not bow to the sanctity of free thought and the liberty of expression. Her diverse activities alongside us, both within the Party and the mass organizations, were stamped with a literary courage manifested in both her conceptualization and her analytical rigor. Notwithstanding her profound religious conviction—and at times, her perceptible conservatism—she never once abandoned her progressive vision. She was particularly fierce in championing the cause of women's rights and the imperative necessity of enshrining them within the nation's Constitution, striving to grant the woman her full measure of liberty and rights within society. Her ultimate goal was for the woman to emerge as a person of sovereign decision and autonomous choice—a human being endowed with the full spectrum of rights.

She possessed a clear understanding that these progressive views could never fundamentally contradict correct religious values—those authentic principles which she had absorbed through a sound and enlightened Islamic upbringing, far removed from any pretense or extremist distortion.

Fate eventually decreed that we should serve together for many years under the majestic dome of the National People's Assembly. During the parliamentary sessions and the rigorous debates surrounding draft laws, she never once surrendered to societal pressure or behavioral coercion. Although she was a smoker—and despite smoking being viewed then as a significant social taboo for women within Algerian society—she never considered it a forbidden act in itself, nor did she ever advocate for its prohibition.

For Baya, while a woman smoking in public at that time was an uncommon and perhaps undesirable sight, it was a personal habit she maintained.

The disapproval voiced by some led them to attempt to forbid for others what they permitted for themselves, relying more upon prevailing commonalities than upon the strict dictates of the sacred *Sharia*.

I frequently found myself defending her against such narrow-minded critics—those individuals whose restricted horizons nearly extinguished any glimmer of freedom for the woman as a human being who possesses the divine right to embrace what she loves and loathe what she loathes.

In my estimation, Baya Hocine was superior in her revolutionary struggle, her unwavering integrity, and her profound patriotism to a vast number of those who merely bestowed upon themselves the title of "Manhood." She was—

may God bestow His infinite mercy upon her soul—exceedingly clear and explicit; she articulated what she believed and acted upon her convictions, remaining entirely aloof from the social hypocrisy that so often pervades and permeates urban societies.

My Friend Khadija and the Library

She was a *mujahida* driven by the unyielding principle of holding fast to cultural authenticity—in language, religion, and our sacred heritage. In her vision, the independence of her nation was fundamentally incomplete unless it was firmly anchored within this civilizational framework, which had been violated by insidious intellectual incursions long before the arrival of military and political conquest.

She was an exemplary self-made woman. In addition to her heroic struggle and her steadfast endurance of torture and imprisonment, she once shared the grim solitude of a prison cell with the legendary *mujahida* Jamila Bouhired. The dawn of independence found her within the lecture halls of the University of Algiers, arming herself with the modern knowledge required by the arduous stage of nation-building and foundation.

Khadija Khayar—whose revolutionary pseudonym was "Dania"—was a daughter of Bejaia and a graduate of the schools established by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, much like myself. I have rarely encountered her equal in unshakeable steadfastness upon principle—specifically the principle of defending the nation's cultural constants. Our paths converged in the noble mission of secondary school education for an entire decade, and we have remained close and intimate companions to this very day.

Our most cherished and beautiful memories were forged when we were entrusted with the academic management of the "Umm al-Mu'minin" (Mother of the Believers) Secondary School. The Principal, Madame Fawzia Sahraoui, assigned us the vital task of curating and purchasing books for the school

library and conducting specialized research befitting the pedagogical and intellectual elevation of our students. We were frequently accompanied in this scholarly mission by our colleague and dear sister from sisterly Egypt, Nafissa al-Rukaybi, the wife of Dr. Abdullah al-Rukaybi.

So there we stood, the three of us, wholly dedicated to the meticulous curation and acquisition of scholarly and literary volumes, gracing year-end festivities with our presence, and immersing ourselves in the craft of composing educational plays and overseeing vibrant wall magazines. We assumed the responsibility of refining student essays and directing a myriad of other cultural activities under the auspices of that school, until that secondary institution emerged as one of the most prestigious educational edifices on a national scale during the **1970**s; it stood as a valiant pioneer in the transformative historical experience of Arabizing secondary education throughout the reaches of Algeria.

It is incumbent upon me to record, with a sense of immense pride, that this venerable school served as the cradle for dozens of illustrious female cadres, who later graced a wide spectrum of professional fields and academic disciplines. These women ascended to the highest echelons of public service and creative excellence. Among the luminaries who emerged from our classrooms were the world-renowned novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi, the esteemed Minister Nouara Jaafar, the prominent media figure Nafissa al-Ahrash, Dr. In'am Bayoudh, the virtuous Minister Fatma Zohra Bouchemla, Dr. Shaza al-Kayyali, and a host of other ladies who have left an indelible mark in the realms of science, medicine, teaching, and media.

Notwithstanding this record of monumental achievements, a shadow of profound sorrow descended upon our journey when

my dear friend Khadija's eyesight began to fail her in a noticeable and agonizing manner. In light of this physical affliction, she submitted a formal request to the administration to be transferred from the grueling demands of classroom teaching to the serene sanctuary of the library. On one poignant occasion, she revealed the hidden depths of her heart to me, struggling against bitter tears and saying with great lament:

"What solace can I possibly find in the library now, my dear companion, when I find myself incapable of drinking from the overflowing springs of knowledge housed within its walls?"

I was, in the depths of my soul, certain of the genuine nature of her tragedy and the validity of her grief; did not the great German philosopher Goethe once say with his enchanting eloquence:

"If the wealthy truly understood the magnitude of the pleasure we find in reading, they would surely kill us out of envy"?

When I reflect today upon Khadija and those cherished sister-comrades—and none besides them—I do not intend to suggest that the others have vanished from my recollection; rather, these are the singular spirits I have embraced with an extraordinary measure of honor and profound appreciation. I confess a deep sense of empathetic sorrow for them, given the myriad tragedies and the occasional insolence they are forced to encounter within the public thoroughfares or during specific commemorative events. How it truly gladdens my heart to encounter one of them by a stroke of serendipity, an event invariably resulting in a spirited exchange of embraces and a shared outpouring of bittersweet tears!

In the objective light of truth, the trajectories of those *mujahidat* who lived into the post-independence era can be delineated into three or perhaps four distinct classifications. There were those who chose to dedicate the entirety of their being to the sanctity of marriage and the cultivation of a family; for them, their revolutionary odyssey and their harrowing prison ordeals became merely a closed chapter within the broader march of their lives, notwithstanding the enduring psychological echoes of those experiences. There were others who, due to various insurmountable impediments, were found unable to complete the cycle of their studies or secure a professional foothold.

And then there existed that select group who persisted in the multifaceted struggle—both political and social—emerging triumphant in all these complex tasks combined. They carried forward that same indomitable vigor they had possessed during the armed liberation struggle, achieving a success that was nothing short of monumental and honorable. I have chosen to immortalize these specific models because they stand as honest and luminous paradigms within the life of the Algerian woman and society at large. There are, inevitably, other models that warrant neither mention nor tribute in these pages.

I recall one afternoon, amidst an atmosphere of genuine camaraderie and sisterhood, when our illustrious commander from the initial Battle of Algiers, Colonel Yacef Saadi, leaned toward me as we sat beneath the august dome of the Council of Nations. He whispered with a tone of pained observation:

"*Sister Zhour—the name by which you are so affectionately known in our capital's dialect—it is a bitter truth that what some of these women have secured in terms of material privileges equals or exceeds all that the true mujahidat and*

militants together received, notwithstanding that they were among the very last to board the train of our glorious Revolution."

I offered him a knowing smile and replied:

*"I am acutely aware of this painful reality, my brother Saadi. It is, in truth, an act of moral transgression for such individuals to seize for themselves what they have never rightfully earned. Yet, the mujahida who ignited the first sparks of rebellion and revolution against the occupier as early as the **1940**s, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the primal generation of fighters, remains to this very day sustained by the sacred memories of that Revolution. She cherishes the profound conviction that she discharged her duty toward the homeland in the most magnificent manner possible, and she continues to regard her sacrifices within the rugged peaks of the Aurès as the most hallowed of all her earthly deeds."*

He responded to my words with a tone of heavy reflection:

"*Such, alas, is the recurring tragedy of revolutions throughout the annals of human history; the sincere visionaries lay the foundational plans, the valiant and the brave wage the fierce battles, and all too often, the opportunists and the 'latecomers' are the ones who harvest the succulent fruits of victory*."

An Egyptian Friend

Dr. Awatef Abdelrahman stands as a cherished soul and a kindred spirit from our sisterly Egypt. We were bound together by the unyielding integrity of shared principles and a magnificent commonality of purpose, unified by a profound and unwavering love for Algeria during that transformative decade that followed the dawn of our independence.

Upon our inaugural encounter, she was being hosted as a guest of honor at the Presidency of the Republic—specifically under the personal aegis and sponsorship of the late President Houari Boumediene himself. It so happened that she had engaged with him on several formal occasions, during which he became cognizant of her undertaking a high-level academic study—a scholarly endeavor of significant merit aimed at comparing the Algerian media landscape with other African media apparatuses. Furthermore, she was meticulously conducting an exhaustive research project into the storied history and the invaluable archives of the militant Algerian newspaper, *El Moudjahid***,** established in **1956**

She resided as an intimate and honored guest of Algeria, frequently gracing the various media landscapes and immersing herself within the historical repositories related to the chronicle of the militant press and the overarching Algerian media apparatus. Being a guest under the direct patronage of the President, her presence was inevitably placed under the supportive sponsorship of the National Union of Algerian Women. Consequently, all administrative procedures were rendered seamless; every requirement for her scholarly pursuit was expedited with the utmost diligence. During that significant period, she was accorded her full political and academic

stature, and the Union thoughtfully placed a dedicated villa at her disposal along the Chemin des Glycines" (the road leading to the Palace of the People).

Later, during my tenure as Minister of State for Social Affairs, she relocated to a social and health center belonging to the National Security apparatus. This transition was facilitated through the direct and fraternal coordination with the late *mujahid* Abderrazak Bouhara, who then presided as the Minister of Health and Population, and the *mujahid* El-Hadi Khidiri, the Director General of National Security.

I had the good fortune of accompanying her during many of her endeavors, serving as her guide through the intricate administrative corridors of our institutions. I came to know her essence with profound depth, and we were bound by unbreakable ties of brotherhood and friendship that have endured to this very day. Awatef remained a tireless observer, following with her eloquent writings and her numerous scholarly publications the diverse movements of liberation across Africa, with a particular and fervent focus on the Arab world. She specialized in articulating the struggles of these nations, becoming a voice for their aspirations. In our intimate exchanges, she affectionately addressed me as "Umm Hisham" (Mother of Hisham), and I reciprocated with the same title, for her only son also bore the name of my own.

Notwithstanding her profound affection for Algeria and its cultural and revolutionary odyssey, I cannot help but reflect today—despite the deep appreciation I harbor for Algeria’s leadership—on the regrettable reality that certain "ambassadors" or "diplomats" who arrived as strangers to our soil added nothing of value to Algeria's historical record. On the contrary, they occasionally manifested negative behaviors that

diminished Algeria's prestige rather than enhancing it. If I were to speak with absolute bluntness, I would say they failed to preserve the sacred bond of Arab brotherhood.

Has the magnitude of Awatef’s profound affection toward Algeria undergone any alteration due to these regrettable behaviors? By no means; she has remained an indomitable exemplar for the Arab woman who holds the sacred conviction that every corner of the Arab world is her true homeland, and that stagnant and deleterious ideologies are but an intellectual pestilence.

Notwithstanding the grueling conditions of the incarceration she endured during the reign of President Sadat, and despite the shifting nomenclature of the "City of Friendship" (Egypt) within these very chronicles, the name of Cairo has remained eternally synonymous with the vibrant fragrance of enlightened thought and advanced civilization. Egypt, that venerable cradle of human history, bears no culpability for those who represent it with such profound inadequacy. These individuals are, in reality, a burdensome weight upon Egypt’s shoulders, representing a deplorable deficit of morality and a stark lack of gratitude.

I stand in absolute certainty that those who are possessed by an obsessive delusion of "Greatness" are, in the final analysis, those possessing the narrowest and most restricted of horizons. Those who serve as the architects of the Egyptians' greatest distress are precisely the ones who seek to distort Egypt's authentic countenance—the face of a noble and profound philosophy upon which the edifice of Egyptian literature flourished, a legacy that never relied upon any hollow pretension.

The Measure of Suitability for the Eminent

During this momentous stage of my existence, I was privileged to encounter a vast and multifaceted array of individuals: the custodians of high sovereign office, the celebrated luminaries of the age, the radiant stars of society, and the preeminent figures of the public sphere. Consequently, my circle of acquaintances expanded to encompass a broad and varied horizon; yet, my discernment of these individuals—and their eventual influence upon the sanctuary of my spirit—remained entirely devoid of any unprincipled bias or superficial dazzle. I adhered strictly to a triad of foundational criteria in my evaluations:

The first: To cultivate an acquaintance with individuals primarily through the enduring legacy of their tangible works, the veracity of their public proclamations, and the intellectual depth of their writings. I remained eternally steadfast against being seduced by their polished images or the ephemeral glorification bestowed upon them by the sensationalist gazettes of the day.

The second: To seek knowledge of others for the noble purpose of mutual intellectual enrichment and the sacred pursuit of learning, or simply for the refined and humanistic pleasure of discovery. It was effortless for me to recognize the intrinsic worth of such individuals and to join them in the majestic and continuous process of seeking knowledge.

The third: To function as a living, breathing bridge between people, facilitating a state of mutual recognition and profound respect. By this, I intended that I should always serve as the bearer of a meaningful message, laboring tirelessly to deliver it, and striving to comprehend the diverse opinions of others

while carrying forward convictions that were intrinsically and authentically my own.

I was perpetually a "militant" in the articulation of my words, the formulation of my profound thoughts, and the deliberate weight of my presence within any assembly. It was my fervent desire that others should absorb my core convictions with a crystalline clarity and absolute transparency. I discovered that my proactive service functioned as a profound person-to-person dedication as much as it was a measured and thoughtful reaction to the deeds and initiatives of others.

Throughout this monumental epoch, I encountered a myriad of human paradigms. There exist certain models who appear to excel and radiate within the spheres of transient power and fame, yet in my estimation, they shall eternally remain mere names relegated to the forgotten margins of history. Notwithstanding their current brilliance and the boundless, inflated ego that saturates their hearts and minds, they possess a peculiar facility for hollow rhetoric and empty eloquence. We encounter them as 'pompous' intellectuals who excel solely in the art of 'ostentation' and theatrical display.

In contrast, there are those possessing a distinctive talent in the quintessential formation that emanates from an unblemished nature and a rectitude of character and conduct. In the vast landscape of Algeria, we are graced by a family that bears an ancestral and storied name—authentically Algerian in every fiber of its being—possessing a lineage that is both noble and profoundly rooted.

I have previously remarked that I have encountered figures spanning the entire spectrum of our national life: from the modest, tireless militants within the grassroots cells to the

formidable summits of executive authority—Presidents of the Republic, Ministers of the Diwan, and high-ranking military commanders. Never once was I seduced by the superficial shimmer of 'resplendent' names, nor was I ever blinded by the ephemeral brilliance of medals, titles, and hierarchical distinctions. My soul was perpetually haunted by a single, persistent inquiry: why?

Why was it that the valiant female *mujahida*—who braved the same fires of struggle—never attained official military ranks following the dawn of independence, in the same manner as her brothers, the *mujahideen*? Why was even a symbolic martial recognition withheld from her?

I dedicated my years of struggle within the clandestine cells and the structured organizations of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Like countless other sisters, my arena was the grassroots frameworks, the trade unions, and the burgeoning state institutions, rather than the formal military establishment. We did not, at that time, raise our voices to demand the inherent right of the young girl to participate specifically within the military field, following the restoration of our national sovereignty. Within the sacred confines of the military establishment, we bore witness to numerous luminous paradigms: clandestine cells of the Party embedded within the army, where women labored with the same unyielding resolve and tireless dedication as their brothers in arms. I served for a period of at least three consecutive years in direct coordination with the National Liberation Army.I recall with particular vividness the year **1967**, during that harrowing epoch of Zionist aggression against the sanctuary of the Arab nation. It was then that the voices of Algerian women rose in a unified and fervent clarion call, demanding the imperative necessity of establishing

specialized institutes dedicated to the rigorous military and technical preparation of women.

Yet, that noble and visionary aspiration did not find its tangible realization until much later, in the mid-**1980**s, when the very first female officer within the military corps—Naima Mazouni—was formally honored with her inaugural rank. At that historical juncture, I was presiding as a Minister during the early years of the eighties government. The sight of her in uniform was truly magnificent, a vision of progress, and I recall addressing her with a profound sense of pride:

—"Accept my most heartfelt congratulations, my dear daughter. You shall stand as a radiant source of honor and prestige for us within the security forces; you are both exceptionally young and remarkably brave."

To my words, she responded with a resolute and quiet certainty:

—"I shall strive with all my being to fulfill that promise."

A question perpetually haunted the chambers of my mind: *from what wellspring did my profound admiration for military missions emanate?*

As I cast a retrospective gaze upon the tapestries of my youth, I find the answer manifesting with an unyielding clarity and a resolute firmness. Since the early dawns of my consciousness, I had been captivated by the quintessentially disciplined persona of the military man. I perceived that the vast majority of the circumstances I navigated—both within the hallowed ranks of the National Liberation Movement and under the aegis of the Party—demanded a formidable caliber of revolutionary historicity and a profound ethical rectitude.

I harbored a visceral rejection of any 'martial' intellect that sought to sever the sacred bond between the military commander and the academic luminary. In the crucible of my convictions, I refused the binary choice between the military persona and the political one, for within the context of a revolutionary chronicle, they are fundamentally inseparable and inextricably interwoven.

I held the firm conviction that politics was far more than a mere atmospheric backdrop; it was the very marrow and the resilient bone of the struggle for liberation. It was never satiated with the mere reclamation of territory; it hungered for the restoration of sacred spiritual values.

I remain uncertain whether my spirit is profoundly influenced by the transcendental philosophy of the German thinker Nietzsche, or if I am merely articulating a genuine, indigenous conviction of my own that I am compelled to defend. It is a philosophy of authority and strength that can only be fully comprehended through the prism of the 'Will to Power'."

The Eldest Son of Independent Algeria

Among the individuals I was privileged to know with profound directness at the very first breath of our independence was our brother, Ahmed Ben Bella. I came to recognize him as the masses of the people had always known him: as a paternal figure, a man distinguished by his boundless kindness and his visceral compassion. He was, in every meaningful sense, the primogenitor and the "eldest son" for every Algerian family, and the sentinel for every Algerian woman. I harbored an affection for him that mirrored the love for a father, and he, in turn, bestowed upon me a tender regard as if I were his own daughter. He stood as a magnificent protector for the nation's orphans, enduring the weight of their sorrows within his own soul for a protracted interval.

He was a man of the people, existing within their hearts rather than as a leader sequestered by the sterile trappings of power. When the roaring fires of the Revolution at last yielded to the serene arrival of the "Bride of Independence," Ben Bella was far more than a mere participant in a celebratory union; he was a leader who understood that the Revolution was a continuous struggle, not a fleeting wedding feast. He was a soul of innate simplicity, a vanguard *mujahid*, and a militant of unblemished sincerity. Though he was not shaped in the lecture halls of world-class academia, his dedication to the cause was absolute and profound. We, the collective of women, were particularly and fervently proud of him.

What remains paramount in our collective memory is that throughout the momentous year of **1962**, we functioned as a newly forged revolutionary cell, convening for the very first time with a singular, unifying purpose. We comprised the

"Women's Council," and it was within the hallowed confines of Brother Ben Bella's own office that we embarked upon the monumental task of drafting our seminal founding manifesto. We consecrated our nights to relentless labor, meeting under the veil of twilight to meticulously prepare for the formidable missions that lay ahead of us.

I have often asserted that the people alone are the singular architect of victory, and in those days, this was far from being a mere hollow or rhetorical slogan; it was a sacred tenet in which we believed with every fiber of our being. We labored with an indomitable spirit, entirely unfettered by the sterile chains of administrative bureaucracy, without the luxury of formal offices, and without the provision of any designated state budget. In our eyes, the only true sovereign was the People, and our every effort was directed toward realizing this lofty objective, fueled by an unwavering and transcendent revolutionary fervor.

The myriad of administrative hurdles and the rigid legal constraints of the old order possessed no power to hinder our progress. We found ourselves in a vast field of profound responsibility, operating in a magnificent state of spontaneous revolutionary flow. The foundational principle that governed our actions during that era was clear and unyielding: "Execute with resolve, then Deliberate upon the outcome"—always provided that every individual act and every collective struggle was dedicated exclusively to the supreme welfare and the enduring dignity of the people.

In this sacred hour, I summon the echoes of his oratory and the formidable weight of his presence. I recall "Abu Ahmed"—as we affectionately knew him—within the very corridors of the first sovereign Council of independent Algeria. There was an

aura of profound humility and a spirit of boundless love that seemed a divine inheritance granted to us by the hands of Destiny.

I remember the President on a day when he chose to attend the inaugural Women's Day festivities following our liberation. He arrived without the heraldry of a fixed date, without a formal appointment, and without the cold distance of protocol; he came simply to witness the first program as it took flight. He stood amongst the women, listening to their discourse and their wisdom, receiving their perspectives and directives with a vast and open heart.

He was a man who shared the very bread of the people, refusing to partake in anything they did not themselves enjoy. He appeared in simple shirts, devoid of the vanity of a tie, his hair sometimes unkempt, his gaze sharp and unwavering. His teeth were yellowed by the relentless use of tobacco—a testament to a man who lived and breathed for his nation. He was a champion of action, one who sought only to fulfill his sacred obligation to the motherland and resolutely refused to yield to the paralysis of administrative constraints.

I would observe him and find myself sighing: "There sits Algeria personified." He was a president who had restored his own stature by restoring ours, and we were the guardians of that shared dream.

This era witnessed our vibrant and spirited engagement in a multitude of resounding public manifestations and triumphant women's festivals. Most notable among these was the historic celebration of International Women's Day, observed for the very first time within the sovereign boundaries of independent Algeria on the eighth of March, **1963**. We extended gracious

invitations to diverse delegations of distinguished women hailing from every corner of the globe, with a particular and fraternal focus on those representing the Arab world, the vast expanse of Africa, and the myriad nations of Asia.

A palpable atmosphere of profound gratitude and unyielding national pride permeated those gatherings—a visceral tribute to the Algerian woman for the sublime sacrifices and heroic oblations she had so selflessly offered upon the altar of freedom. I recall with great clarity that the majestic Atlas Hall was filled to its very rafters, overflowing with an ardent crowd of fervent souls.

President Ahmed Ben Bella graced the occasion with his presence, taking his seat upon the stage alongside us. He was a leader who manifested an eternal readiness to immerse himself in communal discourse. This is how he remains etched in my memory to this very day—a man who would stand with us, engaging in dialogue for two or even three continuous hours. While some might have perceived this as a squandering of precious time, for those to whom he truly and sincerely listened, it was a gain of immeasurable worth.

Between the President and the Leader

President—or rather, the Leader—Houari Boumediene, was a man of a singular and distinct character, embodying within his persona the very essence and defining traits of the people of this beloved land. He was the personification of those attributes by which the name of Algeria is defined. Whether they were perceived by some as flaws or hailed by others as virtues, he possessed a relentless, unyielding stubbornness when necessity demanded, a visceral vigor, and a natural aristocratic pride. He was often profoundly humble when engaging with the loyal and the patriotic, yet he could be markedly haughty toward traitors and the ignoble. Though he was neither a traditional scholar in the classical sense nor a graduate of the world's most renowned universities, he approached the realms of knowledge and learning with an insatiable longing and a grand, far-reaching ambition. He was never hindered by the formidable weight of his military and political duties, nor was he ever seduced by the hollow vanity of power or the transient glamor of authority—unlike so many of his contemporaries. In his own eyes, he was simply the legitimate representative of a great, historic, and revolutionary people, the likes of whom are rare in the annals of time.

Boumediene possessed the authentic, raw qualities of the Algerian man. Consequently, his people—young and old alike—adored him with a fervor that bordered on the sacred. They perceived in him all that they aspired to see within themselves; they recognized in his actions all they sought to achieve in their own lives and the futures of their progeny. In his presence, they saw their own vigor and their most luminous hopes reflected, mirroring the refinement of their ethics in times of prosperity and their boundless, resilient rage in times of hardship—that

profound feeling of injustice known in our popular dialect as *"Haqra."*

He was of them and within them. Frequently, his oratory would distill the silent ruminations and visceral convictions from the very sanctuary of their hearts and minds, manifesting them through his powerful eloquence. He read their essence, perceived their burdens, and understood their silence; he was, in the truest sense, one of them—emanating from their depths, their collective conscience, and their very lineage.

Through Boumediene, I personally came to comprehend the profound and transcendental difference between "Presidency" and "Leadership." Presidency is a political construct that can be meticulously codified or industrially manufactured, much like one might craft objects of beauty or utility. It can be established through the cold ink of decrees, the formality of administrative decisions, and the mechanical process of elections. But Leadership? True Leadership is an ethereal fire forged exclusively within hearts brimming with love and unshakeable trust—those resonant voices that articulate the human soul with absolute honesty and unyielding conviction. It is that sacred and absolute trust between the ruler and the ruled, a bond that cannot be manufactured or codified by law, even if it were supported by a thousand logical proofs and empirical evidence.

With Boumediene, we were graced with both the Presidency and the Leadership—an ideal command that served as a protective mantle, shielding the errors of others and the myriad administrative and non-administrative transgressions. With others, we all too often secured nothing but a codified presidency, entirely devoid of those profound human emotions

that bind a people to their leader throughout the tumultuous history of nations.

Today, I find myself posing a haunting question:

—"Must the peoples of the Third World—or the 'Tenth,' as I am inclined to label the underdeveloped nations—remain perpetually at the mercy of individual Leadership, never fully liberating themselves from its factors and its enduring, long shadows?"

Perhaps some might harbor the illusion that I am a proponent for the "cult of personality" or a champion of monolithic thought, or that I am inclined toward a blind autocracy. No. My only intent is to record, as I find myself today amidst these papers in an atmosphere of crystalline transparency, honesty, and a profound reconciliation with the soul, that certain men are not a recurring phenomenon in the river of time; for time itself cannot always yield their likeness, nor can ballot boxes—regardless of their transparency or integrity—ensure their emergence.

Upon the passing of Boumediene, a cherished friend—the poet Mohamed al-Salih Rawaq—remarked as we sat side-by-side on the bus traversing the path to the "Al-Alia" cemetery to attend the funeral rites:

"Thus is our lot as Arabs; whenever a leader arises to shoulder our burden of struggle and safeguard our dignity and freedom, pushing us forward toward the dawn of the East, he is abruptly snatched from our hearts by despair and defeat, unless the hand of death claims him prematurely."

My friend was alluding to those two monumental leaders: Houari Boumediene and Gamal Abdel Nasser.

I had perceived Boumediene from a distance during the tenure of President Ahmed Ben Bella, when he held the portfolio of Defense. However, our true intellectual acquaintance commenced in **1963**, when I contributed to the editorial foundation of *El Djeich* (The Army) magazine—the central organ of the National People's Army, the noble descendant of the National Liberation Army. I was among the inaugural writers of the magazine at its inception, alongside my husband, Professor Ahmed Jaber, and an elite group of dear brothers such as Dr. Mohamed al-Arabi Ould Khalifa, Dr. Mohieddine Amimour, Dr. Abdellah al-Rukaybi, and others.

The President was an avid reader of my treatises; he harbored a distinct interest in my persona and my prose—interested in the voice of a woman who writes, shattering every barricade of fear, shame, and social obstacle. He read and monitored most journals, not merely *El Djeich*.

He personally expressed this to me in his singular and evocative manner on the day he arrived, in his capacity as Chairman of the Council of the Revolution, to formally inaugurate the inaugural High Commission for Educational Reform in Algeria. I had been appointed as a member representing the vanguard of secondary education educators. During that inauguration session, as we partook in refreshments within the majestic Grand Hall of the People's Palace, President Si Abdelmadjid Alahoum approached me. With his gaze and every movement capturing the weight of my words and my presence, the President addressed me then with a profound earnestness:

—"Beware, Zhour, of ever allowing your pen to fall silent. I meticulously follow your every treatise within the pages of El Djeich and across the diverse spectrum of our publications."

How boundless was my jubilation in that moment—a gracious gesture from a man of such inherent grace. I harbored an affection for him that mirrored the love all the sons of the people held for him. I perceived that his words carried a spirit of profound hope and aspiration, transcending the mere authoritative command of a President-Leader.

Thus do the true *mujahideen* depart—those who propel their people toward the horizons of progress.

Later, certain individuals close to the hallowed circles of political decision-making informed me that my subsequent ascension as the inaugural female minister in the history of independent Algeria in **1982** was a historical necessity.

—"I fervently hope you do not falter in your visionary path. This appointment was among the strategic projects envisioned by President Houari Boumediene before the hand of death snatched him from us."

I whispered to my own soul:

—"It is of little consequence that President Boumediene's vision was realized through the hands of a successor. The paramount truth is that the man harbored a genuine belief in the women of my land. I did not possess a blind faith in everything, yet I functioned as a soldier of unyielding discipline, mirroring the resolve associated with the most dedicated ranks. He appreciated that in me. I felt that his esteem for me was rooted solely in my role as a sincere and disciplined soldier within the unit he commanded. Nothing more, for I was—and remain to this day—among those who refuse to operate behind the artificial barriers and borders that seek to segregate a president from his subordinate. Perhaps for this very reason, I enjoyed the unalloyed appreciation of everyone."

At times, our own actions may appear to us—upon initial contemplation—more anchored in sincerity than the deeds of others. Perhaps this arises from our initial ignorance of the underlying reasons; yet as time progressed, I became privy to many of those hidden catalysts and grew certain of the genuine integrity of some among my circle of friends.

I recall with profound clarity the epoch when I assumed the arduous responsibility of birthing the inaugural women's magazine in a newly sovereign Algeria, navigating through an atmosphere thick with hostility toward the Arabic script and beset by relentless administrative and bureaucratic impediments. At that critical juncture, Dr. Mohieddine Amimour, who then presided over media affairs at the Presidency, observed this initiative with profound gratification.

Given his intimate knowledge of the formidable challenges surrounding the publication's issuance, his jubilation intensified when we successfully navigated the project to its twelfth volume. He had placed a wager upon my resolve, and indeed, his bet was won. He remained an unwavering sentinel by my side, for he fully grasped the monumental significance of launching a journal in the Arabic tongue at a time when the nation remained largely submerged within the linguistic legacy of the colonizer.

After the President himself had graced the twelfth issue with an introductory address and seen the previous volumes bound with exquisite elegance, there was inscribed upon it:

—*"A Magnificent Offering to the President"*—referring to the magazine *Al-Jazairia* (**1970**).

This milestone was subsequently honored by an invitation to his private office, where I was accompanied by my sister and

cherished comrade, the mujahida Safia Ben M'ahdi, General Secretary of the Women's Union, and the mujahida and Professor of Medicine, Nafissa Hamoud (who had previously served as the Union's President). He summoned us into the hallowed sanctuary of his office to extend his congratulations and to open his heart to our shared woes and the social and cultural skirmishes we were waging on behalf of the Algerian woman.

He bared his heart to our tribulations and manifested a profound sympathy for our noble cause. He did not conclude that historic assembly until he had bestowed upon us a solemn pledge of unwavering assistance from every media apparatus of the state. Furthermore, he committed the financial resources of the Presidency's own departments to liquidate the magazine's deficit, ensuring that its voice would never be forced into an untimely silence.

He offered a knowing smile to my brother and friend, Dr. Amimour, signaling a shared understanding of the path ahead.

The journal persisted without a flicker of interruption for two full decades, only to meet its eventual dissolution a mere six months after it had embarked on its transformative dual-language odyssey—publishing first in Arabic, then in French. During its prime, it had attained monumental success under the discerning editorial stewardship of Mrs. Fatima Saidani, a triumph of such significant magnitude that its prestige remained untarnished even when the mantle was later passed to a successor who grasped the intrinsic value of such victories.

The magazine endured for twenty years, only to collapse in the end, much like so many other glorious and grand gains that vanished into the abyss of time. I had once harbored the

hopeful illusion that these pillars of our progress were eternal, yet they eventually crumbled into the ruins of memory. They were systematically dismantled by those who followed—individuals who, instead of preserving the foundational stones and adding new layers of building and goodness, chose the path of erasure, driven by the misguided fantasy that they alone were the supreme masters of the craft.

The ancient poet uttered an immutable truth when he said:

"When shall an edifice ever reach the zenith of its perfection...

if you are tirelessly building while another is relentlessly destroying?"

The Spirit of Religious Renewal

My brother and cherished friend Mouloud Kassim Nait Belkacem was a singular man, defined by his raw authenticity and his enlightened openness. He was a figure of innate genius, a luminary in whom Algeria could take boundless pride. He alone, through the sheer brilliance of his intellect, possessed the stature to boast of representing both the Arab soul and humanity at large—a man upon whom others could only look with a sense of profound reverence.

To the outside observer, he appeared as an eternally restless spirit, a soul that never found terminal repose. This was because he was perpetually pulled by diverse and formidable powers within his being: the irresistible gravity of his spiritual essence and the unyielding call of his civic duty. We find in him—as I so dearly loved him—a Mouloud Kassim who was a polyglot of extraordinary range, a man intimately rooted in Al-Madania, yet a man who truly belonged to the world. He harbored no belief in the sterile isolation of the Islamic intellect from the global stage; rather, he was a fervent advocate for its active and vital contribution to the collective building of human civilization. He was a sentinel of the intellect and a formidable guardian of Islamic thought.

In truth, nothing can be added to the multifaceted goodness of his biography or the enduring lessons of his life.

Si Mouloud was an architect of immense scientific and philosophical activity. He stood as a pioneer in the Arab and Islamic worlds, orchestrating the "Conferences for the Recognition of Islamic Thought." These were annual gatherings hosted by Algeria, serving as luminous windows of knowledge and faith, intended to dispel the suffocating darkness of

ignorance and the profound alienation in which the Arab and Islamic worlds were then struggling. He was like a searcher, tirelessly seeking. He was like one searching for that transcendental vision and those luminous insights which the epic Revolution of November **1954** had ignited—unveiling the message of Islam in its most profound and comprehensive essence.

He was as one who had inherited the mantle of the spiritual struggle for Islam from its noble vanguard and venerable scholars, drawing from their collective memory and their tireless labor. He ardently desired for them to innovate and exert the utmost effort (*Ijtihad*) in their comprehension of this resplendent fabric, meticulously weaving it into a magnificent tapestry of global peace.

Mouloud Kassim emerged as a formidable and unyielding champion of the Arabic tongue. In his visionary estimation, it was far more than a mere instrument for mundane communication; it was the sacred vessel destined to carry the divine message to humanity. It pained him deeply to behold certain Muslims and scholars failing to grasp its monumental greatness and the vast breadth of its objectives. He harbored a visceral frustration when they failed to realize that its flexibility and capacity to keep pace with modern sciences and civilizational concepts were without bound or limit.

He was a man of the intellect who did not launch his scientific and philosophical inquiries from a void or from superficial, abstract notions. He was a thinker who sought to fill the yawning gaps within universal philosophies and civilizations with the brilliant light of Islamic thought and culture. He defended the Arabic language for decades in international arenas, proving through rigorous scientific comparison,

profound analysis, and living examples that it remained the richest of all human tongues.

And because most other languages had drawn heavily from it during their respective eras of awakening and prosperity, he proved through the power of his ideas and the depth of his erudition—devoid of any narrow fanaticism or ethnic insularity—its eternal timelessness and its inherent capacity to lead civilizational progress. He achieved this without harboring any complex toward foreign languages, for he mastered several with absolute fluency, proving through his linguistic and intellectual prowess his authentic belonging to North Africa—a land that embraced and acted upon the Arabic language, rendering its legacy an integral part of the culture of all regions, not merely the Arab Maghreb, but stretching to the farthest reaches of Andalusia—as a faith, a civilization, and a supreme human culture.

The affiliation of Mouloud Kassim was characterized by a proactive and dynamic allegiance to the Arab-Islamic civilization—a lineage that was both fertile in its influence and profound in its reach. His was never a stagnant, racial, or narrow ethnic attachment; rather, he drew from the civilizational wellspring that which enriched its historical record and resolutely discarded anything that tended toward intellectual myopia or distortion.

He was, simultaneously, a man of "Progressive Social Ethics" in his values, an unyielding "Constant" in his nationalistic stances, and a "Visionary Modernist" in his educational and cultural perspectives. I was privileged to observe his positions with meticulous care throughout his stewardship of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. I collaborated with him in the vast majority of the seminars and conferences he orchestrated,

sharing in numerous educational and theological forums. It was through this proximity that I recognized his thought as a genuine renewal of Islamic philosophy—a renewal he fervently hoped would rise to the sublime level of the "Eternal Message of Islam." He held the unshakable conviction that the faith itself never dies nor does it ossify; rather, it is the people who succumb to spiritual death or intellectual stagnation when they fail to keep pace with the relentless march of change and progress.

I recall his lectures and analytical commentaries—they served as a radiant beacon for the "Young Algeria." He had committed to heart the most profound and revolutionary ideas of Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the illustrious leader of the "Muslim Algerian People."

Mouloud Kassim aligned his entire existence with the Revolution of Liberation, and subsequently with the revolution of building and foundation—the struggle of the militant thinker. He attained a level of ethical and organizational discipline that truly surpassed the boundaries of imagination.

Notwithstanding his intellectual brilliance, he was subjected to accusations by certain rivals and lesser thinkers—those who sought to deny his merit—branding him as a fundamentalist or a reactionary, merely because he stood as a formidable bulwark against the unbridled interpretation of individual freedoms. In truth, he was a man who championed rigorous research and fearless inquiry into the most thorny and sensitive social issues. He was a man of extraordinary courage and unyielding principle, one who never feared the censure of any critic. He possessed the fortitude to dismantle numerous social taboos, including the contentious issue of "Marriage to

Foreigners" and its profound, multifaceted impact upon the family unit and the stability of society at large.

I am overcome by a profound sense of monumental pride today as I find myself placed alongside him within a singular category of intellectual conviction. I recall with crystalline clarity the occasion when we were both characterized in a synchronous breath by a certain Algerian female author—one of those "Assimilated" intellectuals who composed her works in the French tongue and was herself wedded to a foreigner. She chose to describe us as being among those who harbor *"the darkest of hatreds"* (*La haine la plus noire*).

This specific expression and description served as the thematic core of one of her volumes published in the French language in Paris during the early seventies of the last century.

Why such a virulent assault? It was simply because we possessed the fortitude to press our fingers upon the deep and festering wound that had afflicted the body of the nation since the very first hour of colonial intrusion—or rather, because we allowed ourselves the scholarly liberty to research and expose some of the underlying factors and catalysts behind the disintegration of the Algerian family unit.

The genesis of this storm occurred when Mouloud Kassim designated one of the primary themes of the "Islamic Thought Conferences" to address this very subject. I was personally suggested as the scholar to tackle this topic, and I proposed that it be dissected and presented through social, educational, and psychological prisms. My approach was anchored in the foundations of my previous treatises published in the *Al-Jamahir* (The Masses) newspaper, and subsequently in *Al-Sha'b* (The People), as well as *El Djeich* magazine. Those

writings had generated an extraordinary and far-reaching resonance, both on the national level and particularly within French intellectual circles. At that time, the Grand Archbishop of Algiers personally oversaw the translation of that specific article—originally published in the monthly *El Djeich*—and sought its publication in the prestigious *Le Monde*. It was subsequently reprinted within the internal bulletin of the Church and distributed to various other ecclesiastical bodies both within Algeria and abroad—entities that recognized the imperative necessity of being informed on a subject that could only be raised with such depth and rigor by Algerian intellectuals and thinkers, far transcending mere provocation or sensationalism.

It served as a vibrant testament to the intellectual reaches an educated woman could attain and the profound proposals she could articulate. It became evident to those observers that her words did not merely echo her personal ruminations, but rather resonated with the collective convictions of an entire sovereign State, a resolute People, and a political order that took unyielding pride in its restored independence and absolute sovereignty. It marked the definitive genesis of a concerted interest in the various negative social phenomena and multifaceted challenges confronting our society.

This seminal treatise first graced the pages of *El Djeich* magazine in the year **1966**, and it remains to this day preserved within the archives of the Party's National Directorate, alongside its French translation rendered by the Church authorities. Subsequently, the subject was re-introduced with significantly greater detail and analytical depth—bolstered by rigorous facts and empirical data—after

Mouloud Kassim assumed stewardship of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Perhaps the most paramount detail to record regarding this historical episode is that it was the President-Leader Houari Boumediene himself who designated me to present this thorny subject. His choice was predicated upon his diligent monitoring of my previous writings—most specifically my contributions to *El Djeich* magazine, an edition of which he never permitted to escape his scrutiny, as I have remarked upon in earlier chapters.

I inaugurated my lecture on this momentous subject—which I delivered during the proceedings of the "Islamic Thought Conference" in the city of Constantine in **1972**—before an august assembly of Arab and Muslim luminaries, alongside distinguished foreign thinkers, among whom was the preeminent philosopher Malek Bennabi.

I commenced my discourse by reciting the poetic verses in which the scholar Mohamed al-Amin al-Amoudi had once congratulated his companion, the wise Saadan, on the auspicious occasion of the birth of his firstborn son from a French wife, wherein he wrote:

"The Sage is the father, and his matchless bride

Is as Solomon joined with the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis).

He has a son—may the Almighty lengthen his day

destined to emulate the virtues of both his Arab sire and his French lineage.

Reproach him not should he falter in his allegiance

for half of his essence is of the righteous, while the other is 'Maurice'."

Thus, through a magnificent alignment of fate, the late Mouloud Kassim and I were bound by a covenant of immense pride and reciprocal reverence throughout the duration of his life. We perhaps found common ground in the same bedrock of ideas and convictions, sharing an identical courage in the articulation of our national imperatives. We emerged into a state of profound maturity, cognizant of the "Blackest Hatred" (complexes) that shadows certain social phenomena within our society—complexes that we together transposed into the sacred sanctuary of "Nationalism."

I find myself pondering today, as I commit these chronicles to paper:

"Could we truly claim to be worthy heirs of this nationalism and our hallowed history had we not confronted such malignant 'parasites' that gnaw at the very marrow of the nation? Does our hard-won victory in the war of liberation truly signify that we should abandon these vital issues, allowing them to erode the peace and the social and cultural security of our people?"

Or is it their desire that we remain forever shackled by hollow, vacuous slogans—the rhetoric of individual and collective liberties, and the seductive allure of Globalization? They utilize these catchphrases as a defensive rampart for individual and collective behaviors, brandishing them as a shield against what they label as reactionaryism or backwardness. They strive to impose upon us mandates and terms which they themselves would never tolerate within their own sovereign societies, even as they practice them in diverse and codified forms, and even legally.

The Dream Born Out of Season

"Destiny willed that I should cross paths with Dr. Ahmed Francis—an illustrious *mujahid* and a distinguished member of the Provisional Government during the sacred Revolution of Liberation. I was then amidst a cohort of militant sisters from the 'Clos Salembier' quarter (known today as Al-Madania). In that epoch, our countenances had become all too familiar to the French colonial administration, marked by our leadership in the momentous demonstrations of December **11**, **1960**. We were branded as 'vanguard agitators' in the eyes of the 'SAS' (Administrative Specialized Sections) officers entrenched within those popular districts.

It was we who orchestrated our clandestine maneuvers within the hallowed halls of the *As-Sadiqia* School for girls and the vocational training center. Within those walls, we undertook the delicate and perilous labor of sewing our national banners—meticulously managing every detail, from the procurement of vibrant fabrics to the final, resolute stitch.

Bound by the mandates of our superiors within the Front, we embarked upon our collective odyssey, brimming with joy and the fervent aspirations of youth. We set forth on our journey identifying as 'French Muslims'—a classification imposed upon us all by the colonial authorities, yet one that could never mask the true identity of our souls.To maintain this necessary camouflage, our voyage bore the outward semblance of a mere youth excursion. While the nomenclature of our vessel remains lost to the mists of my memory, I recall with absolute certainty it was a third-class passage. Having traversed the expanse of the Mediterranean, we sought sanctuary for our

first night in Marseille at the 'Blue Sisters' convent—a religious order profoundly sympathetic to the Algerian struggle.

At the break of dawn, we set forth toward the city of Evian, and subsequently, after a passage of a few days, arrived in Geneva. Among the sisters of this journey, I recall with clarity Safia Ben M'hidi and her sister Sabira, Zohra Beloutti and her sister Zahia, Malika Merakchi, Zahia Khilia, and myself. We were further accompanied by Boualem Beloutti—brother to Zohra and Zahia—who was then a youth of sixteen springs. In accordance with the prevailing traditional mores, he served as our hallowed guardian (*Mahram*), our sentinel, and our unyielding defender should any peril arise.

Within the international enclave of Geneva, we encountered many of the illustrious figures whose names had resonated with us through the channels of the media. Foremost among those was Dr. Ahmed Francis and his noble, militant consort, Madame Baya Francis. The Doctor at that historical juncture held the portfolio of Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs within the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic. He received us with the reverence due to heroines, an honor bestowed upon us in the wake of the resounding and overwhelming triumph of the popular demonstrations of December **11**, **1960**—a success destined to be one of the preeminent catalysts in accelerating the eventual hour of victory.

We participated in formal confluences in Geneva alongside the valiant militants—both men and women—resided there, organized under the auspices of the Front. We articulated our vision, offering detailed expositions and providing authentic insights drawn from the visceral heart of the popular reality regarding those demonstrations, their outcomes, and their

enduring repercussions. It appeared that I was among the select few who possessed the faculty to articulate such matters with eloquence in a sound and pristine Arabic tongue—for was I not, after all, a devoted pedagogue of the Arabic language?"

"Owing to the fact that Dr. Ahmed Francis was profoundly captivated by my articulate command over our national tongue, he presented me with a momentous proposition: that I should refrain from returning to Algeria, stating:

— 'Verily, the dawn of Algeria's independence draws nigh; and sovereign liberty shall demand the expertise of professional cadres rather than merely the valor of mujahideen. Why then do you not remain here in our company, so that we may facilitate your passage to Syria to fulfill your academic destiny?'

He uttered these words, laboring under the assumption that I would be elated beyond measure; yet, he could not perceive the tumultuous waves of hesitation and bewilderment that surged within my soul. I dedicated three entire days to deliberating upon the Doctor's proposal—the final span of time allotted before our mandated return to the motherland. Throughout those hours, I knew not the taste of repose. Was this not the most resplendent of my dreams—to finalize my education and cross the threshold of the university? Indeed, it was! Yet, alas, it was a dream emerging out of its proper season. I ultimately responded to the Doctor with an inquiring tone, veiled in a cloak of profound modesty:

— 'I harbor a visceral dread, sir, that I might miss the hallowed festivities of our final victory.'

My tears cascaded against the resolve of my will, prompting the tears of his noble consort, Sister Baya, to flow as she listened to my plea. She tenderly wiped away both her sorrow

and mine, and with a serene smile, presented me with a record of the transcendent singer Fairuz, entitled ***'Raji'oon'*** (We are Returning).

She had secretly yearned for my response to be thus—favoring my return to Algeria as if I were articulating her own profound desire and sacred longing for the soil of the motherland.

Do I harbor any regret for that choice today? I believe not; for the independence of the nation bestowed upon me the atonement of studying at the University of Algiers—an institution which, at the first light of our liberation, was teeming with *mujahideen* and a select vanguard of *mujahidat*."

The Sage and the Sovereign Intellect of Islam

Dr. Abdelmajid Meziane stood as my august mentor during that transformative epoch of intellectual ripening and spiritual awakening—the primordial stage of profound absorption and civilizational resurgence. He undertook the formidable mantle of instructing us—a diverse vanguard of *mujahideen* and *mujahidat* who had descended from the rugged peaks of the Revolution to the hallowed corridors of the university following the dawn of independence. We sought mastery in a discipline that had historically remained the exclusive province of foreign scholars, dictated solely in a foreign tongue: Sociology. It was through his pioneering hand, and his alone, that I first engaged with the majestic complexities of this science, articulated in the resplendent and eloquent cadences of our national Arabic language.

Dr. Meziane would embark upon a tireless and heroic pilgrimage from the University of Oran—having relinquished his administrative stewardships within the President's Diwan—specifically to deliver his lectures to us every Sunday. Given that Sunday was the ordained weekly holiday, he would arrive at the capital only to find us in a state of fervent anticipation. Yet, he frequently confronted an unyielding university administration that, in its bureaucratic inertia, stubbornly refused to fling open its gates on a day of sacred rest.

May the Almighty bestow His infinite and boundless mercy upon his soul; whenever he encountered those barred thresholds, he took it upon himself to orchestrate an entry that bore the semblance of a clandestine stratagem—scaling the university wall with a youthful, rebellious vigor and unbolting the massive iron gates from within, so that we, his devoted

disciples, might leap over the barriers and follow him into the sanctuary of enlightenment.

He was the "Towering Vanguard" who spearheaded that spirited leap over the university ramparts—our brother Abdelkader Hadjar, currently our distinguished Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt. We would cross the threshold of those lecture halls to drink deeply from the fountains of his sagacity, fueled by a fierce spirit of defiance and absolute intellectual immersion. We remained, in those heady days, profoundly intoxicated by the strategic methodologies and the magnificent victories of the Revolution, anchored by an unshakeable faith in our national constants—all of which compelled our professor to consecrate his every fiber and effort toward our formation.

Through the intimate intellectual discourse between Professor Meziane and myself, I personally gleaned a vast wealth regarding various world philosophies and the intricate comparisons between them. I explored the most paramount philosophical concepts and their corresponding archetypes within Islamic thought. I added to my foundational upbringing the profound concept of "Authentic Islam," realizing that our faith carried a continuous, universal human message to the entire world.

Professor Meziane was a fervent devotee of the thought of the illustrious scholar Ibn Khaldun, and he lived for the human world with the same intensity that he loathed a society characterized by ignorance and hollow pretense. He ushered us into his dynamic intellectual world through methodologies that were as convincing as they were brilliant. Rare, indeed, are those who match his caliber among the academic mentors I have known.

The river of time flowed on until the former student met her venerable professor within the halls of the "Government Palace" dedicated to culture—it was, in truth, for the mission of education and teaching. We sat side-by-side, and I continued to draw from the wells of his wisdom. When he perceived me under the crushing stress of a heavy workload and the suffocating pressure of state meetings, he would lean toward me and remark with a playful, jesting tone:

"Let not your heart be troubled! Smile! Realize that a Ministry is but a 'Wizrr' (a heavy burden) and its only true weight is that of its responsibilities."

May the infinite mercy of the Almighty rest upon my venerable mentor—that profound philosophical sage and devout Muslim thinker. His noble daughter, Madame Karima, the Director General of Human Resources at the Ministry of the Interior, once confided in me during one of our many reflections upon his enduring legacy:

'In the waning hours of his existence, he would entreat me to assist him in committing his final ruminations to paper. Whenever I would gently reproach him, pained by the sight of him enduring the searing agonies of his affliction, he would invariably respond:

— Verily, I have lived my every hour, and I continue to draw my final breaths, solely for the sanctity of Islam and the glory of Algeria.

The Union of Algerian Writers

Professional unions stood as monumental institutions within the fabric of any society aspiring toward civilizational elevation and progressive advancement. Foremost among these, within our own beloved nation, was the Union of Algerian Writers. Algeria's history is remarkably long and rich, notwithstanding the severe tribulations imposed upon the intellectual and cultural elite even during the darkest periods of French occupation. This elite, represented through various "Clubs" and cultural associations, functioned as a distinct and potent manifestation of national resistance, indirectly yet decisively paving the path for the eventual armed struggle. This intellectual vanguard, during the first light of independence, was composed primarily of those who placed the reclamation of national sovereignty and the restoration of our authentic identity at the very zenith of their priorities. Thus, we find that a significant number of these founding members emerged from the primal vanguard of the Revolution—they were the ones who had participated in the sacred struggle through the majestic power of the written word, whether composed in our noble national tongue or in foreign languages.

Professional unions are indeed pivotal institutions within a burgeoning society. In my firm estimation, the Union of Algerian Writers remains one of the most significant entities that can take legitimate pride in its historical journals and its storied archives.

I recall with crystalline clarity that certain chapters of these diaries were forged within the hallowed halls of the 'El Mouradia Palace.' The formal founding of the Union was realized through the approval of the Presidency of the Republic,

as I have detailed in earlier chronicles. Subsequently, the executive bureau was constituted, destined to be presided over by the illustrious man of letters and the celebrated giant of our cultural heritage, Malek Haddad.

Did that initial endeavor encounter the shadow of failure? Indeed, it was besieged by a multitude of complex and multifaceted factors, primary among them being the profound tension inherent in linguistic and political affiliations. This friction often served as a thin veil for a more visceral struggle concerning the cultural and educational gains of a newly sovereign Algeria. It evolved into what could be described as a desperate crusade for the continued resonance and survival of the French tongue on Algerian soil, long after its political and martial forces had been decisively vanquished and driven away.

Subsequently, our second assembly was convened during the inaugural years of the **1970**s—a grand gathering presided over by the venerable and illustrious historian, Professor Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani. Among the radiant galaxy of figures gracing this assembly were the esteemed thinker and minister Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi and the distinguished Kaid Ahmed. It was during this pivotal juncture that the maneuvers of certain feudalist families against the true architects and veterans of the Revolution were unveiled. In direct response to these undercurrents, Dr. Ahmed Taleb was moved to compose a film script entitled "*Bani Hendel",* specifically designed to safeguard the hard-won gains and the rightful stature of those who had labored for our liberation, ensuring their heroic legacy was not eclipsed by the remnants of colonial-era privilege

The assembly hall was transformed into a majestic kaleidoscope of intellectual genius. Present in that hallowed space were the giants of our literature and thought: Mouloud

Mammeri, Kateb Yacine, the evocative and poignant poetess Nadia Guendouz, and the masters of contemporary prose such as Tahar Ouettar, Mouloud Achour, Dr. Abdellah al-Rukaybi, the eminent historian Dr. Abou al-Qasim Saadallah, Dr. Abdellah Cheriet, Abou al-Eid Doudou, and Professor Mustafa Lacheraf. They were joined by the celebrated poet Mohamed al-Akhar al-Saihi and the eloquent Mohamed el Mili, poet Omar al Barnaoui, al-Junaidi Khalifa. The paramount and unifying truth remained that every individual gathered there was a master of the sacred craft of writing—whether they articulated their profound visions through our noble national tongue or within the sophisticated nuances of a foreign language.

I was positioned within that august conclave between my dear companion, the poetess Nadia Guendouz, and the eminent philosopher and statesman, Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi. Adorning the dais of the presidency were the venerable Professor Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani, who steered the deliberations with his customary poise as Chairman, and Mohamed al-Mili, who served in the capacity of rapporteur—or perhaps as deputy chairman, for the specific details of the rank may have blurred slightly in the mist of passing years.

The discourse began to pulsate with intensity around the standards and benchmarks that would effectively transform those assembled from mere participants into legitimate electors and worthy candidates. Indeed, before any other consideration, the following foundational inquiry was posed to the floor:

—*"Whom among us do we rightfully designate as a writer?"*

The assembly eventually converged upon the consensus that a writer is defined solely as one who has successfully navigated a creative work to formal publication in the form of a book. This was a criterion with which I did not find myself in total alignment, nor did Mohamed al-Mili, notwithstanding the manifest reality that I had personally authored and published two volumes by that time, and al-Mili significantly more. Despite this, a spirited and almost incendiary debate erupted among certain writers who had not yet crossed the threshold of publication, clashing over the validity of this benchmark. Among the most fervent was Mohamed al-Mili in his confrontation with the poet Omar Bernaoui. Al-Mili remained unyielding in his assertion that Bernaoui could not claim the title of writer or poet as he purported, simply because he had not yet unveiled a published poetry collection to the world.

Eventually, it seemed that the collective spirit was reconciled to the imperative of employing the mechanisms of democracy through the sanctity of the "clandestine ballot box."

Between the magnificent grace, the storied wisdom, and the sharp wit of —who honored me by requesting my assistance in the solemn process of sorting and auditing the votes—the assembly culminated in the election of a distinguished group of writers. Among that chosen circle, there stood but a single female voice: my own.

I recall with crystalline clarity that certain chapters of these diaries were forged within the hallowed halls of the 'El Mouradia Palace.' The formal founding of the Union was realized upon my own personal suggestion and through the gracious approval of President Houari Boumediene, as I have detailed in earlier chronicles. Subsequently, the executive bureau was constituted, destined to be presided over by the

illustrious man of letters and the celebrated giant of our cultural heritage, Malek Haddad.

And today, as I survey the recurring state of malaise that the Union continues to endure through every epoch, I witness certain individuals attempting to orchestrate hollow victories for their respective parties and political cadres, sacrificing the sanctity of the Union upon the altar of their narrow interests.

I vividly recall a juncture when I stood as a candidate for the supreme presidency of the Union, wherein I was bestowed with the highest number of ballots among all the aspirants. Yet, I chose the path of voluntary withdrawal in favor of those who followed me. That particular election for the stewardship of the Union involved none other than my former university professor for the discipline of Islamic Philosophy, the distinguished Dr. Sheikh Bouamrane—may the Almighty grant him a long and healthy life. I chose to recede because the atmosphere had grown dangerously fraught with tension; the conflict had ceased to revolve around literary output, intellectual depth, or creative vigor, devolving instead into a base scramble for positions and a clamor for administrative chairs. It was no longer anchored in the noble principles of professional competence or scholarly merit.

Perhaps the former colonizer attained his desired ends, or his ideological associates whispered such schemes into their ears—to misrepresent, to falsify, or to manufacture a distorted reality. I shall limit myself to a singular observation: certain colonial sources were never truly devoid of a calculated and insidious intent.

Today, as I observe the persistent cycles of crisis within the Union, I behold those who strive to claim victories for their

political factions and leaderships, exploiting the Union as a mere instrument for the elevation of their own personal stature and the aggrandizement of their renown to one of its grand and visionary goals. I find myself enduring a profound state of spiritual ache because of this prevailing reality; yet, I remain an unyielding and fervent champion of a unified front dedicated exclusively to the sacred service of culture and human thought. I harbor a majestic dream of the day when this Union shall emerge as a truly comprehensive and inclusive institution—a vast, all-encompassing umbrella sheltering every cultural association within its noble embrace. I envision an entity that possesses a radiant and unblemished national identity, serving as a hallowed sanctuary for every intellectual son and daughter of this ancient and storied land.

It is my most ardent hope that an era shall finally arrive wherein the base spirit of "opportunism" and the pursuit of mercenary ambition no longer finds a harbor within our hallowed halls; for, alas, such regressive traits have already caused so many magnificent and beautiful endeavors to wither away and perish. The Union must stand eternally as the preeminent lighthouse of original thought and unbound creativity—a majestic space where the intellect may soar unfettered and where the integrity of the creative spirit reigns supreme above all transient vanities.

Pre-packaged Dreams

The hard-won freedom of my beloved homeland finally ascended, radiating with a resplendent and magnificent light, transmuting itself from a cherished dream into a tangible, lived reality. This transition necessitated a fundamental shift in our collective discourse—moving the dialogue from the valiant pride of the warrior to the refined pride of the intellectual. We migrated from the realms of raw enthusiasm, fierce rebellion, and unyielding stubbornness toward the sanctuary of reason, the rigor of discipline, and the profound serenity of the combatant manifested in their liberating essence. This historical metamorphosis imposed itself as an unyielding imperative upon all, clearing the way for other vital interests—both private and public—to emerge and flourish.

Algeria attained its sovereign liberty and immediately embarked upon its monumental odyssey of transformation. This freedom—for which we had so ardently yearned and for which such monumental sacrifices were offered—finds its multifaceted requirements shifting in the present hour. It no longer demands the cold steel of a bomb to dismantle a strategic bridge or annihilate an enemy barracks, nor does it require surging masses roaming the thoroughfares to defy the might of armed forces. In this new era, freedom demands a plow to till and revitalize this sacred earth, so brutally scorched by the fires of napalm. It requires the laying of bricks to build and the construction of bridges to connect our souls. The severed moral and intellectual spans must be painstakingly restored. Today's ultimate weapon is no longer merely the strength of robust arms, but rather the illumination of enlightened faculties, the brilliance of creative minds, and the expert competencies of Algeria's sons and daughters—

capabilities that must rise to the sublime level of these hard-won victories and the sacred freedom that everyone envisioned and for which they paid so dearly.

The University flings its doors wide open with a magnificent welcome, and countless opportunities are placed at the service of the *mujahideen* and *mujahidat* to quench their profound thirst for knowledge and science. They return to finalize the studies that were so abruptly and heroically halted on that momentous day in **1956**, under a slogan that was as beautiful as it was poignant: *"No knowledge without freedom, and no degree without dignity."*

For we understood then, with visceral clarity, that academic certificates hold no true weight when one dies as a "beautiful corpse" in the service of a shackled nation.

The era of science, rigorous research, and intellectual enlightenment now imposes itself as a supreme and unyielding mandate upon man and woman alike. The pride of belonging to a victorious Revolution acts as a relentless catalyst for steadfastness and intellectual perseverance. The lecture halls of the university now unify the warrior and the militant, who but yesterday were bound by the shared hardships of rugged valleys, the perilous peaks of the mountains, the clandestine hideouts within the labyrinthine cities, and the cold solitude of prison cells. Despite the vast transformation between these two states—the armed struggle of yesterday and the civilizational reconstruction of today—Algeria remains, more than ever, in urgent need of every soul, man and woman alike, just as it was in the crucible of our recent past.

Yet, most regrettably, dissonant and discordant notes began to emerge upon the horizon. Insidious and poisoned ideas—

akin to dormant viruses awakened by the sudden warmth of the sun and the radiance of liberty—found their way back onto the cultural, political, and social stages. In my unwavering view, the lifespan of these archaic-yet-renewed ideas is but a fleeting and ephemeral phase. These voices claim that the woman stepped into the arena of Revolution merely to bridge a temporary gap in those tumultuous stages, and that her "primordial and natural sanctuary" is the domestic hearth, while everything else is but a passing anomaly. But independence itself is the ultimate Light, and the fundamental role of Light is to banish the encroaching darkness and conquer it. It is the sacred obligation of this Light to confront such fallacies, compelling us women to recognize that new, and perhaps even more arduous, battles now lie in wait for us.

Did the Algerian woman fortify her spirit and intellect for the coming of these formidable confrontations? Or had the grueling years of the armed struggle, with their relentless demands, utterly depleted her vital energies, sapped her physical fortitude, and obscured the clarity of her vision?

The authentic vision, as it continues to manifest through the cascading events unfolding before our very eyes, shall undoubtedly prove to be far more taxing and bitter; for these coming engagements are of an entirely different nature: they are monumental civilizational battles. Within these nascent circumstances, the most paramount arena for me was the struggle to transcend the rudimentary stage of basic literacy—the simple acts of reading and writing—and to plunge headlong into the fray of acquiring sophisticated knowledge, garnering the necessary expertise, and attaining the required academic stature. I felt compelled to transition from the realm of mere reactive labor and spontaneous expression to the hallowed

ground of mature, informed decision-making, fortified by the armor of profound learning. I realized then that the artistic methodology and the richness and boldness required in proposing ideas and convictions—principles in which I had believed and upon which I had settled from the very beginning—had to be anchored and fortified once more.

I arrived at the unwavering conviction that thought itself must possess its own comprehensive and total strategy. When the sacred process of intellection and creative innovation commences, it must transcend and escape the restrictive binary of "The Sacred and the Profane," or the limiting dictates of the "Permissible and the Forbidden." Thought and creativity must never be shackled by visible or invisible bonds that stifle the soul and original spirit. Such restrictive bonds serve only to abort freedom of expression—the most vital and indispensable condition for the flourishing of human thought and creative genius.

Life was flowing with a vibrant intensity all around me, and consequently, within the secondary school, they awaited my arrival with a palpable sense of joy and profound longing. The lessons of literature and philosophy made me feel as though I had suddenly become the sovereign mistress of all matters. It was an internal mandate—a command emanating from the very core of my being and from everything that surrounded me. Life was a majestic gush of giving: science, knowledge, history, philosophy—the philosophy of beauty and life itself—the revolution against injustice and stagnation, and the brave rebellion against the paralyzing fear of intellectual ossification.

All of this unfolded within the magnificent embrace of a vibrant and pulsating issue—vivid ideas and themes—deepening with the resplendent brilliance of defiance and

challenge. It meticulously narrowed the chasm between the sublime joy of the spirit and the crystalline clarity of disciplined thought, forging an unbreakable bond upon the foundations of hope and the unyielding will to construct. My heart has eternally remained, and continues to be to this very day, a sanctuary flung wide open to limitless and unfettered intellectual horizons.

This is precisely what drove me to rebel against any stagnant program or rigid lifestyle that lacked the grandeur of a noble and transcendent dream. I came to the profound realization that life, in its truest and most authentic form, is a magnificent synthesis of a dream and a meticulously crafted program—notwithstanding what might be perceived as a distracting clamor or an unsettling anxiety inherent in the delicate relationship between the pursuit of learning and its gargantuan civilizational stakes.

Certain individuals within my surroundings were found utterly incapable of the labor of independent thought. They were the tragic victims of a profound and pervasive intellectual stagnation, possessing no inherent capacity for that vigorous mental exercise which serves as the singular, distinguishing mark of one human being over another. Although they nominally existed within the framework of a dream, they were found bereft of the spiritual ability to truly experience its essence. Consequently, they found themselves perpetually ensnared between two discordant and irreconcilable states: the one thinking and the other entirely non-thinking.

This "intellectual sport" which separates these two human archetypes often leaves one side confined to thinking through the narrow prism of "pre-packaged" and ready-made dreams. They are rendered fundamentally unable to alter their

trajectory or change their ways, even if their minds were ostensibly freed from their external shackles. They find themselves missing out on every glimmer of the new, eventually becoming entirely deprived of the grace of renewal. Such souls are destined, by the very nature of their inertia, to collide one day with the unforgiving dust of history.

This, in my considered estimation, is the human project that manifests a failure to orchestrate its own existence or arrive at a profound comprehension of its present and future trajectories. Such individuals bear a striking resemblance to those souls entirely bereft of the grace of human "intuition." They instinctively pursue the path of least resistance, found lacking in the spiritual ability to embrace change; consequently, those existential human anxieties that accompany awareness do not trouble them. They remain untroubled because their minds are in a state of terminal dormancy. Therefore, the cycles of suffering originate from their very selves, eventually spilling over to afflict the lives of their mothers, their wives, and their daughters.

More often than not, the meager dreams of these "pre-packaged" individuals are draped in a deceptive cloak of "sacredness," exploited ruthlessly for the sake of narrow, self-serving goals that neither contribute to the construction of a resilient human being nor forge the path toward a luminous future.

My students would depart the classroom at the conclusion of the philosophy hour, leaving me to spend the remaining cycles of the day in a state of feverish intellectual pursuit, research, and inquiry. I hungered for answers—countless, definitive answers—at a time when I was only beginning to

master the delicate and necessary art of formulating the right questions.

At the closing of the day, I would be overcome by a sense of profound satisfaction despite the underlying tension. I would surrender my weary frame to the bed, and no dark nightmares would dare haunt the sanctuary of my sleep. Instead, I would find myself intoxicated by a wondrous and boundless optimism. In the theatre of my dreams, I would behold a city wrought of transparent glass, nestled in the tender embrace of a golden vision, beneath a crystalline sky studded with cohesive and radiant stars. Its atmosphere was cool and invigorating, scented with the hallowed fragrance of freedom as it drifted through its elegant corners and its visible and concealed thoroughfares. Its inhabitants knew nothing but the grace of smiles, feeling in their hearts nothing save for a magnificent love and a secure, unshakeable devotion.

I would awaken at the first light of dawn, infused with a revitalizing and boundless vigor, as though I bore no terrestrial burdens save for the pristine innocence of childhood—an existence fragrant with the delicate scent of blossoms and the celestial purity of unadulterated light. I would soar in spirit like a majestic creature of the heavens, a bird adorned with golden wings whose inherent strength knew no earthly bounds. I would sow the seeds of smiles here and there as I moved, acting as if I had been personally ordained by Fate as the guardian responsible for the felicity and happiness of every soul I encountered. I resolutely refused to allow my spirit to be tarnished or dimmed by any melancholic tableau I might encounter on my daily trek to the halls of learning: neither the sight of the ailing elder hammering away with weary hands at dilapidated shoe heels, nor the frail lad stationed behind the

tobacco cart, nor that barefoot child gathering the scattered remnants of bruised greens from the wayside.

To my eyes then, these were but ephemeral shadows—the inevitable and fleeting byproducts of a specific, transient phase that was destined to vanish with haste. For was not the entirety of our reality being woven anew from the very luminous threads of our burgeoning collective dreams?

Arab Cooperation in the Educational System

During that momentous epoch, I was actively engaged as a devoted educator, ascending through the professional echelons of the craft: moving from the primary tiers to the middle grades, then onward to the secondary level, and finally reaching the hallowed precincts of the university. I tasted a fleeting span of profound professional happiness during those years, before my primary interests were eventually captivated and subsumed by the twin realms of media and politics.

In that era, I was privileged to encounter many "cooperants"—both our Arab brethren and foreign scholars alike—who had arrived to assist in our national awakening. We would convene either at the illustrious "Thaalibia" Middle School, distinguished by its storied heritage and its assembly of elite professors nestled in the historic Casbah of Algiers, or subsequently when we relocated to the "Thaalibia" institution in the Hussein Dey district. Or indeed, when the "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" Secondary School was formally established in that same district, emerging as the first model secondary institution where the entirety of the curriculum was instructed in the noble Arabic language, alongside the rigorous study of foreign tongues. This pioneering milestone was achieved during the visionary tenure of Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi as the Minister of National Education.

Yes, indeed. They understood the depths of our soul, and we, in turn, possessed a profound comprehension of theirs. They were, by every measure, magnificent professors of the highest caliber. Perhaps in the present day, we find ourselves unable to encounter educators of that specific, distinguished stature. The professor of that era was one who labored with a

heart consecrated to the sacred cause of his nation. He felt, in the very marrow of his bones, that he was discharging a hallowed duty within a beloved fragment of his own homeland, working shoulder-to-shoulder with the sons and daughters of his own people. He bore an immense pride in contributing to the monumental process of constructing the new Algeria, tirelessly restoring what had been ravaged and lost of its civilizational foundations, its ancient heritage, and its authentic national identity.

As for the foreign "cooperants"—and the French in particular—the very title of "Cooperation" with our community was a source of persistent and palpable tension for many of them. They found it exceedingly difficult to adapt to the new reality. Then arrived the stark realization that they were, in truth, the "collaborators" in this burgeoning field, and they found themselves unable to purge this unsettling notion from their minds.

This language—the very Arabic tongue which they had fought with relentless political, legal, and military ferocity throughout the century and a third of the occupation—had finally returned to reclaim its rightful throne and its sovereign status as the national language of the land.

I used to ponder with a heavy heart: Why was this "Black Century" (the era defined by Islam and Arabism) perpetually met with such unyielding hostility? When I meticulously reviewed the historical documents concerning the chronicles of Algeria, I discovered that colonization in our land was not merely an administrative oversight, but a calculated process of settler-colonialism, hauntingly similar to the American settlement waged against the Native Americans. It was a continuity of colonial archetypes that harbored concern for

nothing save for the exploitation of economic resources and the looting of material interests.

In the aftermath of the invasion that struck our nation during the nineteenth century, France mobilized every conceivable artifice to systematically obliterate, first and foremost, the foundational constants of the people—at the zenith of which stood our sacred language.

The issue of language within our land is a protracted and profound struggle. It is not merely a question of the "Standard" or the hallowed tongue of the Quran; it is the "Ancient Vernacular," an essence which I have come to realize is not fully comprehended by many.

Imperial hegemony fought it through every available channel: through administrative stratagems, through the cold imposition of legal frameworks, and even through the creation of a modern "Westernized" class. The ultimate objective was to orchestrate a total and final estrangement of the Algerian society from its primordial roots.

They sought to manufacture a narrative that the Arabic language was a "moribund" tongue, entirely bereft of the flexibility required for modern life, much like Latin. They claimed it was a cultural import from the Arab East, a vernacular entirely foreign to the essence of Algerian society, thereby justifying their dominion over it as a purported legal right.

Consequently, every definition and linguistic expression was subjected to a forceful process of "Frenchification." Concepts like "French" and "Non-French" emerged as the defining markers of all dialogue and thought. The ancestral tongue of the people was pushed to the neglected margins, rendered as a

language through which the people could no longer articulate the full spectrum of their lives or the richness of their culture. It had to be obliterated precisely because it was so inextricably embedded within every fiber of their human existence.

Subsequently, the colonial educational authorities implemented French teaching curricula and organized rigorous training sessions for a class of Algerian educators—the "Assimilated"—who were fashioned to produce volumes and pedagogies characterized by a French essence, yet written in a fractured, enfeebled Arabic. This was not the authentic Arabic suited for children, but a discordant dialect that inspired only intellectual repulsion. This was a calculated move to push them, directly and indirectly, toward embracing French as their primary language, eventually rendering it the dominant tongue for all of Algeria.

Why must the Algerian child suffer such alienation within the sanctuary of his own home? Why is he compelled to absorb this culture specifically through the home and the street, perhaps engaging with it in a manner far more meaningful than anything he encounters within the sterile walls of the colonial school?

This harrowing colonial history is, in absolute truth, comprehended only by a precious few of our Arab brethren who, on various occasions and through diverse circumstances, tend to reproach us regarding our steadfastness toward our national constants.

I wish to record here, with all the weight of responsible and solemn frankness, that the Arab response to the dawn of Algeria's independence—notwithstanding the commendable cooperation in the pedagogical and educational spheres—did

not ascend to the majestic level of Algeria's monumental victories. It remained predominantly localized at an emotional, nostalgic frequency. While it served as an immense source of pride for the Arab nation at large, it failed to act as a potent catalyst for the rigorous thought, the profound research, and the analytical depth it truly merited. The realistic Arab political maturity, in particular, proved too fragile to fully encompass and comprehend the magnitude of these victories, or to saturate itself with their profound data, their civilizational dimensions, and their historical implications. It was found unable to accurately predict their far-reaching horizons within the forward movement and the strategic destiny of the collective Arab cause.

The contemporary Arab reality was too enfeebled to truly embrace this "Giant" known as the triumph of the Algerian people over French imperialism and the formidable Atlantic alliance that fortified it. These victories should have been meticulously studied and harnessed as civilizational assets that impart to the Arab nation—above all other nations—that visceral vigor, that radiant vitality, and that spiritual renewal which are indispensable for the enduring health of the body and soul of our people.

Throughout the era of President Houari Boumediene—who stood as an enlightened, cosmopolitan Arab intellectual—he pondered these complex issues with an extraordinary depth of vision. He endeavored to heal many of the grievances and sought to bridge the intellectual and political schisms that plagued Arab thought. Simultaneously, however, certain factions remained tethered to the remnants of intellectual colonialism and its devoted adherents. Even while the wounds of the past remained unhealed, these elements labored

fervently to secure a victory for a cultural belonging to the French sphere. This existential anxiety and the palpable hesitation regarding our cultural and civilizational affiliation manifested with even greater intensity and vividness following the passing of President Houari Boumediene.

Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin Secondary School

The "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" Secondary School stands as the definitive culmination and the final iteration of one of the most prestigious model educational institutions in Algeria. Its primordial version was the "Thaalibia" Middle School, which was one of a triad of institutions established by the colonial administration under the nomenclature of "Franco-Islamic Schools." One was situated in the East, in the city of Constantine; the second in the Center, within the capital, annexed to the venerable Sidi Abderrahmane Al-Thaalibi Mosque in the heart of the Casbah; and the third in the historic city of Tlemcen in the West.

These schools, notwithstanding their ambiguous and perhaps suspicious foundational motives, succeeded in graduating a magnificent elite of national professors and high-level cadres. They were distinguished by an unparalleled linguistic dualism, mastering the intricate rules and rich literature of the Arabic language with absolute perfection, alongside an equal mastery of the nuances and subtleties of the French language and its literary heritage. In stark reality, the strategic objective behind the formation of these three institutions was to forge a class of competencies in the human and civil sciences, destined to replace certain figures within the judiciary—those whose primary and sole reference in judicial rulings was confined to issues of personal status as dictated by traditional Islamic religious volumes.

I was formally appointed to the Thaalibia school in the Casbah immediately following my attainment of my inaugural university degree in Literature from the Institute of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Algiers. I dedicated

my efforts to the mission of instruction within its walls from the year **1966** until **1969**.

We subsequently orchestrated our migration to the second iteration of the Thaalibia in the Hussein Dey district, which had been assigned a vastly more expansive domain—formerly a bastion of martial barracks. Years thereafter, upon the final completion of the magnificent new edifice dedicated to "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin," the entirety of the administrative staff and the luminary faculty relocated thither. This transformation rendered that secondary school the preeminent paradigm for the linguistic reclamation—the Arabization—of secondary education throughout the reaches of Algeria.

The institution discharged its noble role with absolute distinction in this field, yielding successive echelons of scholars who navigated their secondary school finals—the Baccalaureate—with all subjects, encompassing both the empirical sciences and the humanities, as well as foreign tongues, entirely within the hallowed medium of the Arabic language. This was, as I have previously remarked, an optional academic trajectory at that time.

The faculty was comprised of a select vanguard of professors, among whom were seasoned veterans with a distinguished record of educational service within the "Free Schools" prior to Algeria's glorious independence. They were collectively driven by a fervent desire to render this institution a living, breathing model, stamped with a distinct and authentic Algerian character.

I functioned as one of those vibrant and tireless activists, notwithstanding my multifaceted and burgeoning interests within the political, social, and media spheres. It was during

that seminal epoch that I served as the architect who helped found the *Al-Jazairia* (The Algerian Woman) periodical, a labor I undertook alongside my heavy instructional duties. Every day, upon the conclusion of my teaching hours and the preparation of the syllabus for the forthcoming issue, I would depart the secondary school to head directly to the Union's majestic national headquarters—the storied villa within the enclave of "Villa Joly." Notwithstanding the reality that we did not possess even a modest inner chamber for our conclaves within that grand estate, we were profoundly content to assemble within the verdant reaches of the garden. There, amidst the natural bloom of spring, we meticulously prepared for the spiritual spring of the "Other Word"—a discourse saturated with profound meaning and visionary thought. It was our ardent wish that this message should reach the heart of the woman, the man, and the entirety of our social collective.

We harbored an acute and unwavering awareness that the media was entrusted with a sacred mission—a multifaceted mandate encompassing culture, profound education, and strategic social mobilization. Within the heart of a society that stood in urgent need of every resource, the media functioned as the very "Marrow"—that vital essence which transmutes into a potent force capable of shifting a stagnant reality toward a positive and transformative horizon. We held the firm conviction that if our resounding military triumphs were not followed by equally decisive intellectual, social, and economic victories, the gargantuan task of constructing the "New Algerian Human Being" would remain fundamentally unfinished and incomplete.

One fateful day, I was struck with a profound and sudden astonishment upon entering the sanctuary of my principal’s

office—only to find her on the very precipice of tears. She delivered what felt like a catastrophic revelation: a formal administrative decree had arrived, mandating my immediate and forced transfer to another secondary institution, known as the "Omar Racim" school.

I was utterly mesmerized by bewilderment. I opened my mouth in a state of sheer shock and inquired:

"Transfer to Omar Racim? I have submitted no request for such a displacement, so by what authority can I be moved without my own consent? I demand an answer to this mystery!"

I looked at the principal, then fell into a heavy silence. My spirit was a crucible of righteous anger, nearly yielding to tears, yet I quickly felt a surging wave of profound indignation at this blatant bypass of my established rights as a permanent, tenured educator. The Ministry of National Education was, at that specific historical juncture, presided over by our brother, the esteemed Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi.

Notwithstanding the bonds of kinship and family ties that united us, I sought no immediate audience with the Minister himself. In my initial pursuit of justice, the reception I received from the Director of Personnel within the Ministry was quite telling.

The Director of Personnel, notwithstanding the undeniable legitimacy of my protest, addressed me with a cryptic, shadowy smile:

"Your appointment was ordained by a supreme ministerial decree, and according to the strictures of administrative law, we retain the inherent right to relocate you."

I replied in a tone sharpened by an immediate surge of righteous indignation:

"By no means, sir. I have functioned as a tenured and established pedagogue for many years, and no authority possesses the legitimate right to orchestrate my transfer unless it emanates from my own personal and formal request."

He observed me intently, that enigmatic smile still flickering upon his features. I had previously garnered much information regarding the sterling reputation and the academic triumphs associated with the "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" school and its esteemed principal. Subsequently, he spoke with an unsettling and clinical bluntness:

"Lend me your ear, madam. The principal currently presiding over the Omar Racim Secondary School happens to be the spouse of our Ministry's Secretary General. It is his estimation that she does not inhabit the same intellectual caliber or professional vigor as your current principal, and he harbors a fervent desire for her institution to mirror the distinguished success of Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin."

I was plunged into a profound silence, my heart nearly surrendering to tears of sheer frustration, even as the Director persisted in his unapologetic reasoning. I countered with a fierce and unyielding insistence:

"But I am not an inanimate vessel to be shuttled thus from one station to another at the caprice of others!"

I articulated those words with a resolute firmness:

"I have submitted no request for this displacement, and I remain a woman anchored in unshakeable principles."

Then, a heavy and suffocating silence descended upon me. I was on the very precipice of weeping out of a sense of profound indignation, for the Director had delivered that phrase with such a cold and dismissive bluntness.

"Indeed, sir, such an aspiration is entirely legitimate; every institution naturally yearns for such excellence. Yet, in the delicate process of distributing competencies—if we may truly designate it as such—it remains the inherent right and obligation of all those entrusted with the stewardship of these institutions to labor toward that noble objective."

However, that official offered me no solace; in truth, it was his own administrative superior who had orchestrated the move.

I departed his quarters and directed my steps immediately toward the office of the Secretary to the Minister, Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi. I was received with an instantaneous and gracious welcome, entirely devoid of the need for a formal appointment. The moment his gaze met mine, he inquired with a genuine and fatherly warmth:

"How is your well-being? And how fares your family? A long interval has indeed passed since our last meeting. Pray, what pressing circumstance has brought you hither to my door today?"

I recounted the entire saga to him with a heart fractured by grief, almost surrendering to tears. Yet, rather than manifesting a reactive anger, he was overcome by a surge of gentle laughter, listening to my narrative with a visible sense of benevolent amusement.

"Justice, my noble sister, is precisely what has led your steps to this threshold."

He subsequently absorbed the intricate details of my story with a serene and unshakeable composure, then declared with absolute finality:

"The administrative decree is hereby revoked. You shall return forthwith to your secondary school, to the students whom you so dearly cherish, and to the colleagues with whom you serve."

Thus, I remained within the hallowed embrace of "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" alongside my students and fellow educators whom I so profoundly loved. I consecrated my most radiant and beautiful years to that institution—the architect of countless monumental achievements. Every passing year, and every year-end convocation and award ceremony—events which Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi himself graced with his presence that year—stood as a resounding and living testament to our collective success.

Multiplicity of Interests

The relentless winds of time—those ephemeral gusts that propel us perpetually forward—carry me upon a sweeping odyssey through the rhythmic ebb and flow of existence. My footsteps traverse the delicate threshold between the phantasmagoric meadows of our yesteryears and the storied corridors of my youth. Verily, existence was not invariably a verdant paradise; life, in all its resplendent beauty, manifests simultaneously as a formidable and pitiless mistress. She blindsides us with cataclysms we had never dared imagine, ruthlessly metamorphosing our most radiant visions into a reality both calcified and bitter.

Notwithstanding these grueling tribulations, we find ourselves anchored to an inexplicable and enduring love for life. We feverishly seek sparks of felicity amidst the debris of sudden surprises. Our beings vibrate with the crescendos of jubilation at one hour, only to be submerged in the hallowed depths of inconsolable grief at the next. Yet, within the crucible of these unforeseen trials, we find it utterly impossible to draw breath or advance a single stride without the guiding light of Hope. Even when we imagine ourselves bereft of its glow, we somehow persist, moving forward through the dark. Existence thus becomes an exquisite paradox: where the most brutal of hardships attains a certain aesthetic grace, while the most beautiful of moments can be suddenly tainted by the shadow of the grotesque. A resolute confrontation with our own mortality remains our sole true possession; thus, we learn neither to yearn feverishly for the unknown morrow nor to remain entombed by the echoes of yesterday. Both have slipped forever from our grasp.

Thus did my heart mount its glorious rebellion, while my intellect operated with the contemplative depth and ascetic rigor of a "Sufi" sage. A crystalline and fierce debate erupted between these two opposing forces, neither of which I expected to claim a final, decisive victory. They functioned as the dual millstones that ground the very wheat of my persona: the visionary dreamer and the profoundly sensitive soul. Yet, with a sudden and startling force, my rational mind emerged triumphant; it rebelled and expanded until it came to inhabit the very sanctuary of my soul. Or perhaps it was that those nascent thoughts and revolutionary ideas had already taken up residence within the chambers of my mind? Or were they burgeoning without the initial sowing of seeds, precisely as opportunistic flora proliferates upon the verdant banks of the river of existence. This emergence occurred following a protracted and seemingly interminable interval of intellectual dormancy.

I found myself swept away by the torrent of a foundational process that was both unprecedented and unique in its essence within the life of every Algerian soul: my own profound self-reconstruction, the meticulous fortification of my intellectual edifice, and the expansion of my inherent capacities to contribute meaningfully to the majestic construction of this most precious nation. I felt a sacred obligation to rise to the level of these liberated Algerians, dedicating my being to the service of this People—who are the true and singular hero, and none besides them. Verily, a society is defined by the profound synthesis of its geography and its storied history.

I arrived—through a path of immense Herculean labor, yet one never devoid of intellectual rapture—at the hallowed precincts of the university lecture halls. These were the very

auditoriums that had raised the standard of challenge, providing a sanctuary where the *mujahideen* and *mujahidat* could persevere in their formal formation. They continued their relentless path toward the battle of knowledge, following the sublime honor they had earned in the arenas of military and political jihad. It was during this historic juncture that, for the first time in our annals, a department dedicated to the instruction of philosophy within our national tongue was established at the Algerian university.

I was utterly immersed within the profound and labyrinthine worlds of these two supreme human specializations, having at last satiated my primordial desire and my enduring passion for Arabic literature in particular. This was the necessary completion of those intellectual beginnings that I had meticulously carved into the sanctuary of my mind and soul: the legacy of the "Association for Education and Islamic Teaching" and the memory of its *mujahideen* and martyrs within the ancient city of Constantine.

All of that magnificent progress was achieved not without consistent success and the triumphant transition to each successive academic year. I drank deeply and feverishly from every required volume and every extracurricular tome I could secure. It was as if I were a wanderer in a parched and trackless desert who had suddenly discovered her ultimate goal: a spring of pure, celestial water after a lifetime of exhausting and wearying toil.

Among the serendipitous strokes of fortune that marked my journey was the occasion when one of the preeminent Arabic bookstores, nestled upon the storied Larbi Ben M’hidi Street, fell into sudden insolvency. Its proprietor was an Egyptian book merchant who had embarked upon the total liquidation of his

stock at dramatically reduced prices, ostensibly to vacate his shelves for a massive and diverse new collection across a myriad of disciplines. I seized upon this opportunity with a feverish zeal; my husband and I resolved, in a bold and visionary maneuver, to consecrate the entirety of our modest savings—which had been originally reserved for an entirely different life project—toward this acquisition. For us, those volumes did not represent a mere accumulation of paper; they were a formidable civilizational project and a tangible, living reality, standing far apart from the fleeting mirages of a thirsty soul yearning for a distant spring.

Once my ideas had become definitively anchored and my convictions had crystallized, they began to weave for themselves a panoramic tapestry that flung itself open to all who hungered for knowledge. We eventually found our ultimate calling by articulating those deeply held convictions across various national newspapers—the very publications I had the distinct and hallowed honor of helping to found. These venues spanned the entire spectrum of our public life: from journals serving as the clarion voice for trade unions and professional associations, to the organs of the popular mass organizations, and extending to the myriad publications issued under the aegis of the Ministry of Information and Culture and other vital state sectors.

The *Al-Jamahir* (The Masses) newspaper stood as the inaugural pioneer among these publications, followed in swift succession by *Al-Sha'b* (The People), the weekly *Al-Moudjahid*, and the prestigious magazines *El Djeich* (The Army), *Al-Thaqafa* (Culture), and *Chabab al-Ahrar* (Free Youth), among others.

It was within the vibrant halls and the bustling headquarters of these journals—amidst the visceral vigor of our national struggle, the unyielding pride of our youth, and the majestic grandeur of our Revolution—that my meetings unfolded with my beloved brothers and fellow visionaries: Ahmed Jaber, Tahar Ouettar, Tahar bin Aisha, Al-Arabi Al-Zubairi, Al-Afif Al-Akhdar, Mohieddine Amimour, Mohamed al-Mili, Dr. Ould Khalifa, Abdellah al-Rukaybi, Abou al-Eid Doudou, and many other valiant militants and *mujahideen*. Our diverse talents converged in a magnificent symphony, our efforts were seamlessly integrated, and our collective energies were distributed between the fierce ideological and cultural skirmishes within the Party cells and its structured unions, and the noble, transformative mission of media and cultural creation.

The Direction and Information Department of the National Liberation Front (FLN) assumed the formidable stewardship of this intellectual arena for a protracted epoch, operating under the visionary leadership of our brother and mujahid, Mohamed Cherif Messadia. He was diligently assisted for an extensive duration by our venerable mentor and brother, the mujahid Abdelhamid Mehri. This department, with its recurring weekly assembly convened every Wednesday—famously known as the "Wednesday Session"—functioned as a majestic sanctuary for the cultivation of political maturity and intellectual depth. Within those hallowed confines, we would articulate our multifaceted political and philosophical visions through the medium of our journals, presenting rigorous analyses and incisive critiques regarding the myriad topics and existential issues that occupied our deliberations every Wednesday. We even bestowed upon our assembly the evocative title of

"Wednesday Discourse" (*Hadith al-Arbi'a*)—drawing inspiration from the celebrated title of the titan Dr. Taha Hussein—notwithstanding that his work remained a primordial school for us all. Verily, that department was far more than a mere forum for "Wednesday Talk"; it evolved into a monumental school of thought, journalism, and politics for every one of us, flourishing despite the inherent constraints and the rigid framework of the monolithic political system.

Furthermore, the department was the architect behind the establishment of numerous journals and periodicals, utilizing them as potent instruments for national orientation and popular mobilization. It also exercised oversight over a multitude of state committees and global organizations; among these was the World Peace Movement, wherein I had the honor of serving as a member of its executive bureau. I stood alongside a select galaxy of devoted militants, including the Malika Boumendjiel (the spouse of the martyr Ali Boumendjel), my dear sister and companion Safia Ben M'ahdi, Professor Al-Sharif Boumaza, and others whose specific names the mist of passing years may have momentarily obscured from my recollection.

Within the framework of these varied organizations, trade unions, and movements—enclosed as they were under the singular umbrella of the one-party system—I was introduced to a vast and multifaceted spectrum of individuals. Among them were those whose thoughts mirrored my own, and those whose convictions stood in stark divergence.

I stood as a constant witness to the profound contradictions, the fierce intellectual skirmishes, and the multifaceted ideological differences that frequently erupted within the same movement or organization. All of this served as a crucible that

enriched my intellectual and militant capacity at every turn, adding layers of depth, wisdom, and seasoned experience to my persona.

Furthermore, I discovered, in my interactions with those brothers influenced by either religious or leftist ideologies, a total and heartfelt consensus regarding the profound love for Algeria and the supreme interest of its people. The divergence between us never transcended the methods of expression or the strategic choices of labor, to the extent that the "Common Denominator" shared by all was the burgeoning spirit of democracy that was beginning to claim its rightful place within every soul.

I find myself pondering today: *were those the nascent embers of what would later be termed "Extremist Thought"?*

And I ask myself: were my own discourses at that time fragmented or incomplete? Had I failed to address the specific impetus that had occupied my mind since that "Fedayee Martyrdom" incident within the cell I belonged to during the Revolution? That responsible official—who attained martyrdom, may God have mercy upon his soul—departed this world without ever offering an apology for his dismissive conduct toward me and toward others who had chosen the Arabic tongue. He utilized French exclusively, and he recognized only those who had mastered it, acting as if any person who did not possess a command over French were, by definition, "Uncivilized."

It was this specific impetus—this lingering sting of intellectual prejudice—that compelled me to embark upon a personal project to refine my proficiency in the French tongue. This was a mission I pursued with vigor at the first light of our

independence, when I enrolled in the prestigious "Descartes" Secondary School (the French Lycée) in Algiers. I dedicated myself to my studies within this high-standard institution for two full years, attending classes from six in the evening until eight at night.

I reaped an extraordinary harvest of intellectual benefit from those evening sessions. While I was immersed in my studies, I found myself diving into the profound depths of the French language, exploring all its multifaceted humanistic dimensions. Between those Cartesian lessons and the other disciplines I pursued, I continued to perceive myself through the lens of a *mujahid*. We were among the living signs of resistance, never positioned against the mere existence of France or its culture in Algeria, but fiercely opposed to its presence as a colonial power and a system of settlement. We did not acquire its language to remain shackled by the pressures of a colonial mandate; rather, we chose to master it within the context of a sovereign Algeria, acting from a position of absolute liberty, far removed from any imperial coercion.

Within the walls of this secondary institution, I found my place in one of the classrooms, seated beside my husband. I was not captivated by the specifics of the lesson or the persona of the instructor as much as I was mesmerized by something inherent in the classroom itself. I would gaze with a sense of quiet pride and profound honor at the French tricolor fluttering above the edifice, while my internal vision was captured by the magnitude of our victory. What was that victory? It was nothing other than the educational institution itself. It belonged to a foreign state, serving the rights of a foreign community, yet it no longer held any power over us. We harbored no visceral feelings of hatred toward it; for our interaction with it had

transmuted into a peer-to-peer confluence—the interaction of the "Master with the Master" and the "Free with the Free."

I could not have known then that my pride in that state of affairs would one day fade, or that the cascading events and behaviors of the future would prove to us Arabs that colonization never truly sleeps, and that we remain perpetually targeted. We eventually bore witness to the truth that colonization possesses eyes that never slumber, and that imperial hegemony during the era of military settlement is, in fact, far less perilous than colonization through "Intellectualism." I came to the agonizing realization during that time that the most dangerous among Algerians are those who find themselves incapable of emancipating their souls from the lingering influence of colonial thought—those who, for one reason or another, believe they cannot survive without the civilizational life-support of the former occupier.

Yet, my bewilderment exploded into a visceral shock one day, when I stood as a supreme national educator before the gates of that very "Descartes" Lycée—for I had returned to those hallowed halls as the Minister of National Education.

Radiant Friendships

I harbored an expansive love for everyone, and I maintained a profound, unshakeable respect even for those who might not have rightfully earned it. I sought to carve a moderate and balanced path—a middle way—through the labyrinth of conflicting ideologies and divergent convictions, striving perpetually to remain a conservative yet enlightened soul, rather than a rebel in the narrow, reactionary sense. I was, in essence, an Algerian woman deeply rooted in the hallowed soil of her heritage, yet one who yearned for progress, enlightenment, and renewal without ever severing those vital historical and cultural ties that defined the very core of my being.

I resisted, with every fiber of my intellect, the narrow and exclusionary theories that sought to oversimplify the multifaceted Algerian identity. My life's journey was a vibrant mosaic of lived experiences and principled stances, forged through the crucible of international summits, Arab forums, and national platforms. These were not mere academic exercises; they were lived realities through the "green lanterns" of various encounters and intellectual confluences. I ardently desired that my homeland should derive its societal systems and its vision of the future from its own unique soil—from its rich civilizational treasury, which is both laden with magnificent victories and heavy with the wisdom of the ages.

I embraced the firm belief early in my consciousness that a difference of opinion should never be permitted to spoil the sacred bonds of human affection. Thus, I never found myself dazzled or taken aback by the eventual arrival of the era of political pluralism; for me, it was a fundamental principle I had

lived by and practiced in my own intellectual life long before it manifested as a political necessity for the state.

Throughout the entirety of what I have detailed, and even within those chapters of my life that remain as yet unrecorded, I was bestowed with the distinct honor of encountering a myriad of illustrious figures upon both the Arab and global stages. Each of these individuals left an indelible imprint upon the sanctuary of my spirit. What continues to resonate within me to this day is not merely the superficial allure of their fame, but rather their formidable intellectual pedigree and the unwavering weight of their convictions.

I recall with an immense sense of pride my assemblies with several Arab and international female leaders. Among them was Madam Nguyen Thi Binh, the Vice President of Vietnam and its legendary Foreign Minister during the heroic struggle of her people for liberation—a woman whose diplomatic finesse was as sharp and refined as her revolutionary resolve during the historic Paris peace negotiations.

I also count among these radiant and hallowed memories my encounters with Dr. Aisha Abdel Rahman, universally known by her evocative pen name "Bint al-Shati," who honored my literary journey by penning the magnificent foreword to my collection of short stories. I had the privilege of attending several of her lectures, which remain enshrined in my mind as a beacon of sublime Arabic literature and profound human thought.

I recall, too, with deep affection, Dr. Suhair al-Qalamawy, who perceived a nascent spark within my character and took it upon herself to foster my growth, nurturing my early steps by ensuring my stories graced the pages of every issue of the

periodical she presided over. To her, and to Amina al-Said—the visionary editor-in-chief of *Hawaa* (Eve) magazine, who first welcomed me in **1964**—I owe a vast debt of gratitude for their transformative and positive influence. Amina once bestowed upon me a book as a gift, wherein she had meticulously gathered my scattered treatises and for which she had authored an exquisitely beautiful introduction. This poignant gesture coincided with my birthday in **1967**, during her tenure as the President of the Union of Arab Writers.

Furthermore, I was privileged to make the acquaintance of a myriad of Arab and international female luminaries who stood at the vanguard of the struggle for women's empowerment and flourished within the hallowed precincts of literature and creative thought. Among this illustrious cohort were Dr. Awatef Abdel Rahman, Dr. Latifa al-Zayyat, Dr. Colette Khoury, and Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, alongside other distinguished pioneers of my generation. The majority of these remarkable women were defined by a rare and exquisite synthesis, seamlessly weaving the indomitable spirit of militant resolve with the profound elegance of literary brilliance.

These historic encounters were distinguished by an exquisite synthesis of literary refinement and a fiery, indomitable revolutionary spirit. I was profoundly honored to engage in the exchange of meaningful tokens of esteem and shared memories with these monumental titans of human thought.

Among the illustrious luminaries who etched a profound and lasting impression upon the sanctuary of my soul was the celestial pioneer, Valentina Tereshkova—the first woman to soar beyond our terrestrial bounds into the vastness of space. During her historic visit to Algeria in the **1960**s, I stood as a member of the official parliamentary delegation and served as

the director of the *Al-Jazairia* periodical. I recall with visceral clarity the exuberant receptions in our western provinces and our pilgrimage through the ancient, labyrinthine Casbah of the capital. I witnessed the simple, hospitable tillers of our soil as they stood in a magnificent salute to her, organizing vibrant displays of traditional horsemanship and folk artistry. They bestowed upon her the most precious artifacts of our regional heritage—the traditional *Burnous* and intricately hand-woven tapestries.

Furthermore, I was privileged to engage with a constellation of pioneers and sovereigns across diverse realms—kings, presidents, and revolutionaries who commanded the unmitigated respect of the global conscience. Figures such as Fidel Castro, his brother Raul Castro, and the legendary Ernesto "Che" Guevara—the man who personified a transcendent citizenship that recognized no geographical confines, including Rajiv Gandhi. I also encountered master diplomats and statesmen of the caliber of Habib Bourguiba, alongside his consort Wassila Ben Ammar, I also met Professor Mohamed Mzali and his spouse Fathia Mzali, who achieved the historic distinction of being the inaugural female minister in the Republic of Tunisia."

As I cast my retrospective gaze toward those bygone days of struggle, I am inundated by a profound sensation of contentment, dignity, and unyielding pride. My conscience dwells in a state of absolute serenity, for I have perpetually strived to contribute a positive cornerstone to the majestic edifice of my beloved nation. Never once did I labor for the sake of narrow, personal interest, nor did I ever attempt to exploit my station for transient gain, or seek to diminish the sacred legacy of our collective struggle.

My Second Journey to Cairo

Regarding my second odyssey to the heart of Cairo, it transpired in the year **1969**—the momentous year in which I successfully attained my university degree, the Licentiate in Philosophy. That magnificent journey was bestowed upon me as a cherished offering and a reward from my husband, Ahmed; it spanned an entire month within the pulsating core of Cairo, a period that would leave an indelible mark upon my consciousness.

It was there that I had the distinct honor of making the acquaintance of our dear brother, the eminent Professor Ahmed Al-Akhdar Ibrahim, who at that juncture served as Algeria's esteemed Ambassador to Cairo. Furthermore, I met our elder brother, Ibrahim Douyabi—who subsequently served as a secretary to our mutual brother, the illustrious and great *mujahid*, Abdelhamid Mehri—as well as the cultural attaché of the embassy. I also encountered the distinguished and venerable *mujahid*, Ammar bin Awda, an intimate companion of my husband, who then occupied the post of Military Attaché within our embassy. That era was the very zenith of revolutionary fervor, where the echoes of our struggle still resonated with a vibrant intensity. These men—who through their unyielding resolve had reclaimed the stolen dignity of the Arab East—bore within their souls chronicles of both profound agony and magnificent triumph.

I recall with visceral clarity those haunting inquiries that used to occupy my ruminations during those days: How could it be that certain monumental leaders, who had offered the very prime of their lives and the most sacred of sacrifices upon the altar of the Revolution, were now subjected to such agonizing

doubt and heartbreaking marginalization? It appeared as though History itself, in a moment of cruel irony, were ruthlessly devouring its own progeny.

Indeed, revolutions, much like the mythological Saturn, frequently devour those specific souls who ostensibly grasped the profound nature of their mission, yet endeavored to impose their own intricate inquiries and private visions upon the collective path.

Nevertheless, cherished memories persist as immutable chronicles of the soul. The Almighty has graciously bestowed upon a select few of us the divine favor of witnessing the "Festivities of Independence" and savoring the celestial nectar of reclaimed freedom. My sojourn in Cairo was nothing short of magnificent; our esteemed Ambassador there ensured, with a meticulous and fatherly dedication, that we were personally introduced to the very heartbeat and soul of Egypt.

I recall with crystalline clarity one particular day when he escorted us to the formidable citadel of Arab media and the intellectual world: the headquarters of the *Al-Ahram* newspaper. On that occasion, he was adorned in an authentic Algerian "Gandoura" wrought of shimmering white silk—a vestment he donned as a radiant badge of national pride and a gesture of humble, yet fierce, defiance. We stood in his company, and the sheer weight of his presence served as a master key that flung wide every door of that institution. *Al-Ahram* was then the preeminent fortress of information, presided over by the venerable and illustrious Professor Mohamed Hassanein Heikal. I can still evoke the memory of how visible his jubilation was upon meeting us. To him, we were the living, breathing symbols of a Revolution that had shaken the world to its foundations and captured the collective

imagination of all free peoples. Our presence in that office was perceived as a vibrant testament to our grueling struggle and our unshakeable pride. As the Ambassador was frequently subsumed by his formidable diplomatic obligations, our brother Ibrahim Douyabi, alongside the cultural attaché of the embassy, assumed the noble task of accompanying us throughout our entire month-long odyssey.

I had not yet ascended to the ranks of directorship, nor had I entered the diplomatic corps as an ambassador or the executive halls as a minister. Nevertheless, the emissaries of that era inhabited the world with the unadorned simplicity of the *mujahideen*, conducting themselves as though they were but ordinary citizens of the soil.

I was enamored with Cairo and with all of Egypt, perhaps since the first journey. Perhaps it was during that inaugural odyssey that the first seeds were sown for my subsequent literary and intellectual encounters with the "Daughter of the Shore" (Bint al-Shati) and the "Star of the East," Umm Kulthum.

I recall gracing the second congress in **1972** alongside the noble Madam Safia Ben M'hidi. Our aircraft, traversing the path from Moscow, was forced into an unexpected diversion toward the capital of Mongolia and faced a perilous proximity to a catastrophic end; yet, we surrendered to mirth in that hour—was it the courage of youth?

I was deeply captivated by Cairo’s allure, yet I remained impervious to that superficial dazzle that so often mesmerizes others. I observed this sisterly nation through a prism of crystalline clarity, for I felt within the sanctuary of my being that the legacy of struggle and the magnificent chronicle of our Revolution were far more monumental and profound.

Notwithstanding this, I shall never erase from the archives of my soul the extraordinary attention bestowed upon me by Dr. Suhair al-Qalamawy. She manifested a personal devotion to my academic ascension, going so far as to offer her stewardship in facilitating my registration in Cairo to finalize my post-graduate research. She and her distinguished spouse, Dr. Yehia al-Khachab, extended the most gracious hospitality, welcoming us into the serene sanctuary of their residence, where their pampered young daughter, "Koko," would move gracefully among us. Nevertheless, I chose to decline her magnanimous offer with a heart full of gratitude, resolving instead to return to the embrace of my own nation, spurred by the fervent encouragement of my husband to enroll in higher studies on Algerian soil.

Al-Jazairia Magazine

In the pivotal year of **1970**, I was summoned to participate in the hallowed act of founding the inaugural women's periodical within the sovereign borders of independent Algeria. This was a milestone of monumental significance during that transformative epoch—the birth of a specialized platform uniquely dedicated to the multifaceted issues concerning the woman. It stood as a vibrant representation of her social fortitude and her indomitable revolutionary fervor.

The magazine was conceived as a formidable bulwark intended to counteract and neutralize those regressive and often toxic ideologies that were scattered across the social landscape—ideas that sought to diminish the pivotal role of the woman and belittle her historic, heroic contributions to the liberation struggle.

This periodical was a clarion call, inviting the Algerian woman to occupy her rightful and distinguished place in the majestic building of a modern and enlightened society. Its inception was rooted in my own visceral desire to labor within the national media landscape; indeed, since the first light of our independence, I have harbored the steadfast conviction that "women's issues" must never be sequestered or isolated from the overarching "national issues." I resolutely rejected the notion of "privatizing" or compartmentalizing the female experience into an isolated ghetto.

My guiding conviction was perpetually anchored in the necessity of possessing an objective and rigorously logical vision—one that centers precisely upon the strategic positioning of the woman within the grander and all-

encompassing context of her primary surroundings, which is society in its entirety.

The expansive landscape encompassing the woman—which is society itself—is by no means a disjointed or separate entity. Therefore, to confine the multifaceted complexities of women's experiences within a suffocating and narrow frame is an intellectual transgression of the highest order. It would constitute a "black" and distorted framing of a momentous issue that resonates through the entire social collective.

For me, the cause of women was eternally and inextricably woven into the sacred principles of mutual reverence and the anchoring of profound social ligaments. Verily, man and woman, joined within the hallowed fold of the family, constitute a single, symbiotic unit presided over by the twin celestial virtues of mercy and justice. This remains the very cornerstone for constructing a resilient and cohesive society, specifically within the radiant and authentic context of our Arab-Islamic identity.

I found myself in absolute and visceral opposition to the tenets of "Extremist Feminist Thought," which I perceived then—as I do now—as a pathological and obsessive ideology. It is a school of thought that demands the impossible and achieves nothing of substance. Instead, it transmutes into a primary catalyst for the catastrophic disintegration of the family unit—an explosive conflict that shatters the serene tranquility and the sacred security of the home. Such a conflict serves only the dark agenda of fostering mutual hatred and nourishing a perpetual, toxic sense of perceived injustice.

The fulfillment of our noble aspirations, as I firmly believe, is a shared and solemn obligation upon both man and woman.

Neither should ever be permitted to eclipse the radiant essence of the other. Thus, I never once harbored a "Feminist" complex, nor did I ever yearn to be a man or the mere shadow of one. Why would I harbor such a desire? The Almighty fashioned me with my own specific points of strength and my own delicate points of vulnerability, just as He did with man. My essential truth is that I am a human being striving toward perfection, profoundly aware that no man can claim to be a "Total Man" and no woman a "Total Woman" in isolation.

This stood as the zenith of my vision: that I must be revered as an autonomous human being, as a mother, and as a woman who possesses a sovereign and enlightened mind. I honor the inherent rights of man just as I demand he honors mine—not as a superior or an inferior, but as a sovereign partner in our shared and sacred humanity. It is a question of "Manhood" as a collective virtue shared between us, rather than a mere biological demarcation.

Therefore, in my estimable view, the pivotal role of media was to articulate and propose visionary solutions to these profound issues within the heart of our community. However, what I understood with absolute clarity was that for our efforts to truly blossom within the intricate reality of Algeria—and indeed, to resonate across other Arab and Muslim nations—we were compelled to confront the lingering remnants of antiquated social architectures. We had to challenge those stagnant and calcified conditions that cast such a deleterious shadow upon the status and dignity of women in particular.

All of this spurred me to embrace the foundational vision for the magazine with an indomitable resolve and an unyielding will. I recall with crystalline clarity the words I penned for the inaugural editorial in January **1970**:

"O venerable mistresses of the hearth, O our beloved daughters—the blossoming promise of our future, and O our noble men—the architects of the coming morrow. It is my most fervent aspiration that this periodical shall emerge as an avenue for direct and heartfelt dialogue with you. It is a sacred space designed for the exchange of profound ideas, rendering it an intimate mirror to your hearts and minds, reflecting the very essence of your lived reality."

The Revolution had served as the quintessential launchpad for every vibrant and rebellious energy within our land. Why then should the woman remain relegated to the forgotten margins of our new existence? This magazine was conceived as a vibrant manifestation of that grand and collective energy.

This strategic step was meticulously intended to empower the woman, enabling her to transcend the restrictive boundaries of her traditional framing—a modest and simple framing of the past—after she had unequivocally demonstrated her intrinsic worth through her visceral participation in the glorious Revolution of Liberation, and her subsequent effective contribution to the building of the present we inhabit and the prosperous future to which we so ardently aspire.

..."*We called upon the entire collective of our society to labor and to live, to realize the very essence of its authentic being, and to decisively overcome all those foreign obstacles and alien impediments that possessed no genuine connection to our human existence. We were never driven by a vision of religion as a mere occupant of the earth or a restrictive, stagnant force; rather, we were inspired by the concept of faith as a radiant light that illuminates the arduous path ahead, positioning us within the very heart of modernity and progress, guided exclusively by the sovereign human will*".

The periodical functioned as a nascent platform where we deliberated upon the multifaceted issues concerning the woman, the sacred sanctuary of the family, and the broader social fabric—aiming to heighten the awareness of the political leadership and refine public opinion through flexible, literary, and evocative methodologies, standing far apart from the hollowness of empty rhetoric or the sterility of dry, clinical reporting.

As for the Palestinian cause, it served as the foundational cornerstone of the magazine and a specialized enclave dedicated to all global liberation movements throughout the world.

The editorial board I meticulously assembled was comprised of my esteemed female colleagues—the devoted educators at the "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" Secondary School, that pioneering and illustrious Arabized institution of Algeria. It was born following the completion of the "Franco-Islamic" educational framework, and we bestowed upon it the title "Thaalibia," following the example of the scholar and reformer Imam Abderrahmane al-Thaalibi.

Certain of my most radiant and cherished moments were those I consecrated within my private office at *Al-Jazairia* magazine.

I was finally granted a dedicated sanctuary within the subterranean reaches of the grand and opulent "Villa Joly." This massive cellar had once served as the secluded servants' quarters for the French colonist, "Monsieur Joly."

What remains significant is that I was now the mistress of an office, equipped with a telephone and a desk. There, I would graciously receive the members of the editorial board, curate

their diverse contributions, and prepare them for the majesty of publication. I also administered the "Letters to the Editor"—a responsibility that was far from incidental or trivial. I can assert with unyielding pride that this was the inaugural women's periodical to be formally printed in the history of independent Algeria.



With members of the Arab Maghreb Parliament



With female members of the International Parliament; on the right is the media figure Baya El-Hashimi



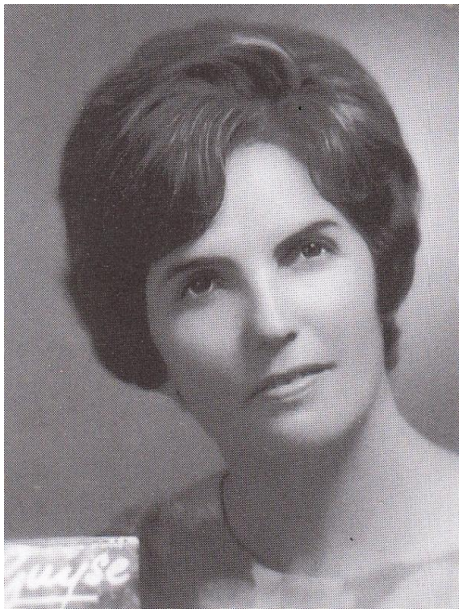
With a group of Arab women writers in Beirut; appearing are Mrs. Nabeeha Berri and the writer Colette Khoury.



With Jehan Sadat, Mrs. Karima Saïd, and the Moroccan Al-Berqadi in Cairo



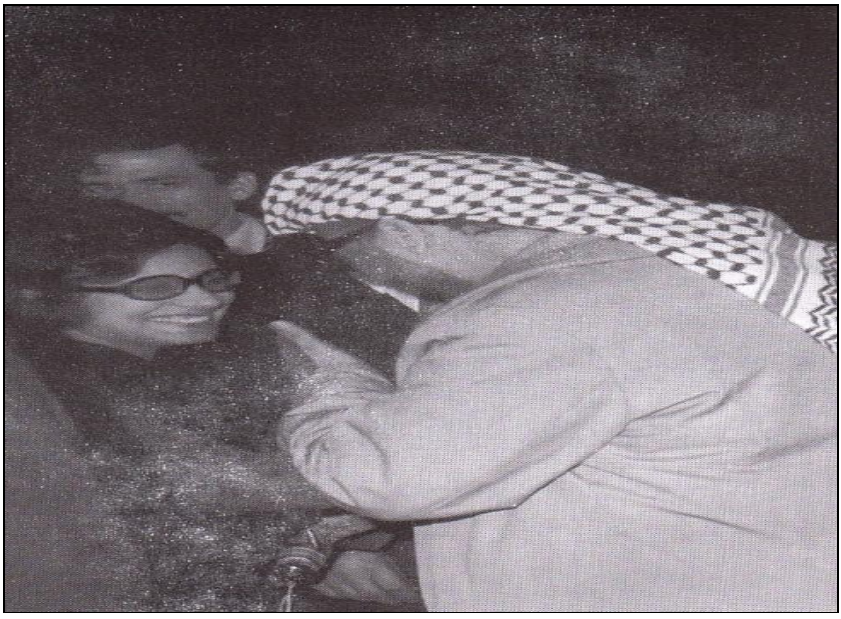
With the Jordanian Minister of Social Affairs, Mrs. In'am al-Mufti



The militant Mrs. Radhia Haddad, President of the Tunisian Women's Union



With the Soviet astronaut Valentina Tereshkova in the Casbah in 1978



With the late President Yasser Arafat



The mujahidat Chama Brahim Chaouch, Leila Belkahl, and Zhour Wanisi with Umm Nasser, director of Yasser Arafat's office



Inspecting a graduating class in one of the military barracks



Commissioning a female officer of the National People's Army



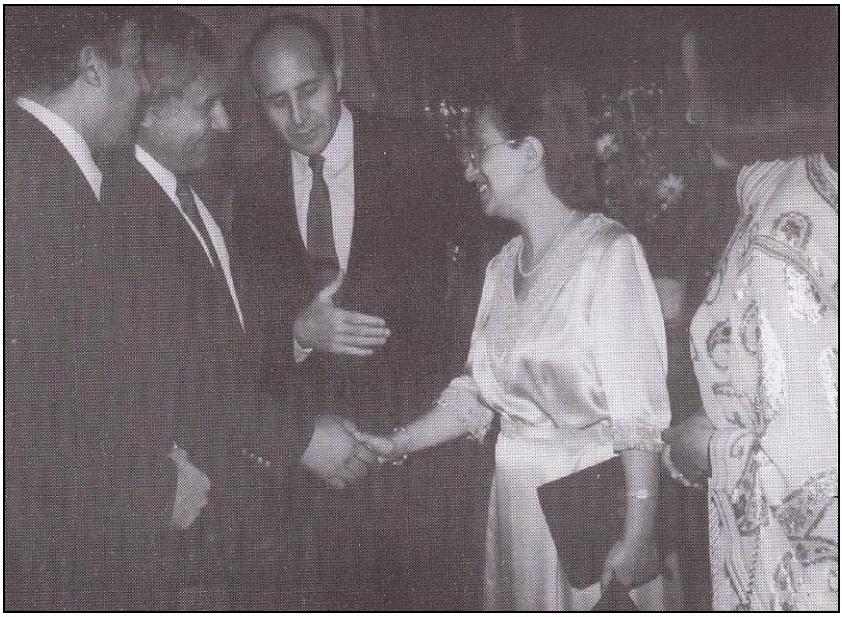
Inaugurating the health center of the National Security corps in 1983 with the mujahideen Abderrazak Bouhara and El-Hadi l'Khdiri



First day in the Council of Ministers meeting with the mujahid Boualam Bessaih



A dinner banquet for the Algerian delegation with François Mitterrand during the first official state visit of the Algerian Republic to France



With the mujahid Noureddine Yazid Zerhouni at the Embassy of Algeria in Mexico City



In one of the meetings regarding birth spacing; to the left of the author is the mujahid and minister, Sid Ahmed Ghozali



A rare photograph of the Ministers of Social Affairs through to the nineties

The historical archives of Algerian journalism do not preserve the memory of any journals that maintained a consistent and structured devotion to the woman and her existential causes, whether articulated in our national tongue or in foreign languages, save for a few sporadic publications issued on seasonal or commemorative occasions. To be sure, there existed certain "Women's Corners" within the press of our land, yet these were predominantly confined to a few sparse pages tucked within the broader fold of male-oriented newspapers.

It is imperative that we evoke, within this context, the legacy of the pioneers of the Algerian press throughout the long and arduous era of French colonialism. There were, indeed, trailblazing journals that stood shoulder-to-shoulder with some of the preeminent Arabic newspapers across the wider Arab

world, composed in both Arabic and French. It suffices to summon the memory of that illustrious journalist and luminary of the intellect, Professor Omar Racim, who was cast into the cold solitude of prison by the colonial authorities in **1916**. His "crime" was the publication of an incisive analytical treatise wherein he warned, with prophetic clarity, against the emergence of Zionist thought and its catastrophic repercussions for the Arab and Islamic worlds. His newspaper was the Herculean effort of a single man—he functioned as the editor, the master calligrapher, and the very printer of his own words.

Or we might recall the venerable scholar Sheikh Abou al-Yaqdhan, who established a myriad of newspapers during the **1920**s. Notwithstanding the relentless confiscation of his work, he never once faltered or surrendered to the shadows of despair. His heart pulsated with a visceral adoration for Algeria and its storied history; he would re-issue his journals with the unyielding stubbornness and the steely resolve that characterizes only the most dedicated of militants.

Why then did my most radiant and beautiful hours become those I consecrated within that modest subterranean office? Perhaps it was because when we flung open its windows to the night air, we were never entirely spared from the marauding rats that seemed poised to devour our manuscripts and our burgeoning hopes—notwithstanding the resplendent splendor and the intoxicating beauty of the surrounding gardens.

The definitive answer lies in the profound discovery I made: that I had been ordained as the sovereign bearer of a revolutionary intellectual mission—a mandate that differed in its very essence from the visceral struggle I had previously shared with my people to liberate this noble nation. It was a

message that manifested with a daunting and formidable complexity, demanding an expansive comprehension of both the physical geography and the deep, convoluted history of our social fabric. It necessitated a rigorous and nuanced understanding of the magnitude of societal pestilences entrenched within the heart of the community, at the dark zenith of which stood the suffocating blight of illiteracy.

This specific "pestilence," in absolute truth, was never relegated to the shadows of neglect. We mobilized the full, formidable weight of our periodical, the sovereign power of the State, and the entirety of the educational apparatus into the very frontline of the struggle to eradicate it.

I recall with particular vividness—alongside my elder sister Halima, the virtuous Nana'a, and my dear brother, the esteemed Al-Amin Bishishi—our personal participation in the stewardship of structured nocturnal seminars. We dedicated our hours from five in the evening until seven at night to the instruction of the "LaLa Khadidja" curriculum, specifically tailored to lift the veil of illiteracy from the adult populace, commencing from the fifth elementary grade and ascending toward the light of knowledge. These adult students were volunteers who held a steadfast and sacred belief in the unyielding continuity of our national struggle.

The internal world of the woman during that era was an untouched, primal, and pristine realm—shrouded in the mystery of ancient taboos. We harbored no desire merely to lift the physical veil as a superficial gesture; we did not wish to subject her essence to the trauma of intrusive social surgery or external harm. Rather, we sought to nurture and safeguard her hard-won interests and newly acquired rights, meticulously ensuring that her forward march toward enlightenment and

progress did not infringe upon—not to mention, violently clash with—the established historical interests of the male collective.

Thus were my most exquisite and radiant hours fashioned—woven, as they were, from the most arduous, complex, and perilous of matters. I felt within the sanctuary of my soul a dual and formidable weight: the sacred responsibility of the written word and the gargantuan burden of issuing a pioneering national publication. My priorities were, first and foremost, anchored in the service of the nation; consequently, the themes we pursued frequently centered upon the "incendiary and vital issues" of our social fabric, rather than the superficial realms of mere entertainment or the fleeting, vacuous caprices of fashion.

Notwithstanding our unyielding resolve, the most formidable obstacle we encountered within the field—specifically regarding those grave infractions we endeavored to unveil and expose—lay with certain officials or figures who perceived themselves as being entirely beyond the reach of scrutiny or accountability. These individuals enjoyed the clandestine protection of the upper echelons of leadership, or perhaps they were figures shielded by the entrenched and stagnant status quo of the prevailing system.

I recall with visceral clarity the day one of our courageous female journalists, while conducting a rigorous investigative inquiry, unearthed a flagrant and shocking instance of administrative malpractice. It was revealed that a certain official was exploiting his formidable authority within a security apparatus to conscript his own subordinates into his private, domestic service. He had reached such a level of startling audacity that he dispatched these state employees to graze his personal flocks of sheep in the countryside.

A veritable storm of indignation erupted against my person, a maelstrom that refused to subside, instigated by various deputies and high-ranking officials. The resonance of this controversy ascended to the very seat of sovereign authority, affecting even the Speaker of the Assembly himself—may the Almighty grant him His eternal and boundless mercy."

I derived a profound and enduring civilizational epiphany on that day: that the ancient and primal spirits of tribalism and narrow regionalism possess a resilient and defiant longevity—a spectral presence that is not easily extinguished or exorcised by the mere imposition of powerful political ideologies, regardless of their perceived magnitude or their ideological reach—be they the tenets of Communism, the principles of Socialism, the doctrines of Liberalism, or the rigid structures of Capitalism.

I recall also, with a touch of pained remembrance, a lady of distinguished character named Zubaida al-Sghir, who approached me bearing an exquisitely and meticulously curated compendium dedicated to the rich, variegated tapestry of Algerian cuisine—a cultural subject to which I had consecrated two specialized pages within the hallowed folds of our magazine. She was radiant with a jubilant and infectious fervor, apprising me that she had successfully orchestrated the color photography of the entirety of her culinary creations—a technological feat of unparalleled magnitude and rare sophistication for that era. Her visionary intent was to synthesize these vibrant elements into what would have been the inaugural and comprehensive masterpiece dedicated to the multifaceted culinary arts of our nation, Algeria.

She petitioned me to grace her forthcoming volume with a formal introductory foreword, intended to serve as a literary threshold prior to its final manifestation in print. Subsequently,

she directed her hopeful and ambitious steps toward the hallowed precincts of the "National Publishing and Distribution Company" (SNED). However, she returned to my presence only days later, her entire being consumed by the bitter and agonizing tears of the disenfranchised and the betrayed. She spoke with the broken voice of one who has looked upon a profound injustice, lamenting:

"I know not by what insidious deception I was ensnared, or whose unseen hand orchestrated my ruin... for the very photographic soul of my labor has been usurped! My work has been unveiled to the world under a fraudulent nomenclature, accompanied by a discordant and alien text that bears no relation to the heart of my toil!"

The official publishing house offered her no solace, dismissing her profound grievance with a chilling and clinical indifference, merely stating:

"The original photographic plates have been misplaced within our archives, and for that, we extend our apologies... your volume cannot possibly be brought to fruition in their absence."

Within the vibrant and intellectually charged folds of *Al-Jazairia* magazine, in addition to the formal editorials that bore the weight of my own signature, I frequently embarked upon the labor of composing a myriad of diverse treatises and analytical articles under various clandestine pseudonyms. I conducted extensive and profound interviews with a vast spectrum of Algerian women—foremost among them were the *mujahidat*, specifically those valiant souls who had been relegated to the forgotten margins and the shadowed depths of the mountain villages. I sought out artists, tireless laborers, and

the silent mistresses of the hearth. We even succeeded in establishing a network of intellectual correspondents across the Maghreb and in the majestic city of Cairo—figures such as Karima Harak, the sister of the esteemed Professor Nafissa al-Rukaybi.

I strove with an unyielding resolve to transform the periodical into a meticulously structured administrative entity, functioning under the direct stewardship of the Information and Culture Department of the Party. Within this arena, I lived through protracted periods of immense psychological and physical fatigue, particularly in my interactions with certain employees. While I remained steadfastly anchored to the sacred principles of discipline, punctuality, and vocational rigor, I discovered the painful truth that it is often fundamentally impossible to compel others to mirror our own habits, our ingrained values, or our sacrificial dedication to the cause.

It transpired that a woman joined our professional ensemble who had previously discharged the duties of an administrative overseer at the "Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin" Secondary School. After a remarkably brief tenure, she sought to overstep the sacred boundaries of her jurisdiction, reaching the brazen audacity of seizing the institution's official administrative seals. She exploited these hallowed insignias for her own private and clandestine ends—once to dispatch letters of demand to various state departments to secure personal favors, and another time to exert undue and illegal pressure upon a school administration concerning her own children’s affairs.

When I engaged her in a resolute and uncompromising confrontation, she did not hesitate to brandish the specter of her "clandestine connections" among the elite security figures of the capital. She even unveiled a badge of authority—

whether authentic or a masterful fabrication remained shrouded in mystery—claiming the formidable title of "Security Inspector." When she perceived that I remained entirely unswayed by her theatrics, she averted her gaze and remarked with a dismissive arrogance:

"I possess no knowledge of your stature... this woman is my neighbor, and I am certain of her absolute veracity."

Furthermore, not a single one among the senior custodians of media affairs would deign to listen to my formal complaints or grant an ear to my grievances, for she had meticulously cultivated a network of intimate allegiances and suspect friendships among them. Nevertheless, my dear brother and militant comrade, Dr. Larbi Zoubeiri, who was intimately aware of the convoluted undercurrents within the administrative labyrinths, sought to provide me with a sanctuary of consolation. He addressed me with these unforgettable and defiant words:

—"In the true scales of human merit, their entire collective being does not even equal the smallest digit upon your foot."

Nevertheless, this specific lady, who had so egregiously wronged me, eventually sought my presence years later, during that subsequent epoch when I had ascended to the sovereign rank of Minister. I was gracing a formal assembly at the Palace of the People when she approached me, her spirit seemingly subdued, to offer a profound apology and seek my forgiveness for the shadows of the past. Pray, do not yield to mirth; for toward individuals of such character, I have always harbored nothing save for a pained sense of visceral pity. I perceive the

transgressor merely as a tragic social condition—a byproduct of a fundamental and unfortunate deficiency in moral upbringing.

During those harrowing days of administrative crisis, I encountered President Houari Boumediene. He inquired:

— *"Are you in good health and spirit?"*

I responded with the due reverence befitting his station:

—*"Indeed I am, Mr. President."*

He cast a gaze upon me that was touched by a glimmer of righteous anger and remarked:

—*"Nay, you are not well at all."*

He had been meticulously apprised of the myriad reports and had been subjected to the relentless, subterranean pressures emanating from one of the Ministers of the Interior, precisely because that aforementioned lady was an intimate companion of the General Secretary of the Women's Union. That specific Minister used to frequent "Villa Joly" adorned in his athletic raiment; whenever he encountered me or Mrs. Fatima Saadani, he would declare with an air of ominous warning and startling audacity:

"Whosoever possesses the temerity to touch or harm [So-and-so] shall inevitably face the full and unmitigated weight of my wrath!"

We were utterly mesmerized by the sheer audacity of his stance, yet we resolutely refrained from submitting any formal grievance or administrative complaint to the higher authorities. We simply did not possess a full comprehension of the hidden "depths" of the matter, nor were we privy to the clandestine currents and motives that moved such men in those times.

We were also encumbered by the presence of an accountant hailing from a province in close proximity to the capital. No sooner had he secured his professional footing than his sense of discipline and responsibility utterly evaporated. We would behold his presence but once a week, as he perpetually offered a litany of hollow justifications centered upon the purported demise of his various kin. I eventually addressed him with a tone of biting irony:

"Verily, man, every soul in your lineage must have ascended to the heavens by now; you have effectively decimated them all! You appears to be the solitary survivor of your entire tribe."

When he finally discerned the gathering storm of our seriousness and realized his deceptions would no longer hold, the safe was plundered of its currency, and he vanished into the void, never to return. This betrayal necessitated that I personally liquidate the missing sum from my own modest resources upon the arrival of the General Inspector of the Party, for I was resolute that no shadow of suspicion or administrative flaw should ever fall upon our burgeoning mission.

Thus, we emerged as devoted militants within an entirely new and pristine arena for the Algerian woman. As the architects of the inaugural women's periodical composed in the hallowed Arabic tongue, we embraced this formidable civilizational challenge entirely devoid of any financial recompense, or even the provision of a formal office. We orchestrated our editorial conclaves during the fleeting intervals between our teaching hours, assembling within the verdant gardens of the historic residence that had once housed President Ahmed Ben Bella. Within that natural sanctuary, we would meticulously layout the vision for each issue, only to

reconvene later within the buzzing and industrial atmosphere of the Mustafa Ben Boulaïd Press. I made it a point of personal honor to share with the laborers their "Milk Supplement"—a vital health requisite mandated to shield them from the insidious lead fumes and the caustic materials inherent in the printing craft of that era.

Our inaugural visual architect and designer was the dedicated *mujahid* Mahmoud Hamrouche, whose creative stewardship was subsequently succeeded by the meticulous Mohamed al-Salih Mubaraki. The foundational editorial secretariat was expertly stewarded by Professor Turkia Deeb and El Aldja Hamitouche—the latter being a luminous figure destined to eventually ascend to the leadership of a London municipality on behalf of the British Labour Party.

As for the editorial board, it was initially comprised of female members, and subsequently expanded to include both men and women, all of whom possessed diverse specializations in various fields. Among them were:

Es-Saidani (the Editor-in-Chief of the French edition),

Mrs. Khalfaoui, the *mujahida* Khadidja Khairi El Asfar,

Zoulikha Saoudi,

Mrs. Morabitine,

Mrs. Nafissa al- Rukaybi,

Mrs. Amina Achli,

Mrs. Nadia Cherabi,

Mrs. Meslem, Massouda al-Amari,

Nadjat al-Amoudi, Ibrahim Merdoukh, Naima Madjer,

In'am Bayoudh, Werdia Mahfouf, Nafissa al-Ahrash,

Djamila Khammar,

Noura Saadi, Zineb Kobbi, Nadjia Arslan,

Abderrahmane Salama, Hisham Aboud,

Amer Rekhila, Fatiha Hadri,

Cherifa Quwaqwaq,

Fahima al-Atrash, Thouraya Boufedji,

Fahima al-Touil, Cherifa bin Abdessadok, Kahina Bari,

Farida Bouaicha, Malika Allag,

Hassiba Ben Habyles, Mustafa Wanisi,

Djamal al-Tahiri, Abdelkader Hammoush,

Abrous Toudert, al-Arabi Arzki, Janine Belkhodja,

Saliha Boudafa, Abdelhamid Abidi,

Mariem Ban, Daho Abdallah, Nachida bin Siam,

Leila Ousmail, and Safia Ketou.

The vast majority of these women were my own students in the Baccalaureate class at the Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin Secondary School. I undertook the task of including them within the board as a means of fostering their talents and encouraging them in the hallowed craft of writing. Indeed, the very first poem by Ahlam Mosteghanemi, entitled *"Safinati"* (My Ship), was published in our magazine within the ninth issue in October **1970**. We also published the works of Safia Ketou, who tragically took her own life as the result of a pained and harrowing incident."

Laboring alongside such a harmonious and multifaceted professional ensemble empowered us to manifest a myriad of our most cherished and ambitious dreams. We were collectively possessed by the profound sensation that we were actively engaged in the monumental architecture of the "Algerian Human Essence," specifically through the elevation and civilizational development of the woman. For me, this periodical served as a majestic gateway that flung open wide horizons, enabling me to comprehend the clandestine recesses of our social collective and to meticulously navigate its intricate intellectual cartography.

Most crucially, our work unveiled the staggering and pervasive prevalence of illiteracy and exposed that hollow spiritual void which certain opportunists endeavored to exploit through superficial and outward forms of piety. Simultaneously, the insidious lingering of imperialist machinations remained feverishly keen to ensure that Algerian society never attained a truly enlightened or profound comprehension of its hallowed religion.

Regarding the overarching political trajectory of the magazine, it was meticulously overseen by my intimate companion and sister-in-arms, Safia Ben M'ahdi, in her capacity then as the General Secretary of the National Union of Algerian Women. Subsequently, the stewardship of this line was assumed by Mrs. Fathia Batahar. As for the intricate web of administrative affairs, the responsibility was expertly shouldered by Baya Daas and Fatima Jerroud. Later, our ranks were further fortified when the esteemed Mrs. Nafissa Hamoud joined our collective effort.

We were unified by the unshakeable conviction that our "modest, burgeoning philosophy" was an absolute necessity of

the hour, precisely because the Party had not yet articulated or provided us with an ideological framework of its own. Thus, my existence was transmuted into a dualistic and formidable conflagration: one fire dedicated exclusively to the sacred craft of writing and editorial creation, and the other ignited by the grave and momentous responsibilities of national legislation.

Indeed, the sacred essence of Religion and its multifaceted civilizational virtues—encompassing absolute liberty, the pursuit of profound knowledge, the inherent dignity of labor, and the sanctity of universal justice—when preserved in their pristine form and unblemished by the tarnish of ideological distortion, stood in stark contrast to the myriad of erroneous and regressive attitudes that had been historically imposed upon women.

Our periodical embarked upon a series of rigorous, extensive, and courageous field investigations, meticulously navigating through the various and complex social strata of our nation. These scholarly and humanistic inquiries served to unveil the deleterious and far-reaching repercussions of a social reality characterized by its profound arbitrariness and systemic imbalance. We focused our intellectual lens upon the most sensitive and thorny dimensions of Personal Status legislation: the agonizing complexities surrounding child custody, the fundamental right to financial maintenance, the woman's inherent right to participate in professional labor, and the harrowing social practices of "coerced union" (*Al-Jabr*) and the persistent blight of premature, early marriage.

Furthermore, we sought an intellectual and strategic integration through collaboration with our noble counterparts at the Tunisian *Al-Mar'a* (The Woman) periodical, which was then presided over by the distinguished and valiant Radhia

Haddad. She was a woman of immense fortitude who struggled tirelessly to transcend the restrictive and artificial political demarcations of the Maghreb region, envisioning a unified front for women's progress.

The women of sisterly Tunisia, under the visionary, reformist, and courageous auspices of President Habib Bourguiba, had successfully secured revolutionary legislative mandates that formally, legally, and definitively prohibited the practice of polygamy. While this was perceived by a vast multitude as a monumental and unprecedented civilizational leap within the broader Maghreb context, certain voices and conservative segments among us in Algeria sought a more nuanced and gradual path.

It was within this framework of profound Maghreb solidarity that I recall the tireless and noble efforts of Mrs. Radhia Haddad, the presiding head of the Tunisian Women's Union and the visionary director of *Al-Mar'a* magazine, who collaborated with us with great fervor to transcend political boundaries and artificial borders. Simultaneously, we were actively mobilizing our own cadres and female militants, specifically within the complex administrative apparatus in Bouzaréah. In those halls, they served as my kindred spirits: dedicated pedagogues, enlightened educators, and mentors of the new generation that was to build the nation. They meticulously and skillfully harnessed their professional expertise to serve the overarching social collective. Among these valiant and venerable sisters were Safia Ben M'ahdi, Badra Amamra, Fathia Batahar, Mrs. Ben Habyles, Farida El-Hezil, Fatima Jerroud, and a multitude of many others who shared our sacred vision.

The duration of this monumental media-driven militant crusade persisted as a vibrant and indomitable force for twenty

full years. Throughout this protracted and grueling epoch, I came to the profound realization that the profession of journalism was never for me a mere sanctuary or an escape from the tribulations of life; rather, it was an immersive, visceral odyssey through the very heart of those troubles. I experienced a profound sense of absolute intellectual liberty, for this platform empowered me to articulate ideas and convictions that were intimately and inextricably intertwined with the pulsating heart and the vital causes of the nation.

The National People's Assembly and the Family Law

In that identical historical period, a serendipitous alignment of fate willed that the pulpits and platforms of my public and vocational service should multiply and diversify. I was bestowed with the profound trust of the people, being elected as a representative to the inaugural National People's Assembly following the dawn of independence. I secured a higher mandate of votes than even the ranking Party official within my own electoral district, a testament to the people's faith.

The Parliament emerged as a significantly more expansive arena than any I had previously known, far richer in the myriad of its complex issues and the formidable moral weight of its causes. I stood among a select and courageous vanguard of only ten women elected for that monumental legislative mandate spanning the years **1977** to **1982**. It is vital to record for history that we were chosen through the full, unmitigated rigor of elective conditions and popular competition, rather than through the ease of administrative appointment. We were ten women standing amidst a vast sea of two hundred and sixty men. I found myself positioned face-to-face with the majestic, arduous, and highly sensitive process of national legislation across every conceivable sphere of human existence. I felt uniquely fortified, prepared, and ready for this momentous task—a responsibility I had once viewed with profound trepidation during the ethereal dawn of our independence. My intellectual, political, and legal readiness was significantly bolstered and refined by the expert guidance and the discerning counsel of my husband—a venerable specialist in Jurisprudence and the presiding head of the Court.

This specific Assembly stands as one of the most paramount and distinguished in the annals of Algerian history. Firstly, because its mandate was forged through the sanctity and transparency of the secret ballot. Secondly, because it was comprised of the very elite of the *mujahideen*—those valiant souls whose sacred commitment to the spirit of the Revolution remained indomitable. They never once contemplated turning their backs upon their revolutionary history in pursuit of transient privileges, for they viewed their past struggle as a hallowed debt that demanded no earthly repayment in the form of titles or vanities.

Among the elected dignitaries were senior leaders of the highest caliber: Rabah Bitat, Si Hmimi, Ammar Moahoub, Said Yazouran, Mahmoud Guennez, Abdelkrim Gharib, Colonel Si Othman, Abderrahmane Belayat, Hussein al-Sassi, Khair al-Din Ammar, Mustafa bin Awda, Abdelkrim Hassani, Mustafa bin al-Nwi, Djelloul Malaika, Djelloul Bakhti Nemiche, and Al-Haj Moussa Akhamouk. The latter held me in an extraordinary measure of respect; later, when I had ascended to the rank of Minister and graced the city of Tamanrasset with my visit, he bestowed upon me a "Silver Amulet" as a gesture of protection from the shadow of envy.

It was a Legislative Assembly that commanded absolute reverence—a sovereign body that was never subservient to the Executive branch, for the individuals within its halls perceived themselves as the rightful peers to the President himself.

His Excellency the President convened with us in strict accordance with the sacred dictates of the Constitution, and our interactions were characterized by a profound and mutual respect. Enshrined within every soul was the visceral understanding that the People alone remained the singular and

sovereign Hero—a conviction that unified intellectuals, tireless farmers, and dedicated laborers under a common banner of patriotism.

A contentious legislative draft was introduced, proposing the definitive rescission of the "Family Allowances" and the establishment of a centralized "Children’s Fund." While the initiative appeared ostensibly positive, we requested its immediate postponement to allow for a more rigorous and exhaustive study, fearing that a hurried application might yield adverse social repercussions. I recall articulating a specific stance during my intervention—one that was recently referenced with scholarly admiration by Mrs. Louisa Hanoune, the leader of the Workers' Party, whose commitment to rigorous research I have always held in high esteem. I had declared:

"...Pray, why this unseemly precipitation? If our objective is truly to fortify this national fund, let us first effect significant economies by forsaking the opulent expenditures and the plush, extravagant carpets within our executive bureaus, rather than severing the meager allowances allotted to the welfare of our children!"

President Houari Boumediene manifested a keen and personal interest in our parliamentary interventions. On one memorable occasion, while he was introducing me to the Libyan leader Muammar El Gaddafi, he remarked with an air of distinct pride:

"This is Zhour... she is both an illustrious writer and a formidable deputy, and her tongue is a veritable hammer (Mitarq)"—employing a metaphor to denote an eloquence that was as sharp as it was precise. Gaddafi responded with a

vibrant laughter, fully grasping the weight of the President's endorsement.

Thus, I existed within the dual conflagration of two distinct fires: the sacred craft of writing and the grave responsibilities of national legislation. The Parliament of that era was stamped with a profound national character, which only served to intensify the formidable weight of our mission. When the preliminary draft of the "Family Law" was finally introduced, the arena of conflict between male and female deputies was ignited, sparking a series of deep and visceral debates for the very first time in our history.

Within those hallowed halls, every one of us female deputies was frequently nicknamed "The Calamity" (*Al-Musiba*) in a spirit of jesting irony; for in our ancient linguistic lore, "Al-Thalitha" denotes the formidable calamities of time. We, whom they once perceived as "Ten Doves" of peace, underwent a sudden and startling metamorphosis, emerging instead as "Ten Indomitable Falcons." Our rhetorical prowess and the sheer analytical weight of our discourse proved to be vastly superior to that of the majority of our male counterparts.

As the venerable proverb articulates with profound wisdom:

"One soul may equal a thousand when intellectual terrorism and the vitriol of verbal violence are permitted to prevail over the sanctuary of Reason."

Even as we were locked in these incendiary debates within the chamber regarding the preliminary draft of the law, hundreds of courageous women had converged outside the gates, orchestrated by the legendary vanguard of *mujahidat* such as Zohra Drif-Bitat, Khalida Toumi, and the immortal Jamila Bouhired. They stood in a magnificent state of

defiance, demanding the definitive and final abolition of the proposed Family Law. They perceived its very essence as a manifestation of a regressive and stagnant mentality, posing a piercing inquiry to the conscience of the nation:

"Is our existing Civil Code not more than sufficient to guarantee that absolute equality which is enshrined as a sacrosanct right within the Constitution?"

We stood as a resolute vanguard of ten women within the chamber, fortified by the fervent and unwavering support of thousands of our sisters stationed outside the gates. The governing apparatus, becoming cognizant of the burgeoning pressure and the unyielding strength of our collective voice, was compelled to take our protests into serious consideration; consequently, the contentious draft law was formally and definitively withdrawn from the floor.

Later, when I was ordained with the sovereign responsibility of a Minister of the Republic, I embarked upon the arduous task of completing my mission regarding this specific legislative project. I came to the profound realization that while the broader social fabric remained predominantly patriarchal, the woman in Algeria is distinguished by an extraordinary and innate political acumen—a hallmark forged in the very crucible of the liberation era. She remains, in spirit and in deed, an indomitable "Peer-to-Peer" counterpart to the man, standing as his equal in the sanctuary of national struggle.

The monumental subject of the Family Law has occupied the collective conscience of the state for a duration exceeding four decades. The initial seeds of interest in this legislative cornerstone were sown under the visionary and reformist aegis of President Houari Boumediene. In the pivotal year of **1972**, he issued a supreme directive for the exhaustive study of the Personal Status draft by a select assembly of the nation's most distinguished cadres—specifically those rooted in the scholarly disciplines of Jurisprudence, Sociology, and the Justice sector.

I was privileged to be counted among those expert cadres entrusted with this grave task. Collaborating alongside us were distinguished figures such as collaborating alongside us were distinguished figures such as Mrs. Anissa El Mensali—the brilliant legal mind who was subsequently destined to become the President’s spouse—and the eminent judge Malika Allag, whose vibrant life was tragically and prematurely extinguished in a harrowing automobile catastrophe. I recall her once confiding in me with a touch of her unique and spirited character:

"I harbor no inherent desire for the acquisition of gold or jewelry; my singular and true passion lies in the pursuit of changing automobiles."

Joining our hallowed ranks was also Mrs. Cherifa Ouwaqwaq, who served as the articulate and principled representative for the national educational sector. The National Union of Algerian Women, which was then operating under the steadfast, visionary, and maternal stewardship of Safia Ben M'ahdi, meticulously oversaw the proceedings and the intellectual climate of that significant era.

The ensuing deliberations were characterized by an extraordinary and unprecedented boldness, centering primarily upon the incendiary and complex issue of polygamy. Mrs. Anissa Mensali, approaching the matter through the prism of her rigorous legal expertise, articulated justifications for the practice predicated upon the concept of "The Man's Sovereign Liberty" and the religious licenses afforded by the sacred faith. Conversely, other resonant voices within the Union sought to cast a searching and uncompromising light upon the devastating social repercussions and the myriad negative consequences that such a practice imposed upon the first wife—most specifically regarding the sacred right to housing and the agonizing complexities of child custody.

They argued with great fervor that since our sisters in Tunisia, under the reformist and visionary auspices of Habib Bourguiba, had achieved the definitive prohibition of polygamy, we in Algeria were under a moral and national obligation to seek an authentic formula that does not infringe upon the hallowed sanctity of the Quranic text, yet significantly expands the sovereign powers of the presiding judge to impose the most stringent and unyielding restrictions upon the practice. Such a mechanism would ensure the absolute triumph of social justice without ever violating the divine spirit of the Holy Scripture.

We became acutely cognizant that the absolute and total prohibition implemented in sisterly Tunisia had inadvertently driven certain men toward the shadows of clandestine unions, where they took second wives in total secrecy, or worse, succumbed to the corrosive vice of adultery—transgressions which, ironically, were not punished with the same legislative rigor and social stigma as a formal, legal second marriage.

When the deliberative committee ultimately found itself at a profound intellectual impasse, foundering in its arduous attempt to reach a unified consensus, the entire legislative project was relegated to the dormant drawers of the administration, where it languished until the year **1981**. It eventually re-emerged, significantly enriched and expanded in its overarching scope; notwithstanding this meticulous evolution, it succeeded in pleasing neither the unyielding conservative religious currents nor the progressive and secular liberal factions.

We engaged in numerous monumental "rounds and strategic maneuvers" concerning this most sensitive of subjects, where intellectual fervor and legislative rigor intertwined in a fierce dance of ideas. A specialized and august committee was established for this very purpose, presided over by the Minister of Justice, Mr. Boualem Baki. This body sought the counsel of eminent experts who meticulously highlighted the profound misery and the harrowing conditions endured by divorced women and those innocent "foundlings" cruelly abandoned by their fathers to the whims of a pitiless fate. Notwithstanding these exhaustive and sincere efforts, the legislative project was met with rejection once more, only to be resurrected and elevated to the Government for a solemn second reading. I was an active and tireless participant in these relentless discussions, even persisting in my advocacy throughout the nineties while in retirement.

I eventually arrived at the profound civilizational realization that moderation stands as the supreme master of all righteous and enduring decisions. Our hallowed religion is anchored fundamentally upon the principle of *Al-Wasatiya* (The Middle Path). The inherent flaw resides not within the celestial and

immutable Quranic texts themselves, but rather within the stagnant, rigid, and fossilized minds of those men who fiercely oppose the necessity of Ijtihad (interpretative reasoning) to ensure our faith keeps pace with the multifaceted complexities of the modern era.

The majestic building of societies necessitates the establishment of regulatory laws designed to bring divine order and social discipline to the varied lives of individuals. Laws refine human actions and provide a much-needed discipline to freedoms whenever they threaten to violate the sanctity and rights of others.

Establishing a family law is perhaps the most complex and delicate of human tasks; it is, in its essence, the preparation of a fertile civilizational ground. The family remains the primordial cell for a society governed by the twin virtues of justice and mercy.

The true revival of civilization begins with reviving correct human values and purifying our religious heritage from the accumulated stagnation of past eras of decline. The law must provide the opportunity for genuine, sovereign development without ever falling into the trap of cultural dependency. Laws are indispensable tools to guide society toward a state of knowledge and awareness that renders individuals the ultimate and sovereign judges of their own consciences.

Predicated upon exhaustive inquiries into our illustrious Islamic heritage and through meticulous comparative analyses with the diverse legal frameworks across the Arab world, I endeavored to project my voice within the hallowed halls of Parliament, anchored firmly by these profound and unshakeable convictions.

The monumental undertaking to draft a just and equitable Family Law was, in its essence, a mission of the utmost gravity and responsibility. It sought to forge a code that not only safeguarded the singular characteristics and the intrinsic specificities of the human being in Algeria but also labored relentlessly to exorcise every lingering vestige of systemic injustice and historical discrimination. These deleterious remnants are the unfortunate progeny of inherited mentalities—the byproduct of a protracted epoch of intellectual stagnation and a profound deficit of reflection that historically obstructed the pursuit of necessary remedies. Verily, nothing precludes us from the sacred practice of Ijtihad (interpretative reasoning) founded upon our primordial principles as they are; we issued a clarion call for an Islamic *Ijtihad* within the various branches of the law, one distinguished by its supple flexibility and its celestial essence of mercy.

We resolutely maintain that the foundational pillars of our faith, most notably Consensus (*Ijma'*) and Analogical Reasoning (*Qiyas*), (Ijtihad), constitute the most vital of all methodologies. These must be harnessed as the primary wellsprings of legislation, aiming toward a law that truly serves the sovereign interest of the people—contrary to the misguided desires of its diverse detractors. The pervasive stagnation and the rigid, unyielding interpretations surrounding our social issues represent a peril of the highest order. They threaten to erode and fragment the very sanctuary of the family unit, resulting in the profound suffering and the tragic displacement of its most vulnerable members.

The vast majority of these crises—prevalent within our own society and echoing across the Arab and Islamic world at

large—revolve around the harrowing practices of arbitrary divorce, bitter custody disputes, and the systematic deprivation of women's fundamental rights. These include the dark shadows of coerced unions, the blight of child marriages, and the abhorrent "trading" of a young girl's future to settle the material debts of a father, uncle, or brother in certain regions. These are injustices beyond counting.

I personally contributed to the deliberations of the National People's Assembly, proposing balanced and sophisticated solutions rooted in the very core and spirit of Islam and its transcendent values. I sought the path of enlightened moderation, perceiving the woman as an equal and autonomous human being to the man, entirely free from any extremist bias toward one or the other. Most regrettably, I did not always succeed in swaying the convictions of all—particularly those who sought to satisfy neither the fanatical voices on the right nor the radical elements on the left. Nevertheless, I remained resolutely anchored to a pivotal and defining principle: that extremism, regardless of its ideological direction, constitutes a perilous and destructive path. It is predicated upon a singular, suffocating mindset and a dogmatic defense of its own narrow posture, which in truth is nothing but a perpetual retreat from reality rather than a visionary, forward-looking aspiration.

I discovered that the path of moderation is an arduous and formidable odyssey, for it demands a monumental degree of mental and psychological equilibrium. It signifies the ultimate triumph of sovereign reason over the tides of raw emotion—a civilizational value of the highest order. Our sacred religious heritage was never ordained to function as a chain of bondage, but rather as a radiant and guiding light for humanity.

I recall with startling vividness a specific episode that unfolded during the incendiary battle between parliamentarians over the Algerian Family Law. There was a particular colleague among the deputies whose entire existence and life project appeared, to all observers, as being thoroughly Westernized and unreservedly secular. We recognized him by his everyday conduct—perpetually modern, unencumbered by the weight of tradition, and seemingly aloof from religious dictates. Yet, suddenly, amidst the solemn deliberations on the Family Law, we witnessed him ascend the podium and begin to cite Quranic verses with a calculated fervor to persuade his peers. He stood in fierce defense of the practice of polygamy, advocating for its unfettered necessity for men without a single condition or restriction. In doing so, he employed neither jurisprudential rigor nor sound legal logic, but rather resorted to a purely social and self-serving justification.

Our collective bewilderment at this sudden and profound transformation was absolute. It represented a startling and dangerous leap from one ideological shore to its polar opposite. The man who previously manifested no hesitation in branding Islam and its adherents as regressive and backward was now utilizing the sacred faith as a convenient shield. However, our visceral shock soon evaporated when the truth was unveiled: we discovered that the man had, in total secrecy, wedded more than one wife. It became clear then that he was attempting to meticulously tailor the Family Law to his own personal dimensions, satisfying his own caprices at every turn. Whenever he willed, he exploited the sacred texts for his private advantage—renderings that were entirely bereft of any genuine sense of justice or equity. This was an affront we could

never accept, for we were in a sacred quest for a code that could not be manipulated.

The manifestations and archetypes of systemic injustice within this arena were, and tragically continue to be, exceedingly severe throughout the vast expanse of the Arab and Islamic world. The woman remained relegated to a mere shadow within the labyrinthine mind of the man—concealed whenever his will dictated and revealed only when it suited his whim. She was handled as though she were a spectral presence, expected to remain perpetually silent, bereft of thought, devoid of desire, and animated only by his sovereign command.

I am reminded of an ancient and evocative folk myth concerning the "Matriarchs of the Moonlight"—venerable women who would congregate at the threshold of a hallowed saint's shrine to weave the tapestries of their personal chronicles. Each would pour the visceral contents of her grievances into the soul of the other, until their collective sighs and laments merged into a singular, overwhelming river of pained sorrow.

Their eyes were masterworks of human suffering, and their brows were indelibly etched with the ink of a "Mektoub" (Destiny) that spoke of ambiguous cataclysms and the silent tracks of tears upon defiant cheeks.

All of this constituted a stream of consciousness flowing toward a sense of pride not yet birthed—a narrative that began and concluded with the woman, whose life story would never be anything but a dormant seed within the womb of the unknown.

I find myself perpetually haunted by a question for which I have never unearthed a truly convincing answer:

"Can the Arab-Muslim soul ever truly taste the celestial nectar of freedom, so long as one half of its being remains shackled in the heavy chains of servitude?"

An Arduous Day in My Life

"The first woman to ascend to the rank of Minister in the chronicles of independent Algeria." This is a phrase that has been echoed by many with a blend of profound admiration and hushed wonder. I was not a woman without a past before this momentous juncture; yet, the event itself stood as a monumental historical milestone. It has never faded from my internal vision with the passage of the years, for it was a historical occurrence of the first order. Never have I permitted myself to forget it, nor have I ever ceased to grasp the profound magnitude of that precedent which was bestowed upon me among all the women of Algeria.

I understood then, with crystalline clarity, the formidable weight of that privilege—one which I never once sought nor pursued through the channels of ambition.

It was a day in the month of January **1982**. The President of the Republic, Chadli Bendjedid, summoned me to the hallowed sanctuary of his office to formally apprise me of my selection to preside over a State Secretariat for Social Affairs. He endeavored to dissolve my palpable hesitation by presenting this truth with his signature kindness and characteristic humility, declaring:

"You shall, by this very act, step into the annals of history."

Even certain among the brother ministers and eminent personalities—whom the President had specifically requested to exert their influence upon me due to our close professional and personal bonds—did not cease their tireless efforts to persuade me to accept the mantle. Among them was Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, who remarked during a final and fervent attempt at persuasion:

"Harbor no more hesitation. Embrace this path and set forth, and offer two Rak'ahs of profound gratitude to the Almighty. It is a magnificent honor for you; indeed, it is an honor that transcends your person to embrace the noble values you so faithfully carry."

On that momentous day, I had been immersed in a continuous assembly throughout the entire morning at the National People's Assembly. The special committee was being presided over by Mr. Boualem Baki, the Minister of Justice, with the singular and arduous objective of forging a definitive consensus on certain pending and incendiary issues within the Family Law—as I have alluded to in previous chronicles.

Suddenly, the Director of Protocol for the Assembly approached my station and whispered with an air of solemnity:

—"Madam... the President of the Assembly, Si Rabah Bitat, requests your presence immediately within his private chambers."

I ascended to the office of Brother Rabah Bitat, only to find him standing with his signature welcoming smile—distinguished by that innate modesty and graciousness that was his enduring custom. Without any elaborate preamble, and without even inviting me to take a seat, he declared with a sense of high urgency:

—"The President of the Republic requires your immediate presence within his office at the Presidency. A sovereign vehicle has been placed at your exclusive disposal."

In essence, the President had dispatched a direct summons. I was instantaneously struck by a visceral surge of profound fear. What could be the nature of such a sudden and urgent call? My

mind became a vortex of frantic questioning, and I stood before Si Rabah—transparent and direct as has always been my nature. I made no attempt to veil my deep anxiety and bewilderment from him. I inquired with a voice that betrayed an internal tremor:

—"Si Rabah... pray, what is the matter? Does this concern the Family Law? I am well aware that I possess a certain rhetorical boldness—a 'long tongue' as they say—regarding that legislation; perhaps the President is awaiting me to deliver an official admonishment or a stern censure?"

Si Rabah did not cease his gentle and reassuring smiling. He patted my shoulder with fraternal care and remarked:

—"Calm your spirit, Zhour. It is a propitious surprise—a most pleasant revelation—that awaits you. You are truly worthy of every good thing. I possess no authority to divulge more than that."

I felt a modicum of reassurance, yet my heart persisted in its frantic and irregular rhythm. Upon arrival at the Presidency, as I stood before the threshold of the office of the President of the Republic, I felt as though I were an actor suspended within a dream—or perhaps a looming nightmare. Notwithstanding the President's manifest kindness and his legendary humility, I was utterly overwhelmed by a profound and overwhelming sense of majestic awe.

—"Mr. President," I managed to utter as I stood before him. He observed me with a steady gaze and spoke: *"Given your tireless and continued devotion to the cause, and in light of your storied revolutionary odyssey and your formidable cultural stature, I have resolved—in consultation with the leadership—to entrust you with this grave and momentous mission in the*

forthcoming ministerial reshuffle. It is a responsibility of immense weight and significant national consequence."

My silence in that moment was not born of any deficit in professional etiquette or social poise; rather, it was the captive progeny of a visceral and paralyzing dread. I finally found the strength to speak, my voice a reflection of my internal tumult:

—"Mr. President, this is an honor of truly monumental proportions, yet I harbor a deep-seated and terrifying fear... I beseech you, allow me to continue my struggle from the cloistered back lines. This is a gargantuan responsibility, and as you are well aware, I am a woman anchored in unyielding principles and an absolute, sacred commitment. I harbor a profound dread that I may falter or fail to meet the requirements of this new and daunting arena."

He laughed with a fatherly, reassuring warmth and replied:

—"And pray, who among us is entirely bereft of fear when confronted with such a formidable weight? Yet, the relentless dictates of necessity command that we cast aside our trepidation and our hesitation, so that we may discharge our sacred obligations to our nation with absolute resolve and unwavering fortitude."

Then, he added with a touch of poignant reality:

—"And which one of us, among our ranks as mujahideen, could ever boast of a sire who was himself a President or a Minister of the state?"

I absorbed his words with a state of intense and concentrated interest, then offered a final plea:

—"Mr. President... I implore you, permit me a brief interval for consultation."

He looked at me with a spark of intrigued surprise and inquired:

—"And with whom, pray tell, do you intend to take counsel?"

I replied with an absolute and resolute firmness:

—"I must seek the counsel of my husband, sir. I hold the unwavering conviction that he is the primordial arbiter and the foremost individual whose blessing and consent must be secured for such a momentous mission. Is that not the very essence of our values?"

He responded to my words with a gaze brimming with visible satisfaction and a profound sense of respect, declaring:

—"Seek the counsel of your husband, by all means. I am confident that he will take immense pride in your achievements and shall graciously grant his blessing. I await your definitive response before the stroke of four o'clock."

...Truly, the mission demanded monumental commitments and the most arduous of sovereign duties. The paramount imperative remained that I should provide my final decision before the definitive stroke of four o’clock.

I learned subsequently that the President had received my remarks with a profound sense of admiration. He realized that a sovereign leader must always harbor a deep respect for those who possess the intellectual fortitude to be courageous in their political convictions. Or perhaps he perceived that I was—and have eternally remained—among those who never once wavered from their fierce independence from any factional alignment or any preordained political camp.

I departed the hallowed precincts of the Presidency, my mind and soul caught in a tumultuous and dizzying whirlwind.

This was, in its essence, a "beautiful calamity," yet it was a calamity that seemed utterly impossible to decline. I found myself haunted by a single, agonizing inquiry: how could I possibly navigate the demands of such a majestic mission with success, without it being at the profound expense of my small, cherished family?

No sooner had the news of my selection emanated from the Presidency than I was greeted by a tidal wave of fervent and warm congratulations. This spontaneous outpouring served to dissipate much of the lurking fear and the lingering hesitation that had clouded my heart. I was particularly moved by the gesture of one of our militant sisters—one of those who were the very first to offer their felicitations upon the formal announcement of my name among the members of the new government. It was the sister Meriem Belmihoub-Zerdani, who subsequently ascended to a distinguished legal station.

She, like me, harbored the sacred conviction that every achievement attained by a woman in Algeria is, in truth, a resounding victory for every Arab woman—nay, for every woman in every corner of the globe.

A Lioness or a Cat?

When I assumed the sovereign mantle of a Minister, I suddenly found myself compelled to alter certain of my innate behaviors—those which had historically been stamped with absolute freedom, swift movement, and a raw, unadorned spontaneity, whether within the sanctuary of my home or in the world beyond.

As I began to practice my labors within the complex gears of the administration and its winding corridors, I felt as though I were in a relentless process of strategic management or decisive leadership. I acted with a distinct courage and an unwavering intensity. It was as though I were a "Lioness" of the state, listening with a sharp ear to diverse opinions and ideas, absorbing and dissecting every minute detail and every grand scheme. I permitted not a single generality or intricate specific to escape my scrutiny. I moved always with a visceral sense of the coming responsibility, for I felt that I was perpetually walking upon the edge of a trap or a daunting pit—having previously been someone who never deliberated excessively before speaking or listening. I had historically approached matters with a very innocent spontaneity, a trait that had frequently landed me in significant difficulties, both within my home and outside it.

Within the confines of this elevated station, my newfound vigilance became, in truth, my primary and indispensable shield. I perceived my immense responsibility as a sacred trust that had been placed, by the hand of Destiny, within my own hands.

I found the spirit of my grandmother inhabiting my consciousness for a protracted interval throughout this tenure,

and the trust that bound us together was absolute and unyielding.

During the inaugural week of my appointment, a high-ranking official within the Social Insurance apparatus approached my presence. He spoke with a voice that carried the heavy resonance of an urgent warning:

—"Madam... there is a surreptitious decision currently being orchestrated this week between the Ministry of Health and our own sector. It has come to my knowledge that one of the senior officials in the Social Insurance department is planning to issue a decree—one entirely bereft of legal merit—to facilitate the transfer of a monumental sum of capital from the Health sector to an entirely different sector. This maneuver is intended to act as an addition to the designated grants already codified within the Finance Law."

Thus, certain opportunistic elements endeavored to exploit the "Temporal Fissure" created by the administrative metamorphosis of the sector from a mere State Secretariat into a full-fledged Ministry of Social Protection. They sought to conduct these maneuvers under the cover of this transition. I found myself asking with a pained bewilderment:

—"Why must such calculated stratagems manifest on my very first day presiding over the ministerial chair? Why this pervasive atmosphere of tension and visceral dread from the very onset of my mission?"

Yet, as much as I functioned as a formidable "Lioness" while orchestrating the affairs of the sector and bearing the weight of its nascent responsibility, I underwent a complete transformation once I crossed the threshold of my home. I would shed that "Lioness" persona and resume the identity of

the "Gentle Cat"—the woman who felt a sacred obligation to separate her formidable professional being from her quintessential domestic essence.

There existed a husband and a family who stood in expectation of my services, awaiting my smile, my tenderness, and my maternal care—notwithstanding the monumental problems and the exhaustion I had lived through during the day.

These were multifaceted and labyrinthine dilemmas that defied any simplistic resolution within the span of a single sun. Rather, they constituted a relentless succession of interconnected crises that never truly reached a finality; they merely receded to yield their place to other, more pressing anxieties and burgeoning difficulties.

I would arrive at the sanctuary of my home and bolt the door behind me, as though I were sealing off an entire universe and retreating into another. It was a paramount necessity that my domestic life remain entirely sequestered from the professional world I had just exited; had I failed in this separation, existence itself would have been transmuted into an unbearable inferno.

Did I emerge triumphant in this daunting endeavor? Verily, I did, but only after a protracted and grueling apprenticeship of the spirit. What I achieved was the arduous harvest of immense tension, profound anxiety, and many a sleepless vigil. It is, in absolute truth, no trivial feat for a woman to occupy the sovereign seat of a Minister—with all its high responsibilities—while simultaneously striving to preserve her maternal sanctity, to shield her children from the shadows of public life, and to

meticulously nurture that delicate harmony and that radiant, warm spirit between her, her spouse, and her family at large.

One might venture to label this state as a "fragmented persona," yet I would argue it was, in essence, a relentless and heroic struggle to harmonize one's soul with the unyielding dictates of circumstance. It was the ordained lot of a woman within the "Third World" to navigate these conditions with a heightened consciousness, fully aware that her destiny was to personify and experience this radical, transformative shift within the prevailing and often ossified mentalities of her era.

A Sovereign Mind in Feminine Form

I wish to record here a monumental observation: a political station of the magnitude I occupied—as the inaugural woman minister in the history of a newly sovereign Algeria, presiding for five consecutive years over two of the most vital sectors for our social collective: the Ministry of Social Protection and subsequently the Ministry of National Education—is, in its very essence, the cornerstone of the civilizational project for any community.

I must unequivocally assert that such a high office is, in stark reality, a primordial and fundamental right for the women of my nation. It is an honor they have meticulously earned through a grueling and bitter odyssey of struggle for victory and the definitive restoration of our national sovereignty. Throughout the various and unrelenting Algerian revolutions and popular uprisings, this was never a "magnanimous gift" bestowed by any individual, even if it ostensibly appeared so to some. It seemed that the political order, through this bold and pioneering initiative, had finally manifested its intent to honor the epic struggle of women—who represent the vibrant half of our society—and its solemn commitment to actualizing the articles of the Algerian Constitution. This document affirms absolute equality between the genders in tangible practice, not merely in abstract theory.

Before that historical threshold, women were acutely aware that the interest manifested toward them frequently surfaced only in moments of visceral and pressing national necessity, primarily because they constituted a formidable and expansive demographic power, even if perceived only through the prism of numerical strength.

Therefore, I record here as well that this fundamental right arrived noticeably late in time, when measured against the distinguished and heroic role that women played in Algeria—at the very least, when contrasted with the trajectories within the Arab world and the "Third World" at large.

Notwithstanding all the intricate details I have deliberately left unmentioned, everyone—both the skeptics and the ardent supporters alike—eventually converged upon the absolute necessity of acknowledging the woman's role in its most comprehensive sense. This recognition, however belated it may have been, was rendered inevitable by the sheer weight of history.

I perpetually felt, while inhabiting this high office, that I was far more than a mere individual; I was a living symbol. An archetype that was duty-bound to remain luminous and untarnished. Destiny had willed that I should be this representative, standing as a poignant testament for all the women of Algeria—most specifically the valiant *mujahidat* of the War of Liberation—and indeed, for all women across the global stage. The struggle of women, regardless of geography, is a singular, unified crusade against the barricades of discrimination, injustice, and systematic oppression.

I embraced this sovereign post and its formidable mission only after a period of intense hesitation, visceral fear, and a profound sense of spiritual trepidation. Why such reluctance?

First: The haunting possibility that my husband might find it difficult to reconcile his spirit with a position specifically tailored for his spouse. How could an Arab man, rooted in his traditions and heritage, respond to his life partner being addressed as "Minister" or "Director"? what would his internal

reaction be? He was a man of significant stature, whose own intellect and formidable capabilities entitled him to the highest honors.

Second: The paralyzing fear concerning the sheer difficulty of the mission itself, and the looming specter of failure. I was acutely aware that failure in such a monumental undertaking would, God forbid, result in a catastrophic setback for the collective path of women toward such high sovereign offices in the future. Conversely, success would serve to fling wide the gates of ambition for women to inhabit the most senior positions within the state.

This was an entirely unprecedented phenomenon in the political chronicles of our nation. It was a visionary initiative credited to its architect, the Brother Mujahid and President Chadli Bendjedid. In the eyes of the Brother President, this was a positive, courageous, and pioneering stride—one that decisively challenged those regressive mentalities which stubbornly refused to permit a woman to inhabit the summits of state authority. Such mentalities were often rooted in a modern-day skepticism, entirely unsupported by the authentic Prophetic traditions that some erroneously claimed, such as the erroneous interpretation of certain traditions. The lived reality, however, was that new portals were flung wide open in my wake for dozens of women who subsequently ascended to the ranks of ministers, state secretaries, and custodians of major portfolios. They emerged as directors of formidable institutions, presidents of sovereign councils, and distinguished ambassadors of the nation.

This progress was further amplified following our entry into the arena of political pluralism; the woman's presence expanded exponentially to head opposition parties, contest the

highest office of the Presidency, and represent the vibrant pulse of civil society within hundreds of scientific, media, and social associations. This evolution served as an irrefutable testament that the presence of the woman within the halls of power was not a fleeting anomaly, but a civilizational necessity—one no longer subject to the whims of individual injustice or the caprice of human prejudice; she continues to hold her rightful station by the very logic of enlightened leadership and sovereign governance.

It was an entirely pristine and unprecedented experience being lived for the very first time in our history. I stood among those who bore its formidable weight—a responsibility to which the Algerian woman was previously unaccustomed. I found myself positioned under a relentless and unforgiving spotlight; every measured move, every pregnant silence, every articulated word, and every decisive action was subjected to an exhausting scrutiny. Even the cadence of my laughter, the specific style of my hair, and the very raiment I donned became subjects for the daily assessment of my professional performance and my character by the direct President of the nation.

The political leadership of that era was struck with profound astonishment by my palpable hesitation and my visceral fear. How could a woman possibly decline a position of such sovereign honor, at a time when men—and indeed women too—were engaged in a frantic daily race to secure responsibilities? In their estimation, ministerial portfolios were the ultimate, hallowed objectives of an administrative career or the harvest of strategic political maneuvering, often reached even through the most suspicious and labyrinthine means.

Was my reluctance born of the fact that I was a woman devoid of the vast, consuming ambition that so often characterizes the man? Or was it because I, as a matter of fundamental principle, never once aspired to any position of power for my own sake, no matter how modest? Verily, my psychological makeup was distinct in this regard. All my revolutionary endeavors and my militant activities were performed as a sacred duty; not once were they conceived as calculated strides toward self-serving goals or narrow personal interests. I harbor no inherent ambition within those specific fields.

This remains the quintessential response for an individual who truly comprehends the monumental gravity inherent in the mantle of responsibility. It is a sacred burden we are destined to carry with solemnity, rather than a mere privilege of vanity to be enjoyed. We are bound to labor with such unyielding integrity that we avoid the labyrinth of a thousand unsettled accounts, and ensure we are not found wanting in the very sectors where we serve—for in the final analysis, it is we who serve the people, while the people are the ones who pay the staggering price for our missteps, our deficiencies, and our lapses in professional competence. This is precisely because the People remain the governed, while we are ordained, for a time, as the rulers.

I ultimately surrendered to the acceptance of this high office following that protracted interval of profound hesitation and visceral trepidation. To my mind, it represented a pristine archetype of struggle—a magnificent addition to my previous revolutionary efforts. I grasped with absolute clarity the formidable complexity of the task ahead, for it constituted a definitive and historical judgment upon the feminine essence

first, and upon the masculine collective second. This man, in whose consciousness the cause of women is frequently relegated to a "First and Last Cause," is himself a seedling from his own planting, perpetually revolving around his own ego without genuine regard for the "Other." He remains the sole architect of ideas and the supreme legislator of theories and laws; he perceives himself as the primordial author of everything, to the exclusion of all others. This pervasive dynamic serves only to render the woman as nothing more than a subservient instrument for execution and implementation.

Did not the illustrious philosopher Plato relegate women to the very lowest rungs of the social order among the inhabitants of his "Ideal Republic"? For, in his philosophical estimation, they were not the sovereign masters of laws, as he alone claimed the mantle of the author of all such profound thoughts and transformative theories. Within that classical framework, the woman was perceived as but a tool for mechanical implementation.

I recall with crystalline clarity one particular day, during a closed session of the Parliament in **1977**, following the formal inauguration of the first elected legislative term. The assembly was presided over by the late Houari Boumediene, one of the grand architects of the November Revolution. On that occasion, he opened the sanctuary of his heart to us, permitting us to articulate whatever we desired to the leadership and to express the visceral emotions we harbored following our victory in the legislative elections.

We stood as a select vanguard of ten women amidst scores of men. نحن assumed our rightful places and shared the manifold roles of posing inquiries to the President. It fell to my

lot to articulate further questions and seek deeper clarifications. The specific inquiry was posed by our sister, Baya al-Hashimi—a renowned luminary of the media world. She asked:

—*"Mr. President, by what logic do you interpret the triumph of a mere ten women in these elections? It remains a startlingly modest number when measured against the vast demographic weight of women in our society and the staggering magnitude of the tribulations and problems they endure."*

The President responded, after taking a deliberate and measured draw from his cigarette, a smile barely disturbing the majestic serenity and crystalline clarity of his noble features. He spoke:

—*"Lend me your ear, Baya. Verily, woman herself can be a formidable adversary to woman. This truth is by no means an ultimate justification for the predicament you have described, yet it remains the stark and unvarnished reality."*

I whispered then to the sanctuary of my own soul:

—*"Indeed, it is a lived reality. How often does a woman manifest nothing but a repressed and excessive tenderness exclusively for her male offspring? She frequently harbors an affection for him that far outweighs her love for her daughter. It is the woman herself who, all too often, exacts vengeance upon the spouse of her son while relentlessly pampering the son himself."*

The President's insight had touched the very heart of that matter; his logic was incisive, direct, and profoundly convincing.

Subsequently, I posed further inquiries to my own heart: is this phenomenon rooted in jealousy? Or is it the bitter fruit of

envy? I was inclined to believe it was neither. For envy and jealousy are universal human behaviors that characterize the entire human species, not merely women. I have discovered that the successes achieved by women frequently transcend the established boundaries of the general rule. Their triumphs stand as an exception, achieved far beyond the common grassroots base. This exceptional nature of women's progress, however, often elicits a visceral shock that the traditional social structure struggles to absorb. Consequently, I found myself braced for a multitude of daunting surprises—many of which were quite unpleasant. I prepared my spirit to encounter a spectrum of pained reactions, from patronizing pity to mocking derision, all of which became most palpable during my formal speeches and public appearances.

Therefore, I strived from the very onset to impose upon every soul my treatment as a sovereign Mind, rather than a mere feminine form. I asserted myself as an entity possessing an enlightened intellect and a profound capacity for human thought—rather than merely mimicking the ways of man. I am a female endowed with reason. The Almighty never withheld from the woman a mind or the capacity for rigorous thought, notwithstanding the stagnant beliefs of some. For her, abilities are not a transmuted gift; her success and her superiority in every labor she performs are authentically and inherently her own.

I navigated through interminable days and restless nights of sheer exhaustion, relentless effort, and high-strung tension before reaching any tangible positive results. I made it my custom to travel every single week to one of the provinces (Wilayas) in my official capacity, personally inspecting the progress of projects, the status of workshops, and the manifold

needs within the fields of social protection and national education. I attended ministerial councils and the daily assemblies within my sector, and subsequently participated in governmental meetings, in addition to the incessant sessions at the Presidency. I refrained from excessive international travel, reserving such journeys for cases of absolute necessity; instead, I entrusted my ministerial cadres with the honor of representing the sector in the most magnificent manner possible. I bear witness before all—and it is my firm conviction—that my triumphs were achieved not because I endeavored to become a "Man" or even half of one. Nay! I attained true success precisely because I am a Woman.

"So-and-so is like a man"—this is frequently uttered as a purported proof of human perfection. Yet, I was never once tolerant of the erasure of my gender identity. I practiced this mission and achieved within it, praise be to God, significant and far-reaching accomplishments. I am recognized by both the ordinary citizen and the wise observer, and I have left behind achievements that organized and framed the lives of the disabled category across all fields. We codified the life of the handicapped within unions organized across all sectors, even extending to the athletic arena. Algeria became a pioneering model followed in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, particularly through coordination with Queen Noor al-Hussein, who embraced the Algerian model with extraordinary seriousness and consideration. This successful structuring of the sector was a historic necessity, providing a unified sanctuary after these marginalized categories and this vital segment of our society had historically been scattered across diverse other sectors where they received nothing save for systematic neglect and institutional marginalization.

A multitude of radical and positive transformations were subsequently inaugurated regarding both the material and moral status of these weary groups of citizens, whether on the level of focused social care or rigorous organizational stewardship. Each group was brought under a unified and dignified framework through formal administrative and athletic channels, whereas previously they had been dispersed among various ministries and departments, often lost in the shadows of bureaucratic indifference.

My supreme preoccupation remained perpetually the resolution of the tribulations facing the greatest possible number of our citizens. I held the sacred conviction that my presence in this sovereign office was ordained solely to alleviate the sorrows of the people, and that I served as the primary address for every form of national social protection. I frequently found myself pleading with my fellow ministers on behalf of exceptionally arduous human cases—those arising from terminal illness or those trapped in a state of profound distress: the orphans of our martyrs, women enduring grueling circumstances due to malady, arbitrary divorce, or cold eviction from the marital hearth, alongside many other multifaceted human tragedies.

I dismantled various ranks of administrative barricades that stood as formidable obstacles before the developmental trajectory. My heart and mind were occupied with the demographic evolution within our villages, dedicating profound attention to the plight of mothers and young girls, and to the displaced and marginalized who had been cast aside for one reason or another. Naturally, this included providing a robust voice for the diverse categories of the disabled.

Among those urgent national demands: I was designated to coordinate with the General Directorate for National Security, working in a profound and seamless manner with my brother mujahid, the head of the National Security apparatus. together, we presided over a specialized committee specifically aimed at combatting and eradicating the insidious plague of drugs within the circles of our youth.

Every one of these multifaceted categories received its rightful framing, meticulous organization, and rigorous training within the sanctuary of the social protection framework. This endeavor justified its existence and presented, within its hallowed folds, a series of new republican laws of the highest order. These were regarded as among the most distinguished proposals ever submitted to the Parliament for formal ratification—legislative frameworks whose validity and wisdom resonated across the entire Arab world and the "Third World," most particularly those pertaining to the rights of retirees and the systems of social insurance. We fought a monumental and grueling battle for the sake of these laws, specifically concerning the "Maternity Leave" legislation, which certain voices endeavored to extirpate entirely, driven by a shrouded and regressive background that perceived no inherent necessity for the presence of women within the professional labor market.

In this context, I must evoke with profound gratitude the formidable and unyielding assistance provided to our cause by the venerable Speaker of the Assembly, Si Rabah Bitat, whose stewardship remained a decisive factor until we finally emerged triumphant in this noble crusade.

I recall with a touch of pained tenderness a day when a father addressed me while I was inaugurating an educational

institution in his remote village, nestled deep within the interior of our land. He looked at me and declared with a solemn vow:

—"I pledge to you, Madam Minister, that my daughter shall complete every single stage of her academic destiny, even if I am compelled to return to the most grueling labor to ensure that end. My entire family harbors the singular desire that she might one day become like you, should the Almighty so will."

My heart overflowed with jubilation at the man's noble aspiration, and I responded with the visceral sincerity of my soul:

—"The exception is that which laboriously breaks the common rule, and the world, thank God, remains in a state of spiritual health. For the fundamental flaw, in the final analysis, does not manifest in human nature itself, but rather in the earned mind and its perceptions."

And I found myself asking during those days:

—"Why was all this concentrated attention bestowed exclusively upon the simple, marginalized categories? Why this immersive interest in the tears, the pained sighs, and the hidden sorrows of the disenfranchised, instead of exploiting the radiant opportunities for a life defined by fame, immense prestige, and the intoxicating allure of power?"

The answer, for which I would later search across its manifold reasons and hidden motivations, continues to pull at the strings of my memories to this very day. Perhaps these dualities did not truly yield to one another in the end. It is, quite simply, my childhood—the simple folk, the labyrinthine back alleys of my youth, the profound depth of my country, and the visceral aches and luminous dreams of the deprived classes.

One day, I stood beside a venerable elder serving as a doorkeeper within the halls of the Ministry of Education. He was but a few short months away from his ordained retirement. He shared with me his most fervent aspiration, after offering his greetings and expressing his longing to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy House of Allah for himself and his spouse. As he was unaware of my sovereign rank as Minister, he perceived me merely as another compassionate official. When his dream was finally realized through my facilitation and he returned safe and sound from the hallowed sanctuary, he bestowed upon me a majestic and priceless offering as he prepared to depart from the institution forever: a Noble Quran he had meticulously transcribed by his own hand, letter by letter, verse by verse. He had consecrated his final months before his departure to this sacred labor—as if he were dedicating a holy manuscript to me, one written not by the mechanical coldness of a printing press, but by the very pulse of our shared aging and our common time.

A Woman Director at the Province Level

Within the administrative reaches of our various provinces (*Wilayas*), a woman had not yet attained the sovereign rank of a director of a specific sector or an entire administrative unit. This remained, throughout that era, the exclusive and unchallenged province of men alone. The stewardship of Education at the provincial level, the direction of Media, the management of Culture, the oversight of Youth and Sports, the administration of Health, Transportation, and Agriculture—all of these formidable roles were occupied solely by men.

Following a period of profound reflection, and as I bore witness to the monumental efforts exerted by women within the social protection sector and those marginalized groups that had come under our ministry's aegis, I became resolutely focused on the visionary idea of appointing women as directors at the provincial level, to replace the men who had traditionally managed these sectors. I formally presented this strategic project to the Brother Mujahid **Abdelghani**, who was then the Prime Minister. Without the slightest tremor of hesitation, he replied with unyielding support:

—"If there exist female cadres who are truly worthy of such a mantle and who possess the requisite competence and sense of responsibility, then proceed with the blessing of the Almighty."

And thus, through this bold and visionary initiative and the manifestation of an unassailable trust in the multifaceted capabilities of women, they unequivocally proved their professional competence, their profound worthiness, and their unyielding sense of responsibility. They demonstrated that a female worker, her performance, and the tangible results she yielded in every province—across all provinces according to the

administrative division at that time—and her direct coordination with the *Wali* (Governor) and other sector directors, was a resounding success.

She stood, in truth, as the authentic and dignified representative for the sanctuary of the family, the sacred innocence of childhood, and the entire spectrum of social tribulations. This station, which women had never previously attained in our history, served to validate her responsibility and her professional caliber as a director for the sector. She manifested a high and refined level of leadership in the arduous labor of national development. Through her actions, she proved that her presence in high sovereign offices was not a mere novelty, but a civilizational necessity. She further established the truth that should a failure occur within a leadership sector—if it were to happen at all—it would be a failure attributable to the sector itself, and never simply because it was presided over by a woman.

The reaction among a certain segment of society was a quintessentially "Masculine" one, at times surpassing the skepticism and resistance manifested by the men themselves. Certain voices would remark: *"So-and-so is as though she were a man,"* perceiving this comparison as a supreme testament to human perfection. Yet, I was never once tolerant of the systematic erasure of my essential gender identity. I practiced this majestic mission and achieved within its framework, praise be to God, significant accomplishments that were both meticulously organized and elegantly framed.

I recall vividly today that the general responses were overwhelmingly positive. There was an immense and gracious intake for these pioneering initiatives. I harbor the firm belief that there was a positive and welcoming reception for these

changes from the depths of society itself. Did the ordinary members of the people truly react with negativity or cynicism? By no means. Rather, these initiatives, despite the political blowback emanating from those whom I classify as the "Semi-Educated"—individuals possessed by a diseased mindset whose singular obsession was to prove that women remain fundamentally incapable in our professional labors and public activities—they sought only to prove that she is inherently unfit for the mantle of leadership.

Preconceived and preordained judgments all too often cast their long, darkening shadows upon our developmental path. Subjective, narrow objectives had taken deep root within their hearts, transmuting into formidable barriers and unyielding obstacles that stood defiantly before our humanist and civilizational program.

—*"Verily, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."* (The Holy Quran).

In light of this, I recall receiving one day a copy of a significant missive, delivered into my hands by my illustrious mentor and brother, Dr. Abdelmajid Meziane. It was an epistle that one of the venerable sheikhs and esteemed jurists from the city of Tlemcen had composed and dispatched to the President of the Republic. Within its lines, he sought to remind the President of the primordial principles of Islam regarding the preservation of public ethics through a strict conservatism toward women, going so far as to articulate, with a startling literalness:

—*"We have placed upon the woman formidable encumbrances and arduous tasks that do not harmonize with the quintessential nature with which the Almighty has*

fashioned her—nature defined by kindness, tenderness, and visceral compassion. We have, thus, neglected the hallowed mission of raising and nurturing generations, which is from her core and primary specialties."

The Sheikh articulated these words so as not to explicitly declare: *"Cursed is a people who are ruled by a woman!"*

I appreciated the Sheikh's feelings, the author of that missive, and his call for the protection of women and the sanctity of ethics, but I could not stop myself from posing a profound and persistent inquiry:

—"Pray, why do you seek to stipulate ethics for the virtuous woman only, at a historical juncture when the sublime virtues of ethics were ordained for the entirety of mankind, and we Muslims were intended to be at the very vanguard?"

Was all of that for the ultimate benefit or the detriment of these societal phenomena? Or were they merely an indispensable and logical link in the great, convoluted cycle of a complex life? I eventually responded to my own soul:

—"Perhaps they are neither intrinsically good nor evil; they are but a necessary and logical link in the majestic cycle of a multifaceted existence."

To have been present for more than four decades within the echelons of political leadership, traversing the diverse landscapes of media, serving under the august dome of Parliament, and functioning within the heart of the Party—holding membership in the Central Committee—as well as presiding within the Government with its labyrinthine files and momentous projects: all of this must inevitably bestow upon its bearer a state of perpetual learning and the acquisition of a vast reservoir of experiences and seasoned expertise across a myriad of disciplines, significantly more than others might ever hope to aggregate. It is an essential condition of active citizenship, akin to that of an erudite student, to glean and derive profound benefit from the rich and varied experiences of others.

In stark reality, the ascension to the sovereign rank of Minister does not imply that one has attained omniscience or an absolute mastery over every subject. Rather, it signifies that your vantage point has become more expansive; indeed, the station of a Minister resides at a unique zenith precisely because the scope of the responsibility is more monumental than any other.

I recall with crystalline clarity that certain senior cadres under my supervision were, in fact, guiding lights in their specialized fields; they would daily provide me with profound insights and visionary ideas, looking to my authority to bring those visions to fruition.

It was through such immersive experiences and the poignant chronicles of elderly matriarchs, widows, and the orphans of the "Lyouq" village—nestled within one of the verdant oases

of Biskra in the profound heart of the nation—that I composed what I consider to be the most sublime of my novels. These human landscapes were the very ink for my prose as I explored the hidden depths of that hallowed soil of our beloved motherland. This migration toward the south was, in its essence, a quest for that sanctuary of security and crystalline tranquility—an immersion into a pristine and virgin atmosphere where the creative spirit is at last liberated from every terrestrial shackle.

And thus, notwithstanding the exhaustive field itineraries and the immersive encounters with the citizenry in the very depths of our rural reaches, I was frequently besieged by a persistent and heavy sense of profound ennui. Yet, let it be clearly understood that this was never a tedium born of society itself or the unyielding loyalty I held for its urgent and visceral needs. Rather, it was a weariness directed toward certain executive spheres within the machinery of the state—a profound and pained frustration with the glacial, sluggish pace of project implementation when measured against the feverish velocity and the meticulous rigor with which those very projects were initially conceived and prepared.

I operated within a professional rhythm that was notably swift and intense compared to my contemporaries, yet I remained acutely aware that I did not stand as a solitary figure in the arena. I was by no means an entity sequestered or isolated from the strategic designs of other administrative sectors. Inevitably, the success of our endeavors necessitated a direct or indirect symphony of contribution from various ministerial spheres; for the process of national development is, in its essence, a unified and indivisible imperative. To attempt a separation between its multifaceted aspects is an exercise in

absolute futility! It constitutes an integrated and holistic operation of the highest order.

I came to the agonizing realization then that the initiatives of my own sector could only be hailed as a genuine success if every other administrative wing manifested a total and unswerving commitment to the cause. Coordination and a profound civilizational integration between disparate sectors remained the vital artery of progress; for pray, what is the ultimate utility of a legislative masterpiece such as the "Family Law" project being meticulously prepared and formally ratified by the sovereign Parliament, if the various sectors of the State do not thereafter consecrate themselves to the faithful implementation of its mandates and the rigorous fulfillment of its multifaceted requirements?

I find myself posing a piercing inquiry to the conscience of governance:

— "Where, then, is the professional discipline and the symphonic harmony in our labor? When shall the official within the nations of the 'Third World' attain a state of true discipline and absolute commitment, unless his very soul is first profoundly convinced? When shall we see an era where individual caprice or the flickering ideas of a single person are no longer permitted to overshadow the majesty of national projects, and where the dark specters of stubborn regionalism and stagnant mental baggage cease to be the defining hallmarks of rule within these lands?"

Consider, for instance, the quintessential challenge of "Family Planning" initiatives as they were meticulously woven across our various provinces (Wilayas). This was a project of immense social magnitude, one that demanded a delicate

symphony of coordination with the average citizen just as much as it necessitated a rigorous synchronization with the executive leadership of other administrative sectors.

Most regrettably, certain high-ranking officials within those very sectors remained fundamentally unconvinced of the subject's paramount importance, harboring their own idiosyncratic opinions and distinct, localized hierarchies in the developmental process. They remained largely sequestered within their narrow vistas, far removed from the overarching and sacred interest of the society as a whole. They observed the unfolding of events through the restrictive prism of their own limited views and transient personal interests. It was not merely that they stood in opposition to the concept of coordination, but rather that their spirits were found to be distant and detached from the common foundational aspirations of the general public.

It was my fervent hope that, as we reflected upon these discordant exceptions, we would succeed in propelling our society a significant and majestic stride forward by systematically eradicating these formidable administrative obstacles.

The resounding triumphs of my foundational principles in the arena of labor were, in absolute truth, the noble progeny of a fierce and unyielding professional integrity. I remained steadfast in my insistence on the absolute necessity of extending a robust mantle of social protection to every vulnerable cohort; for I hold the unwavering conviction that one of the primordial bedrocks of social justice is the shielded elevation of the most frail and marginalized segments within our collective human family.

I have previously articulated that we arrived at tangible results that elicited the profound satisfaction and won the unmitigated admiration of both the simple citizen and the intellectual elite alike. Pray, why did the common citizen embrace me with such visceral acceptance? It was because they perceived that I was, in essence, one of them—authentically articulating their myriad woes and deeply feeling the rhythmic pulse of their own pains. In other words, I was transmuted into an "Empowered Citizen" who had rightfully earned the trust and the unassailable credibility of the common folk through my devotion to knowledge and, most specifically, to the diverse categories of the disabled; for in my voice, they finally discovered their own.

The methodologies of professional conduct are as varied as they are intricate. It is, in absolute truth, no trivial undertaking to inhabit the dual identity of a valiant activist—passionately championing the sacred causes of the people—and a successful, pragmatic Minister of the State simultaneously.

Notwithstanding the inherent complexities of such a duality, I attained a state of quiet certainty in the following years that I had, in fact, orchestrated momentous strides forward. I stood as a woman who had successfully galvanized the very foundations of the sector! Verily, those strides were manifold; I harbored the profound belief that they would serve to pave the arduous path for the women who would inevitably follow in my wake in the coming days. My objective was to render their journey free from the most formidable barricades and the stagnant, diseased mentalities that had, for so long, cast a darkening shadow over the collective destiny and the historical progress of our society.

It was in recognition of this tireless and principled devotion that I became the inaugural Minister of the Republic to be formally honored by the National Liberation Front (FLN)—a majestic ceremony of recognition graced by the presence of legendary *mujahideen* and valiant militants, presided over by our venerable brother, the Mujahid Abdelhamid Mehri (may the Almighty lengthen his days in health and wellness)

Seeking a General Secretary

Within the inaugural week of my sovereign appointment as the presiding head of the State Secretariat for Social Affairs, a telephonic summons arrived from the very summit of the Presidency of the Republic. It was from our brother, Larbi Belkheir, who then occupied the formidable and influential station of Chief of Staff to the Presidency. He extended a gracious invitation for me to visit him within the hallowed confines of his official chambers.

Upon my arrival at his office, following the customary and respectful exchange of diplomatic formalities and mutual greetings, he addressed me with a significant and focused gravity:

— *"The President* Chadli Bendjedid *has issued a supreme directive that I should nominate for your consideration a high-level cadre of the first order—an individual uniquely capable of serving as your steadfast cornerstone in the pivotal role of Secretary General of the Diwan. While our initial roster of potential candidates was diverse, our final selection has definitively fallen upon the person of Mr. Mohamed El Salih Mentouri."*

I observed him, momentarily suspended in a state of pensive hesitation, as my spirit traversed the memories of other esteemed colleagues with whom I had previously collaborated. These were individuals with whom I had shared the trenches of labor within the Media Department of the Party, most notably Mr. Mohamed Babas, with whom I worked when I was the director of *Al-Jazairia* periodical, and the venerable mujahid Abdelhamid Mehri held stewardship over the Department of Culture and Media.

Si Larbi Belkheir monitored my internal deliberations with a steady gaze, then remarked with a measured and deliberate tone:

—"But surely you are aware, Madam, that Mr. Mohamed El Salih Mentouri hails from your own ancestral city, Constantine."

I responded in a state of tempered bewilderment:

—"Indeed, that is so; yet I possess no intimate knowledge of his person, nor has the honor of professional collaboration previously united our paths. I am certainly cognizant of his brother, the illustrious Mujahid and Professor Bashir Mentouri, with whom I shared the responsibilities of Parliament. I am equally mindful of his Constantinian roots and his belonging to a storied family of mujahideen. Yet, I must confess, these considerations offer no practical solace to me in the present hour. My search is exclusively for unassailable competence and a masterful command over labyrinthine and thorny files such as Social Security. He currently presides as the General Director for Social Security, and I shall evaluate his suitability according to the rigorous metrics found within the scholarly studies in the archives of the Ministry of Health."

I perceived—as I meticulously monitored his reaction—that he might be pondering within himself:

"Does this woman truly fail to grasp the gravity of the situation, or is she profoundly certain of the weight of her words?"

I offered no further discourse on the subject. However, he suddenly rose from his chair, gesturing with a deliberate hand toward the heavy door of his office as he declared with significant emphasis:

"Do you behold this portal? It is the solitary barrier that separates my presence from that of President Chadli Bendjedid."

At that specific juncture, I did not fully comprehend the underlying signal, so I simply replied:

"May the Almighty grant you His blessing."

Yet, as the river of days and years flowed on, the profound meaning of that signal revealed itself to me with absolute clarity.

It became most vivid later when I requested to halt a certain administrative procedure. And when a grant for medical treatment in Switzerland had been ordained for me—a promise President Chadli Bendjedid himself had graciously bestowed. Being a man of his word, he had fulfilled it with absolute sincerity. Yet, when I was approached by the Chief of Staff of the Presidency, requesting me to voluntarily relinquish the grant, I responded to him with a firm, principled resolve:

"The treasury is enduring the loss of monumental sums, and we find ourselves in a state of self-sufficiency; verily, the national fund is far more worthy of those resources than I."

He looked at me in a state of profound and stunned amazement. But what I have gleaned regarding Brother Mohamed El Salih Mentouri across the subsequent years is entirely characterized by goodness and integrity. He remained steadfast in his respect for my person, valuing my contributions and striving perpetually to assist me in my professional labors. I never perceived from him anything save for the most refined conduct and professional sincerity.

And thus, Fate willed that I should stand as a witness to the excellence of one of the vibrant youth of Algeria. Indeed, this man eventually ascended to the rank of Minister of Health, and in the present day, he occupies the prestigious station of President of the National Economic and Social Council.

The Birth Spacing Project

Among the pivotal and foundational projects I formally proposed to the government—and which were subsequently adopted as a matter of national policy—was a comprehensive new Social Insurance Law. This specific legislation was meticulously designed to be all-encompassing and inclusive, reaching every social stratum of the nation. It was uniquely targeted toward our tireless farmers and devoted laborers, rather than being restricted exclusively to state functionaries or the urban private sector.

I ensured that every vital sector within the nation emerged as an active and contributing participant in its preparation: from the common workers and senior executives to the tillers of the soil, the educators, the health professionals, and even the laborers within the private sphere. I further involved the various media apparatuses in the rigorous study and public debate of its clauses, most notably through the medium of television, which hosted a series of live and vibrant seminars on the subject. I recall vividly that those broadcasted sessions featured eminent representatives from the medical community and the mass organizations. At that juncture, the medical field was represented by Professor Abdelaziz Ziari, while the women's movement found its voice through Mrs. Fatima Zahra Jarroud, the Secretary-General of the National Union of Algerian Women.

Notwithstanding the myriad inherent (technical) complexities, the comprehensive Social Insurance project which I formally presented before the hallowed halls of the National People's Assembly was ratified in its entirety, entirely devoid of any significant alterations or structural dilutions. It emerged as

one of the most vital and foundational legislative pillars, acting as a sacred safeguard for the fundamental rights of every citizen and worker, most notably enshrining the right to retirement—a right that was finally transmuted into a universal and inclusive mandate. Within the broader Arab and African context, it was hailed as a monumental and progressive leap, rising to the level of, and in some aspects surpassing, the highest international legal standards of that era.

However, I feel compelled to digress from the technical intricacies and administrative nuances of that specific law to address a subject of even more profound sensitivity—one which I wish to illuminate within this specific chapter: the Birth Spacing Law. This particular issue was inextricably interwoven with social and cultural perspectives that had remained largely unexplored, introducing an array of new concepts and visionary initiatives that were destined to place formidable challenges before our collective resolve.

This specific project emerged from a state of dormancy, having languished within the shadows of administrative repositories for several years, ever since the era of the late President Houari Boumediene. The core vision had historically collided with diverse forms of vocal opposition and fiercely conflicting viewpoints. On one side of the divide were those who perceived an urgent and undeniable necessity to curtail the "demographic explosion" and the galloping population growth—a stage wherein our national economy and developmental trajectory were struggling to maintain pace. Conversely, there were voices that argued there was no inherent peril in the unrestricted doubling of birth rates, reasoning that Algeria, as a vast geographic expanse, possessed

the latent material potential to sustain and accommodate hundreds of millions of souls.

While the initiative remained at a standstill, the underlying social and economic imbalances began to surface with alarming clarity, casting long and negative shadows over the lives of individual citizens, the broader society, and the State itself, particularly regarding the metrics of economic stability. This precarious situation persisted until the hour of my sovereign appointment arrived, whereupon the President formally requested that I prepare a comprehensive, exhaustive report on the matter, accompanied by a meticulously crafted draft law proposing the necessary solutions to resolve this burgeoning national crisis.

The project manifested as a quintessentially rational and rigorously logical endeavor, immediately apparent to any sound and discerning mind. An extraordinary array of ministerial sectors, national institutions, mass organizations, revered religious scholars, and enlightened educators converged in its meticulous drafting. It took into profound and solemn consideration the intricate social, economic, and cultural topographies of a devoutly Muslim society such as our beloved Algeria.

The most primordial and hallowed principle upon which this visionary project was anchored was the unshakeable tenet that Birth Spacing must be a purely voluntary act—an intimate manifestation of the mutual desire of the spouses and their sovereign freedom to decide their domestic destiny. We remained resolute that this process should be entirely devoid of any external psychological or social duress, and certainly far removed from any shadow of state coercion.

This imperative necessitated an extensive and multifaceted mobilization of our media apparatus and a refined pedagogical orientation, specifically enlisting the voices of medical specialists in the fields of women's and children's health, alongside venerable religious scholars. We orchestrated a grand symphony of cooperation across all media channels, administrative departments, and provinces to activate vibrant circles for dialogue and intellectual persuasion. We enlisted the expertise of distinguished social scientists and economists to outline a comprehensive and nuanced program, designed to be applied with rigorous precision without ever neglecting or infringing upon the sacred freedom and the absolute independence of the citizen within the sanctuary of their own home and family.

I recall with crystalline clarity an occasion when I traveled to the remote city of Tindouf, where I presided over a grand assembly of women. I presented the core vision of the project in exhaustive detail and was met with a barrage of inquiries and spirited discussions. One young woman, distinguished by a remarkably sharp and piercing wit, rose to address me:

—*"But Madam Minister, you assert that we should refrain from a high number of offspring... yet here, amidst the vastness of the desert, our brothers proclaim that we are few in number and we must feverishly increase our population to populate this immense and sprawling land. Where, pray tell, lies the truth?"*

I observed her for a moment, then cast my gaze upon the audience of women who were collectively gathering their thoughts, and I smiled.

—*"Am I a criminal?"* she inquired, her voice nuanced with a subtle shade of doubt that toyed with a serious edge.

I responded with a definitive:

—*"Indeed!"* At this, she persisted with a resolute air: *"Then proceed according to what I declare, and pay no heed to the surreptitious whispers of others."* Our discourse culminated in a magnificent symphony of joyful laughter and resonant nationalistic ululations (*zaghrouda*).

I recall being profoundly moved and stirred when I formally introduced the legislative project before the National People's Assembly; a new and incendiary debate was instantaneously ignited within the chamber. One of the deputies rose to his feet, his entire countenance flushed with a visible and high-strung agitation, and shouted with a booming voice:

—*"Madam Minister, the hallowed lands of Algeria are sprawling and vast; they possess the latent capacity to accommodate another hundred million souls. Why, then, do you seek to impose the shackles of 'Population Limitation' upon our people?"*

I confronted his outcry with a serene composure and an unshakeable fortitude, responding with a measured gravity:

—*"Sir, I must clarify that this legislative project is by no means 'Limitation'—as is the rigid policy implemented in certain neighboring sovereign states—but is, in stark truth, 'Organization': an absolute necessity dictated by the prevailing economic and social landscapes of our nascent nation. It emanates from a visceral desire for the woman to flourish in a state of enduring health and wellness, so that she may be fully empowered to nurture a sound, resilient, and healthy generation across every intricate facet of human existence. For true Organization safeguards for the child a life defined by*

felicity and abundance, far removed from the cold and desolate shadows of deprivation."

I proceeded to elaborate upon this vital point with exhaustive detail and scholarly rigor, citing the paradigms of highly advanced and civilized nations such as Sweden. In that land, the State meticulously organizes its population trajectory annually through the rigorous prism of comprehensive economic planning, as ordained by the Ministry of Economy and dictated by the precise and scientific indicators of national growth. This is performed with the noble and supreme objective of ensuring that every child brought into the world is guaranteed a life of absolute dignity, far removed from the pained necessity of ever having to solicit charity.

The deputy struck me with a startling response, enveloped in an aura of misguided boastfulness and a peculiar sense of pride:

—"I stand before you, the sire of twenty sons and daughters, and I harbor no inclination whatsoever to cease this procreation!"

The entirety of the august chamber erupted into a sudden crescendo of laughter—the President of the Assembly, the gathered deputies, and even the members of the media corps. I, too, found myself surrendered to a moment of genuine mirth. I countered him with a sharp and immediate wit:

—"Verily, sir, that constitutes a form of pure social selfishness on your part. In such an extraordinary circumstance, the State would be compelled to provide you with your own private educational institution and a dedicated sovereign bus exclusively for your own progeny!"

The room vibrated once more with the echoes of laughter and resonant applause. I found myself later pondering the sheer logistics and the heavy moral burden of how this man could successfully navigate the raising of such a monumental household. A profound sense of empathetic pity washed over me; for I imagined that were I placed in his station, I would find myself fundamentally incapable of such an arduous and exhausting feat.

The subject matter proved to be profoundly draining, resonating with a palpable tension even among the intellectual elite within the sector. It was a theme that fluctuated according to the transient whims of certain individuals who harbored the arrogant illusion that they alone were the supreme masters of successful implementation.

I recall one particular high-ranking official close to my circle—let us designate him as Mr. La'la Bouali—who was celebrating the arrival of a new daughter. I addressed him with a touch of jesting irony:

—"Pray, what is the numerical tally of your household now?"
He responded with a tone of unyielding and traditional determination:
"Madam Minister, I am the father of four daughters, and I shall not cease my efforts until the Almighty grants me a male heir."

This was his stance, notwithstanding my strategic reliance upon a myriad of hallowed religious texts and the authoritative opinions of venerable scholars and jurists, both from the classical eras and the modern day—foremost among them being the illustrious "Proof of Islam," Imam al-Ghazali. I had personally consecrated many a night to diving into the "Foundational Mothers of Books" (foundational texts). Yet,

despite this formidable intellectual and theological fortification, I was still confronted with a formidable wall of absolute rejection and pained protest.

One particular episode remains indelibly and poignantly etched within the very archives of my mind. I recall a weekend when I was seeking solace at the hallowed sanctuary of my family's residence, nestled within the vibrant and pulsating heartbeat of the Al-Madania quarter. It was a Friday—that sacred day of communal congregation. The windows had been flung wide open to invite the afternoon breeze, allowing the ambient sounds of the neighborhood to filter in. Suddenly, the voice of the preacher emanating from the nearby mosque surged into the room, his tone ascending with a terrifying crescendo of accusatory fervor. He began his discourse, his words functioning as a direct and visceral assault:

—"This Minister... she harbors a dark desire to dismantle the very foundations of the maternal role in our children's upbringing! She labors tirelessly to expand the sprawling network of kindergartens and nurseries for the sake of working women, effectively orchestrating a limitation of our holy offspring—an act that stands condemned by the absolute and sacred consensus of the faith!"

I turned my gaze toward my mother, who had absorbed the pained resonance of the sermon with every fiber of her being. Her countenance was a masterpiece of profound spiritual agony and visceral sorrow. She looked into my eyes, let out a heavy and pained sigh that seemed to carry the weight of the ages, and whispered that sacred and timeless invocation:

—"There is no power nor might except with Allah, the Most High, the Almighty."

Reactions

As the inexorable river of time surged forward, through the relentless labor we performed or the focused devotion we extended to the welfare of others, I found myself frequently consigning the vast majority of those deeds to the shadowed archives of oblivion. Such actions, in my estimation, fell within the mundane framework of our daily jurisdictions and prescribed duties. It was neither our station nor our right to dwell upon them or seek their glorification. Yet, I am perpetually confronted with profound instances of unyielding gratitude and visceral recognition from certain souls—moments that these individuals have anchored to the very bedrock of their consciousness, never to be erased.

While such cases may be entirely absent from the library of my own memory, for them, they remain as sharp, vivid, and pulsating as the day they occurred. These were chronicles of harrowing physiological tribulations or devastating social complexities that had once appeared as insurmountable fortresses of despair. At such times, I am overcome by a tidal wave of profound humility and a sense of bashful modesty. They recount these episodes to me as if they were fresh news, concluding their narratives with an exquisite and hallowed prayer for my well-being.

—"My daughter was that fragile blossom you snatched from the jaws of death by orchestrating her medical treatment beyond our borders. She was then in a state of terminal peril; today, she stands as a young, erudite luminary of the medical sciences—a doctor and a mother. Verily, she would not inhabit this earth today were it not for the mercy of your sovereign intervention."

Or I encounter another who declares with fervent emotion:

—"I am the soul for whom you smoothed the path to secure social housing for myself and my progeny many years ago. We have dwelled in a state of felicity and wellness ever since. Do you retain any memory of that day? Our tongues have never ceased their hallowed prayers for you."

Or another who solemnly recounts:

—"I am the very soul whose parents you graced with the facilitation of passports for the hallowed Hajj pilgrimage in the year [so-and-so], enabling them to fulfill their sacred journey to the House of Allah."

I recall a poignant and memorable occasion when I journeyed to the province of Medea to be formally honored by the Kuwaiti Al-Babtain Foundation. A young man, distinguished by a fine bearing and a refined air, approached my presence and inquired with a soft, pained reverence:

—"Do you retain any glimmer of who I am, Madam Minister?"

I found myself suspended in a state of pained hesitation, as if overcome by a sense of bashful embarrassment; for the vast archives of my memory did not immediately yield his likeness. He had blossomed into a man of impeccable stature, elegantly adorned. He proceeded to complete his chronicle:

—"I harbor no blame for your lack of recognition; indeed, I extend to you my most sincere excuses. For our shared story is now anchored to a past that exceeds twenty full years."

He offered a gentle, knowing smile, then continued:

—"Madam, I am that destitute child you graced with a visit at the 'Childhood Emergency Center' within the municipality of Beni Chicao in Medea. It was a day of savage storms, where the relentless snow had draped the world in a heavy white shroud. When you stepped into the dining hall and discovered us consuming our meager sustenance from unhygienic, neglected vessels, a righteous indignation flared within you, and you dismissed the director from his sovereign post on the spot. You then leaned toward me, patting my head and pressing a tender kiss upon my brow while I was surrendered to bitter weeping. To this day, I know not if my tears flowed from the biting cold, the gnawing hunger, or the primal grip of fear."

I replied to him, my voice thick with emotion:

—"Hush, I beseech you; for you are moving me to tears this day."

He responded with a radiant and comforting smile:

—"Nay, Madam, do not weep. Today, I stand before you as a successful and virtuous citizen, and an elected deputy within the hallowed halls of the National People's Assembly. All of that is the ripe fruit of that single touch of visceral tenderness from your hand on that frozen day. Whenever your likeness graces the television screen, I am moved to kiss the cold glass in a gesture of profound gratitude."

Nevertheless, these luminous, heart-warming paradigms were frequently shadowed by other instances that yielded only a harvest of virulent anger and unmitigated hostility—transmissions of resentment that emanated even from certain quarters of my own kin.

It occurred that we, acting as a collective government, arrived at a decisive and arduous resolution regarding certain disabled children whose sojourns within French medical institutions had been fruitlessly protracted, yielding no tangible harvest toward their recovery. We resolved that they should be ushered back to the embrace of the homeland. Our visionary intent was to provide them with specialized care within our own burgeoning medical repositories, thereby safeguarding our precious foreign currency reserves that were then being squandered abroad to no avail. Furthermore, a consensus among distinguished psychologists affirmed that no substantive benefit could be gleaned from treatment in foreign climes while these souls remained exiled from the visceral warmth of their kin; for familial tenderness acts as a vital psychological and spiritual balm in mitigating their profound suffering.

It was a mission characterized by its formidable moral weight. I was acutely cognizant that certain progenitors of these afflicted children would not embrace such a transition with ease; many had grown accustomed to an existence entirely unburdened by their disabled offspring, effectively consigning them to a state of non-existence while centering their devotion exclusively upon their healthy children.

To establish a precedent of unyielding integrity and set a living example for all, I inaugurated this process with Luqman—the son of my own brother in Constantine, Professor Abdelhamid Wanisi. His spouse was instantaneously consumed by a fiery and unmitigated resentment, harboring a cold and lasting hostility toward me for a protracted interval thereafter.

That administrative decree appeared as a startling enigma to my own kin, yet I remained resolute in the profound conviction

that my family must be governed by the very same statutes as any other household in the nation. The Law stands as a supreme and unyielding sovereign above every personal tie; I would have been consumed by an unbearable sense of moral shame had I ever attempted to circumvent its mandates or orchestrate a bypass for the sake of my own blood.

My elevation to full and absolute membership within the Central Committee transpired in the historic year of **1984**. This promotion did not manifest as an anomalous or peculiar event in my eyes; rather, I perceived it solely as a majestic moral tribute and a formal acknowledgment from the high leadership of my decades of consistent and unwavering struggle. I was overcome by a profound sense of dignity and hallowed honor, for I was, in every meaningful sense, a "daughter of the grassroots." My militant trajectory had been meticulously forged through the struggle within the clandestine cells and regional divisions nestled in the heart of our popular neighborhoods. My path remained inextricably intertwined with the varied strata of society and its visceral, pulsating issues. I had dedicated my entire existence to safeguarding the sacred covenant of our martyrs, never once allowing my heart to yearn for rank or the hollow vanities of a high station.

Consequently, when the hour of my formal appointment to the Party leadership at last arrived, it felt like a quintessentially natural occurrence—notwithstanding the observations voiced by some in the aftermath. Foremost among those voices was our dear Brother Messaoud Zeïtouni (may the Almighty bestow His infinite mercy upon him), who remarked to me:

—"Your entry into the inner sanctum of the Party leadership arrived at a noticeably late hour, notwithstanding the manifest reality that you were a foundational architect of every vital wing of the Party—be it political, social, or cultural. This transpired at a time when certain individuals exploited the first light of independence merely to aggregate vast material fortunes in the hallowed name of the Revolution."

The Central Committee of the National Liberation Front (FLN) manifested within its formal statutes and its communicative strategy as though it were the singular, sovereign ruling authority of the entire nation. It was an unwritten mandate that every soul should seek affiliation with this Party through the intricate network of its grassroots cells.

However, those who inhabited the inner sanctuary of the Party—navigating its mass organizations and its diverse wings—grasped with absolute clarity that the Party functioned as nothing more than a symbolic "Protective Canopy" for the political and administrative edifice of the state. Consequently, the Party as a collective entity found itself frequently detached from the aesthetic of artistic creation or the actual machinery of the executive body; nevertheless, it was held responsible for the totality of the nation's trajectory, attributing to itself both the majestic victories and the stinging defeats. This paradoxical dynamic existed because the true political body often operated within the shadows, in the form of a fragile opposition that had been penetrated by various other factions.

When the Fifth and Sixth Party Congresses were inaugurated within the "Baydaouia" Pavilion of the **5**th of July Sports Complex (currently the Mohamed Boudiaf Complex), the sheer capacity of the hall for militants arriving from the very roots of the provinces—those elected via the sacred process of the grassroots cells—ensured that their militant performance during the congress was nothing short of remarkable and historically significant.

Within the hallowed halls of that congress, while I was gracing the high office of Minister, I was selected from among the ranks of the female militants to serve as the official spokesperson for the entire congress. I was entrusted with this

grave responsibility alongside General Hussein Ben Maalem and the *mujahid* Bachir Rouis, who was then my colleague within the government as the Minister of Information. During those momentous days, as I conducted a formal press conference every single day throughout the duration of the congress, I became acutely aware that I perceived the existence of subtle, unseen pressures that permeated the atmosphere—clandestine attempts manifesting in every veiled hint or hushed advice, all aimed at dissuading me from a path of absolute and unflinching explicitness. I was repeatedly exhorted to suppress certain revelations, to excise specific passages from my discourse, or to refrain from articulating any individual perspective or subjective impression.

Yet, I remained entirely indifferent to these manipulative currents. Driven by the visceral media intuition I had honed as both a dedicated journalist and a vigilant citizen, I strived to ensure that the common people, in their entirety, were granted their sacred right to be apprised of every intricate detail—whether monumental or minute—surrounding this significant gathering and the myriad events unfolding alongside it. I held the firm belief that the citizen is the cornerstone of any congress tasked with evaluating the past, achieving progress, and orchestrating the blueprints for future stages.

The Extraordinary Congress was subsequently convened in the heavy wake of the seismic and tumultuous events of October **5**, **1988**. By that historical threshold, I had been formally relieved of my ministerial burdens. I recall with crystalline clarity that, immediately following this professional transition, I—acting in my capacity as a woman of the media and letters—submitted my administrative dossier to the relevant authorities to finalize my retirement, preparing myself

for the serene conclusion of my public career. Mr. Abdelaziz Bary, the Director of General Administration at the Presidency, regarded me with a sense of profound and stunned amazement, inquiring:

—"Wait, Madam! Pray, what is this? While others are frantically rushing toward foreign embassies and competing for high-ranking positions, you are voluntarily submitting your file for retirement?"

I offered him a serene smile and replied:

—"Sovereign positions have more than sufficed me, sir. I yearn now for a season of rest, and a return to the hallowed arena of struggle through the power of my pen—a path I have eternally cherished and to which my soul has always belonged."

Nevertheless, notwithstanding this shift, I remained a full and active member of the Central Committee of the Party. This specific congress transpired in the aftermath of the October **1988** upheavals, a period during which I was positioned among the specific targets struck within the nation's psyche—identified as one of the prominent symbols of the National Liberation Front (FLN). This orchestrated assault had been preceded by a torrential deluge of malicious and fabricated rumors, meticulously engineered by specialized interests whose sole objective was to divert the public's discerning eyes away from the genuinely deviant and profoundly opportunistic officials. These dark forces were feverishly clearing a path for foreign entities who had issued the mandate for the systematic destruction of the "Revolutionary Party." Their ultimate design was to replace it with a hybrid, artificial political and media pluralism, beneath whose deceptive cloak countless enemies of

the nation and its hallowed constants sought to conceal their true intent.

During the intense sessions of the congress—which I attended with the full measure of my vigor and an unshakeable faith in the Almighty's decree and the mysteries of Fate—I conducted myself as if no assault had ever been directed toward my person. I registered myself to participate in the general debate, presenting a landmark intervention wherein I analyzed the perilous situation of the country through a prism of rigorous and honest self-criticism. Never once did I stoop to address my personal grievances or what I had endured as an individual; for I held the firm conviction that what had transpired was, in truth, a grand conspiracy against the very soul of the nation and its unblemished symbols. It was a calculated conspiracy in which certain elements of the regime itself participated, only to subsequently lose control as events bypassed them—simply because they possessed no genuine understanding of the heartbeat of this People.

In my discourse, I undertook a precise and visceral dissection of the regime—of which I remained an integral part as a member of the Central Committee. I explained its inner workings through a revolutionary methodology reserved only for those who maintain an absolute honesty with themselves and their people. For he whose spirit is not enslaved by the allure of power or the vanity of positions is the only one capable of such transparency. Conversely, those who seek only the favors of the high seat are destined to adopt the opposite style: clutching the staff from the middle, surrendering to the vices of flattery, sycophancy, and profound hypocrisy.

The reaction of the gathered militants within the "Baydaouia" Pavilion was nothing short of magnificent and

overwhelmingly positive. Such was the resonance of my words that certain officials from the grassroots cells and regional divisions took it upon themselves to record the entirety of my intervention. They subsequently reproduced thousands of copies, distributing them widely among the militants at the base and to every honorable nationalist across the land.

That specific historical juncture transpired during one of the momentous sessions of the Central Committee in December **1986**, as we were engaged in profound deliberations regarding the amendment of the National Charter. I was, at that interval, a full and active member of that august body. We had convened within the majestic halls of the Nations Palace to meticulously dissect the new chapters and the strategic modifications introduced to the primordial Charter of **1976**.

One of the central tenets within the proposed project asserted that our national constants were distilled into the twin pillars of Islam, Arabism and Tamazight.

Initially, I had not registered myself to participate in the debate, for my spirit was draped in a heavy shroud of mental exhaustion and profound grief; barely a week had passed since the hand of death had snatched my brother from this earthly existence. However, one of our colleagues—my dear brother Dr. Othman Saadi, for whom I harbor a deep affection and the highest measure of scholarly respect—rose to articulate his perspective. He issued a categorical rejection of any other cultural constant beyond the Arabic language and our Arab belonging, declaring with absolute fervor:

—"We are Arabs, and it is our sacred duty to repudiate any other 'stagnant' or divergent claim, most specifically the Tamazight language."

His words ignited a state of palpable bewilderment and sparked a myriad of urgent inquiries within the hall. Driven by an irresistible impulse of national conscience, I momentarily exited the chamber to register my name with the Congress

Secretariat. I re-entered the arena without the luxury of prior preparation, and in my impromptu intervention, I declared:

—"We are the Algerians, the sovereign custodians of primordial lineages and ancient, hallowed origins. The resplendent light of Islam and its civilization arrived to bestow honor upon us, and we, in turn, defended its sanctuary until our reach touched the very frontiers of Europe. Yet, even before we were graced by the honor of Islam and its refined civilization, we were a people of a central and middle ground—a truth we labor to entrench through our volumes, our diverse compositions, and our recorded history, which is as countless as it is limitless.

—We, the people of Algeria, are by no means 'severed' or rootless branches. Rather, we possess an authentic pedigree and a genealogical anchor that spans the entire history of this earth long before the dawn of Islam. Nations and peoples prior to the advent of Islam possessed their own storied chronicles and magnificent glories; they did not emerge into existence only fourteen centuries ago. They were people of history and immense grandeur, just as the Egyptians take pride in their 'Pharaonic' heritage, and as the Babylonians, Assyrians, and other diverse peoples of the earth celebrate their ancestral splendor. Why, then, should we choose to deny our own foundational roots, our ancient origins, and the vibrant diversity of our cultural components? Does this variety not constitute a visceral richness and a monumental civilizational treasury?

Was it a state of madness, my brother Dr. Othman Saadi, that moved the entire assembly hall to respond so fervently to my thesis? On the contrary, they sought me out to offer their congratulations, most notably among them my dear brother,

the late Mujahid Said Ait Messaoudene (may the Almighty grant him His mercy).

When we finally exited the hall, he approached me within one of the palace corridors and remarked with a tone not entirely devoid of a certain playful, yet biting, accusation:

—'I certainly did not label you a foundling!'

He was, in essence, branding me as rootless or illegitimate—implying that by defending our ancient, non-Arab origins, I was somehow casting doubt upon the purity of my own belonging. I refrained from offering a direct retort in that moment, for I was overcome by a profound exhaustion; yet my silence was intended to demonstrate to him and to all others that our national constants must, by the very weight of logic, prove their truth in the days to come. Our history must inevitably encompass our glorious Amazigh heritage, in all its hallowed richness.

How Many in the Depths of Prison are Wronged?

There transpired an episode within my life through which I was made to feel the cold sting of injustice and a sense of profound oppression. It was a situation wherein I found myself utterly unable to articulate a defense of my person, constrained as I was by the dictates of deep-seated respect and a natural, dignified shyness. It happened during the period when my son, Hisham, had successfully concluded his higher academic pursuits in the United States of America. It was a magnificent coincidence that he was numbered among the preeminent graduates—those "valedictorians" who were rightfully granted the sovereign right to a scholarship abroad to finalize their studies, having been ranked among the top three in their graduating class.

When my son fulfilled his academic destiny with distinguished excellence, and within the precise duration mandated by the scholarship, he returned to the embrace of Algeria. He carried within his baggage a doctoral degree and a motor vehicle. He had meticulously saved the necessary funds from his stipend during those years through diligent labor he practiced alongside his studies—tasks he undertook for certain of his student colleagues from the Gulf nations, charging them for his expertise in preparing certain of their research and scholarly studies. By so doing, he not only achieved a material gain but also deepened his own immersion into the subject matter, both intellectually and morally. He manifested a bravery far superior to that of certain Gulf peers who chose instead to squander their nights in leisure and the transient pleasures of youth.

The vehicle he brought from the West was of the "BMW" variety—the very automobile my son had perpetually envisioned in his dreams of ownership. Neither I nor his sire could have ever provided such a luxury for him; it stood solely as his own hard-won reward. Notwithstanding our modest means—for prior to my ascension to the rank of Minister, my husband presided as a judge and I was a successful educator—we were never a family that nurtured its progeny upon the lap of pampering or the immediate fulfillment of every whim, save through the path of rigorous work and individual effort. I had meticulously raised my children and sisters to understand that garnering even a modest sum of currency from those closest to them was an endeavor that was never easily attained.

The specific incident occurred while we were convened in a Cabinet meeting presided over by the President of the Republic, the Mujahid Chadli Bendjedid. On that particular day, certain of the ministers with whom I collaborated—among them Brother Mohamed Tibi, the Secretary-General of the Government—manifested a visible and palpable agitation. The President was stationed in wait for every soul, one after another. President Chadli was in a state of extraordinary and searing anger, seemingly mocking the very commencement of the meeting five minutes before its ordained hour.

While it is an unyielding truth that a high official of the state must never be found late for a presidential assembly, the President was inhabited by a state of high-strung tension that morning, as if he had awakened to a circumstance that occasionally afflicts all men.

Then, the President spoke with a voice vibrating with tension before the assembled people:

—"By what logic do you permit your children to import such luxury automobiles from abroad, at a time when you are the ones entrusted with the responsibility for the People?"

That specific observation struck me with the visceral impact of a physical blow—for I was the very individual whose son had only recently ushered a "luxury" vehicle into the country from beyond our borders.

I found myself pondering with a pained bewilderment:

—"By what mysterious channel had such a detail navigated the corridors of power to reach the President's ear with such startling and uncanny velocity?"

It was, on the surface, a question of a naive nature; yet, considering the sheer speed with which the news had traveled to the President, the inquiry was far from simplistic. Suddenly, the image of my driver crystallized in my mind—a man of unadorned simplicity, perhaps even intellectually limited, yet he was intimately and strategically tethered to the staff of the Presidency. It was he, I realized, who functioned as the courier of such "news," delivering it with that breathtaking speed to the Secretary-General of the Presidency. I further recalled that my brother, Mouloud Hamrouche, who then presided as the Secretary-General of the Presidency, was a neighbor to my own mother.

I began to meticulously observe this man, though at the time, I perceived no justifiable reason to seek his replacement. I have never harbored an inclination for changing familiar faces; little did I know then that this very visage would subsequently be the silent architect behind a great deal of extortion practiced under the mantle of a Minister’s driver.

In the aftermath of that incident, I recalled the subtle suggestion once offered by my brother Mouloud Hamrouche; perhaps he was privy, more than any other entity, to the surreptitious activities of my driver. He was not merely a pilot of my vehicle; in stark reality, he was likely an operative functioning for an intelligence apparatus—for he could not possibly have been as intellectually vacant as he appeared in his role as my driver. Even if, as is often the case, everything is deemed possible within the labyrinthine world of politics.

I had embraced this driver with a maternal affection, treating him much like my own son, Hisham. I had welcomed him into the very sanctuary of my home, until he became intimately familiar with every minute and grand detail of my private and public existence. It was as though I inhabited a house of transparent glass—an existence characterized by absolute clarity, with nothing whatsoever to conceal from the eyes of the world. Naturally, when my son returned from his academic odyssey abroad, our driver had shared in the jubilant atmosphere of our family celebration.

Perhaps it was in that precise moment when he demonstrated he was exactly that kind of person. I do not refer here to the technical implications of his role, for I have always been a woman who lived her integrity with a certain masculine stoicism—possessing a spirit that, while not devoid of feminine grace, felt the profound weight of a lady of her stature. He was, in stark and pained reality, a man entirely bereft of honor and integrity (*Amine*).

I recall a day when he shared a journey with me in the vehicle of my brother, the illustrious Mujahid Abderrazak Bouhara. We were collaborating on a shared task, and when

Bouhara observed the man's disheveled state, he addressed him with a blunt, soldierly directness:

—"Do you not find a sense of refined pleasure, man, in driving a lady of such elegance and gracing her sovereign vehicle? How can you tolerate such a state of neglect and malodor? Do you not possess a pristine shirt, a dignified tie, and the decency of a proper haircut?"

I reacted to the observation with a soft, forgiving laughter; yet, upon my return home, I was moved by a maternal compassion to gather a collection of shirts and ties for him.

I had harbored the charitable assumption that his modest stipend was insufficient to meet such requirements, burdened as he was by the weight of a vast household of children.

Within the cabinet chamber, I watched the President as he transitioned from the issue of automobiles to other administrative matters. I whispered to my own soul: *"Should I raise my hand to request the floor and articulate a response?"* Ultimately, I chose the path of silence. Yet, I yearned to declare before him and before the entire assembly:

—"Mr. President, my son is a paragon of excellence and academic distinction. He did not squander a single cent of the sovereign grant bestowed upon him by the State. On the contrary, through his extraordinary diligence, he shortened the duration of his studies from three academic years to a mere two. He did not waste a single moment of the scholarship intended for his formation on the vanities of others. Furthermore, he is a student who resolutely refused to remain in the West, notwithstanding the lucrative and seductive financial offers presented to him by various Arab and American corporations. Instead, he chose to return to the embrace of the

nation that educated and fashioned him. He possesses the profound consciousness that he is needed here, and that the country which nurtured his intellect must be the first to harvest the fruits of his knowledge."...And truly, how many within the cold, desolate walls of prison are entirely wronged and innocent?

The Arch of Triumph

I have embarked upon countless journeys and traversed a myriad of lands and continents across the globe. These diverse odysseys left a rich and varied tapestry of imprints upon the sanctuary of my soul, though they were invariably and exquisitely beautiful. These were never merely touristic escapades designed for idle leisure; I traveled for the sake of labor and sacred duty, representing a majestic nation and a noble, sovereign people. I felt a profound and constant responsibility to stand at the very pinnacle of knowledge and lived experience. In short, travel always left me with a sacred debt of gratitude toward the realms of learning and the grace of keen observation. Journeys, in their truest and most authentic essence, are profound reflections and intimate dialogues with the "Other"; at the very least, they serve to perpetually renew one's hope in reaching elusive goals and mastering the intricate crafts of life. We perpetually strive to acquire the varied experiences of other nations to assist us in resolving our own dilemmas and elevating the civilizational quality of our existence.

How often I found myself utterly enthralled and captivated by the eloquent and wisdom-laden verses of Imam al-Shafi'i (may the Almighty be pleased with him), as he depicted the stagnant human being who neither moves nor labors, likening him to stagnant water that only purifies and refreshes when it flows and ripples anew:

"Venture forth, and in new horizons... find recompense for all that you leave behind; and strive with unyielding vigor, for the true nectar of life is found only in the heart of toil."

"Verily, I have witnessed that the stagnation of water is the very seed of its corruption; should it ripple and flow, it attains a celestial sweetness, but in stillness, it surrenders its purity."

From this bedrock of religious conviction—if we may rightfully designate it as such—sprang my innate passion and my lifelong investment in the realms of industry, exploration, and the rhythmic grace of human movement.

I have graced the soil of France on countless occasions, and Paris in particular, since the very dawn of our independence. Within that "City of Light," as they are so fond of calling it, I found myself invariably captivated only by its cultural and artistic facets. I would consecrate whole hours to the labyrinthine corridors of Saint-Michel and the historic Latin Quarter, profoundly enamored with the echoes of antiquity and the weight of history—specifically within certain evocative eras. It was as though I were orchestrating a subconscious purge of the colonial night from my consciousness, permitting myself the luxury of a balanced and objective gaze upon this city. This reached such a level of aesthetic admiration that it once prompted me to compose a delicate short story entitled *"A Bottle of Perfume and Colored Masks."*

Yet, the official state visit stood as an experience entirely unlike any other. It shook the very foundations of my being. I find myself utterly unable to fully articulate the maelstrom of emotions I navigated throughout that journey. It was a visit defined by a high-level delegation and the intricate web of complex protocols—the first sovereign visit by an Algerian President to that state which had, for over a century, been the primary architect of our dispossession, stripping us of our independence and systematically looting our dignity, our resources, and our global stature. France represented a chapter

of history that we could never truly ignore, notwithstanding the visceral reality of our past.

Regardless of how fervently we strive to turn the page, that specific chapter remains indelibly etched. We endeavor to look toward the future, for what has transpired belongs to the past; we emerged triumphant over them and drove them from our hallowed land by the testimony of both adversary and ally—indeed, by the definitive testimony of History itself.

Regardless of our most fervent efforts, we find ourselves utterly incapable of exorcising those visceral emotions and latent tensions. We take a magnificent pride today in our civilizational progress; yet, we remain acutely cognizant that this very host was, in a bygone era, the primordial catalyst for our stagnant dormancy. He sought to drag us perpetually backward, even as he accelerated his own advancement fueled by our pillaged resources, the sweat of our weary brows, and the hallowed blood of successive generations of our children.

Furthermore, every singular district within my homeland, every hamlet, every winding alley, every rugged peak, and every sprawling plain bears within its folds the sacred remnants of a martyr or the visceral traces of a victim who fell under the crushing weight of injustice and betrayal orchestrated by this very host nation.

This is the same State that today endeavors to systematically erase those haunting footprints and plant, in their stead, the deceptive seeds of "trust and tranquility" within our collective soul. But pray, can one ever truly succumb to oblivion? Can we truly consign that chapter to the void?

Can we truly fold the page of history when we stand at the very epicenter and seat of that power? Can the victors truly

forget? Can they fold that blood-stained page with such effortless ease, entirely devoid of the lingering psychological, social, economic, and intellectual repercussions?

When we stood with a solemn gravity before the Monument of the Unknown Soldier within the Place de l'Étoile, positioned beneath the majestic Arch of Triumph to lay wreaths of blossoms and exquisite roses in the front ranks, we were momentarily overwhelmed by the glitter of their medals and the splendor of their decorations.

Without any conscious volition on my part, I found my fingers instinctively reaching for the "Medal of Jihad" pinned firmly to my breast. Had they [the Algerians] not once helped liberate France itself from its occupiers? Had they not eventually vanquished the French colonial might through their monumental sacrifices? Had they not decisively altered the very trajectory of human history?

They stood adorned with our medals, boasting of our victories as if they were their own. Yet, pride radiated from our eyes like a celestial light—a beacon of unyielding honor and absolute, sovereign certainty.

And I felt the profound tremor that resonated through my being as I listened to the two national anthems: the Algerian and the French. My mind was flooded by a question as ancient as it was poignant:

—"Why is it that nations appear so diminished in stature when their people have been subjected to oppression?"

It is because the spectacles of human ignominy that stir the collective heart of a people are often those that cling most tenaciously to our common humanity. The greatest shame that

haunts the conscience of nations is that which leaves a dark and permanent stain upon the annals of human history.

Why do we experience those visceral sensations born within our souls—we, the generation of the Revolution—feelings that emanate from a history of injustice or systematic marginalization? Such an affront is not merely fleeting; while it may seem to fade from the surface of our immediate feelings, it becomes indelibly etched into the recurring patterns of our existence, transforming into a kind of enduring resentment and a deep-seated rancor. These emotions stand like the weathered pillars of ancient Roman ruins, withstanding the passage of ages without ever fully eroding.

Such are the visceral sentiments experienced by any *mujahid* or national militant against the shadow of colonial occupation, notwithstanding their sincere attempts to temper their blood and interpret matters through the cold logic of victory. We are, after all, believing Muslims, and a true believer is ordained to harbor no enduring malice in their heart.

Those who orchestrated this upon us—all that systematic injustice, calculated oppression, and profound humiliation—are they truly the French populace of the present day? Or were they merely individual architects who sought to construct an empire of time? Indeed, among the French figures who held the firm conviction that an independent Algeria was a historical necessity were men of the caliber of Pierre Bérégovoy, whose life subsequently and tragically met its end by suicide.

—*Why do these feelings persist?*

I find myself wondering, and I seek the answer within my soul for the underlying conditions that birthed such tragedies remain vibrant and alive. In instances such as these, the

collective memory manifests as a formidable and intricately interconnected tapestry. The bridge of remembrance remains anchored within the hearts of the orphans and the pained souls of the bereaved, and within the sacred silence of the martyrs' cemeteries that grace every municipality—hallowed grounds where every portal is inscribed with the immortal names of those who fell.

It persists, equally vibrant, in every wretched manifestation of enforced stagnation and ignorance that was once imposed upon us, while the splendor of progress and the refinement of civilization flourished within their own metropolises—achievements wrought at the agonizing expense of our own people and constructed by the very hands of our ancestors: those whom they favored as their primary subjects in Africa, here in Algeria.

In the Gracious Sanctuary of the Palestinian Revolution

I was in the distinguished company of the valiant mujahida Chama Boufedji (may the Almighty bestow His infinite mercy upon her soul) as we traversed the path toward sisterly Syria, destined to participate in the proceedings of the National Congress of the General Union of Arab Women. That Union, which in subsequent years was transmuted into an assembly of sovereigns, presidents, and the ruling elite, had once stood as a formidable bastion for the genuine struggle of peoples—not to mention serving as a resonant voice for our own national aspirations.

The landscape of international air travel was then engulfed in a state of global turbulence. Or more precisely, it was the visceral repercussion of the profound political and economic crisis that had gripped the oil-producing nations—most notably Algeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—in their defiant stance against the West. This was a direct response to the West's pro-Zionist posture and their unyielding support for the Israeli entity.

Within this charged and volatile atmosphere, we endeavored to navigate our passage through Rome to reach the ancient city of Damascus, serving as a formal delegation representing the resilient women of Algeria. Upon our arrival at the Roman terminal, we were confronted by a spectacle of chaos that transcended all our expectations. The entire apparatus of Western travel was in a state of total upheaval and cataclysmic disruption that paralyzed every flight destined for the various Arab capitals. We found ourselves compelled to endure a night of forced vigil within the confines of the Rome airport. Chama and I were stationed at the Fiumicino

terminal—an institution which her vibrant wit and intellectual poise preferred to christen, with a touch of irony, as the "Fiumicino Palace." Thus did I interpret her humor during those trying hours.

We remained positioned within the Grand Hall of the airport amidst a myriad of weary passengers. As the shroud of night grew more profound and the throngs of travelers gradually ebbed away, a select few of us were left to confront a frigid night within the desolate expanse of the great waiting hall. We never once ceased our ruminations, searching for a resolution to our predicament and a path of egress, until a sympathetic individual intervened to assist us. He guided us toward the imperative necessity of establishing a lifeline with our diplomatic mission in Rome to facilitate our extraction from the airport and into the city. However, the airport constabulary intervened with a chilling clinicality, prohibiting our entry into the city for want of a vaccination certificate—treating us as though we were the bearers of some infectious pestilence.

Indeed, we were confronted by a formidable ordeal. After a grueling struggle, we finally succeeded in making contact with the Ambassador himself. Upon presenting the gravity of our situation, and following the Ambassador's discourse with the police authorities, he addressed us with a startling literalness that remains etched in my memory:

—"Pray, what is it you expect of me? I myself do not traverse the city by motor vehicle; and furthermore, who, I ask, issued the mandate to cease the exportation of oil?"

This was the response of an Ambassador ordained to represent the sovereign policy of the President and the entire

State abroad. I still retain the name of that individual, yet I prefer to shroud it in the silence of discretion.

When that telephonic exchange concluded, Chama (may the Almighty grant her mercy) turned to me, laughing with an air of magnificent indifference and fierce defiance:

—"O perfection of women, does the prospect of slumbering in airports strike fear into your heart?"

I replied to her with a serene smile:

— "I am in your company, and thus I remain entirely indifferent."

—"I have never before navigated the convoluted depths of such an experience, yet fear finds no harbor in my soul, provided I remain in your presence and you stand as my sentinel. This white 'Burnous' I don—a garment of Sufi purity and unblemished grace—possesses a breadth that exceeds my cumulative years and a fortitude far more resilient than my own perceived reality. Verily, I am inhabited by a profound and radiant sense of jubilant peace within its protective folds."

Chama was my senior in years, and her words resonated within me with the weight of an undeniable truth. In her company, I was enveloped by a sense of absolute and unassailable sanctuary. On that hallowed night, we improvised a modest resting place by aligning four chairs to serve as a bed, utilizing that "Wahrani" burnous as our singular shield against the elements. The frigid air possessed a predatory and biting intensity, seemingly determined to penetrate the very marrow of our bones.

We were not the sole occupants of that particular wing of the great hall, yet our material resources were painfully

meager; for in those days, the stipends allocated for governmental missions were largely symbolic, never disbursed in the significant sums common in later eras. Given that our specific mission was undertaken on behalf of the Party and its grassroots mass organizations, we possessed only a pittance of currency in our purses.

Abruptly, while we were struggling to suppress the involuntary tremors of our bodies beneath the protective length of the burnous, a young man of a deep, dark complexion and skin the color of burnished amber approached our station. He was adorned with a traditional "qalq" (cap) upon his head. He offered his greetings with a quiet and resonant solemnity:

—"Peace be upon you."

Chama responded with her customary poise and grace:

—"And upon you be the peace and the infinite mercy of Allah. Pray, sir, what is your desire? Is there perchance some service we might extend to you?"

The young man replied with a voice that carried the warmth of genuine kinship:

—"I am an Arab Muslim man from the land of Somalia. I perceived the distinctive echoes of the sacred Arabic tongue in your discourse, and I felt moved to offer whatever assistance or help I might provide."

Chama responded with a gentle, yet firm smile that radiated the dignity of her character:

—"Our gratitude is immense, sir. We are truly honored by this chance acquaintance, yet we find ourselves in no urgent need of anything beyond the mercy of the Almighty."

The man withdrew, his face still adorned with a modest and serene smile that betrayed no hint of persistence. Yet, he re-emerged shortly thereafter, bearing with him a selection of provisions and a bottle of mineral water. He presented them to us, declaring with a voice full of sincere devotion:

—"I implore you to accept this modest offering from my hand; are we not, after all, brothers and sisters unified by the sacred bonds of our faith?"

Chama accepted the offering with a heart full of gratitude, though she strived to veil her desperate eagerness for the sustenance—provisions that had arrived at the most providential hour, for they were more than an absolute necessity within that frigid and desolate atmosphere of December **1974**.

We finally reached the ancient city of Damascus, yet it was only after an exhausting twenty-four-hour odyssey of wandering through the labyrinthine corridors of international airports. We traversed the path to Lebanon by motor vehicle, entirely bereft of our suitcases; for they had either been lost to the winds of fate or maliciously detained at the Rome airport, where the staff made no effort to conceal their visceral and immense animosity toward the Arab people.

We participated in the proceedings of the conference, where Chama recounted the chronicle of our journey in her address to the assembly. She offered a dignified apology for our delay at the inaugural session. Upon the conclusion of her oratory, she let out a resounding and long "zaghrouda" (ululation) directly into the microphone—a piercing and defiant salute to the conference, to the collective struggle across the Arab world, and to every honorable Arab stance. Our luggage was never

restored to us; the suitcases were truly lost to the shadows. Thus, we were compelled to acquire the barest of essentials in Damascus, making do with the garments we had worn throughout our journey.

On the final day of the conference, we were graced by a formal invitation from Brother Yasser Arafat, delivered through the Palestinian militant sister Najlaa Saad al-Din Umm Nasser, the manager of Arafat's private office. She was accompanied by the dedicated Palestinian activist Nabila al-Qadoumi (Umm al-Lutf). We embraced the invitation with profound joy and were hosted as honored guests of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut for three full and transformative days. They meticulously orchestrated several activities and field visits for us, including a pilgrimage to the fedayeen bases in Al-Rashidiya in the south and the rugged heights of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon. During our visit to Al-Rashidiya, we were accompanied by the philosopher of the struggle, the martyr Abu Iyad, alongside the sisters Umm Nasser and Umm Jihad.

The atmospheric conditions were quintessentially wintry, and the jagged peaks of the Lebanese mountains were draped in a heavy, majestic shroud of snow. Within the sanctuary of the fedayeen camp, we engaged in a protracted and profound dialogue concerning the multifaceted experience of our Revolution. I recall with visceral clarity our nocturnal repast: it consisted of nothing more than salted cheese, traditional Turkish *halawa*, and simple bread—a meal of revolutionary austerity that tasted of dignity. From our vantage point in Al-Rashidiya, we beheld the distant, hallowed lights of occupied Palestine—that land referred to by the world as "Israel," yet known to our hearts by its true and eternal name.

Within that same crucible of resistance, we discovered Algerian, Iraqi, and Egyptian fedayeen, all fused into a singular soul and a unified destiny alongside their Palestinian revolutionary brethren. On our trek toward Nabatieh, escorted by the sisters Jamila Umm Sabri and Najlaa Umm Nasser, we bore witness with our own eyes to the relentless daily shelling orchestrated by the Israeli occupation—a brutality met with a magnificent and indomitable resilience by both the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples in the south.

Following our field immersion, Brother Yasser Arafat received us within the hallowed confines of his office. We lived alongside him, and every soul present, the vibrant hopes of imminent victory and the eventual establishment of the sovereign State of Palestine—the very state that was subsequently proclaimed at the Palace of Nations on Algerian soil. I evoke his memory today, may the Almighty bestow His mercy upon him, as he stood amidst our shared dreams and we dwelled within his gracious hospitality.

Present in that historic conclave were the poet Muin Bseiso, Abu Jihad, Abu Iyad, Abu Sakhr, and many others, alongside our companions from the militant sisterhood, including the courageous writer Mai Sayegh.

The relentless river of years flowed on, and most of those beloved comrades of the struggle have since ascended to the heavens or attained martyrdom. Long after the passing of Yasser Arafat (Abu Ammar, the martyred symbol), and following the tragic vicissitudes that have befallen the Palestinian cause, I encountered Sister Mai Sayegh once again as we were being honored in Damascus—the capital of Arab culture—as pioneering writers of the Arab world. She remembered me as she surrendered to a deluge of bitter tears,

weeping over the weight of memories and over her own fragile state, for she was then enduring a grave malady. She confessed to me that she did not feel the peril of her own physiological pain as much as she sensed the grave malady currently afflicting the Palestinian Revolution.

Special Envoy to King Hussein

One momentous day, President Chadli Bendjedid summoned me to his presence to entrust me with a sovereign mission of the highest order: to serve as his personal and special envoy to His Majesty King Hussein bin Talal, the monarch of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Addressing me with a fatherly recognition, he remarked:

—"You are a soul that rarely seeks the sanctuary of rest. The Prime Minister himself has apprised me that you remain anchored within the cabinet chamber until the very final echoes of the meeting have faded, notwithstanding the formidable weight of your domestic obligations. Moreover, I bear witness to your tireless vigor, for I observe your presence every single week treading the soil of a different province on a working and inspection odyssey."

He paused for a pregnant moment, his features softening with a discerning smile, then added:

—"Furthermore, do not lose sight of the historical reality that you shall be the inaugural woman to serve as a special envoy for an Algerian President!"

Here he was, evoking that theme of "priority" and "precedence" once again, just as he had on the day of my inaugural ministerial appointment, when he had proclaimed with such solemnity:

—"You shall, by this act, step into the annals of history."

It is a bitter truth that this very "priority" served as a catalyst for the emergence of detractors and enemies, offered up to me entirely without cost—most notably among certain members of my own gender. Nevertheless, I was inhabited by a profound

sense of jubilant honor at this distinction, while remaining acutely aware that it represented an entirely new frontier for me—a majestic mission that I would embark upon and perform for the very first time in my existence.

Directly from the President's presence, I directed my steps toward the chambers of our dear brother, Dr. Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, who then presided over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I sought his counsel, inquiring after the established customs and protocols for performing a mission of such sovereign gravity. He responded with a radiant, congratulatory smile, articulating the following:

"You shall carry to the Jordanian monarch the most fraternal greetings of the President of the Republic. You are to present before his presence a concise yet comprehensive exposition on the current situation in Algeria, emphasizing our unyielding and principled positions regarding the Arab cause in general, and the Palestinian cause in particular. Subsequently, you shall listen with exquisite care to his Majesty's discourse, so that you may convey it with absolute fidelity to the President upon your return."

I absorbed the words of my brother Ahmed Taleb with concentrated interest. I reflected deeply upon the mission, and I was certain that he grasped the tremors of anxiety that often inhabit me in such momentous situations—specifically because he understood my visceral desire to perpetually rise to the required civilizational level. As I prepared to rise, he remarked:

—"Ah, I had nearly forgotten! You shall take with you a financial check destined for our Palestinian brothers; Brother ***Dr.*** *Jawad al-Anani, the Jordanian Minister of Health and Social Affairs, shall receive it from your hand."*

I embarked upon my journey to Jordan. Upon my arrival at the Amman airport, I found our esteemed Ambassador there, Mr. Ahmed Al-Aidi, along with his spouse, the illustrious writer Aisha Lamsin, awaiting my presence. They had meticulously orchestrated a welcoming reception and prepared a comprehensive press conference that included every facet of the media—print, radio, and television.

I had not anticipated such a magnificent reception, and I was, in truth, entirely exhausted. Yet, I found myself simultaneously surprised and gratified; for the press conference lasted for more than an hour, during which I beheld my likeness gracing every one of these media platforms. They held in high esteem the stature of the "Writer and Woman of Letters" that preceded my identity as a "Minister." a distinction that brought me immense gratification. I soon learned that many of my Palestinian and Jordanian sisters-in-arms had been apprised of the matter, and they arrived in succession to offer their felicitations. Among those radiant souls was Sister Emily Naffah, a woman of steadfast Communist conviction. As I greeted her, I vividly recalled our inaugural encounter in Moscow during one of the Afro-Asian Congresses. We had stood together before the solemn sanctuary of Lenin’s tomb, and she, visibly moved, had whispered:

— *"I adore you, O Lenin."*

I was struck with a profound bewilderment on that day; yet, in the quiet of my soul, I respected her stance. For is it not the sovereign right of every individual to hold their own distinct opinions and convictions, both in the theatre of life and the labyrinth of politics?

Be that as it may, a single day thereafter, His Majesty King Hussein bin Talal dispatched his sovereign aircraft to facilitate our passage to the city of Aqaba, for he was not in residence in Amman at that hour. I embarked upon that royal flight in the company of my dear brother, His Excellency Ambassador Ahmed Al-Aidi. During our journey through the heavens, the Ambassador turned to me and inquired with a gentle, discerning kindness:

— *"And pray, what discourse shall you deliver before His Majesty the King?"*

I met his inquiry with a serene smile that strived to veil my internal trepidation; for in absolute truth, I had not prepared a formal, written text to rely upon in the presence of the Monarch. However, while sequestered in my hotel, I had consecrated long hours of vigil to memorizing and meticulously organizing the necessary ideas within my mind—thoughts studied with exhaustive care to be relied upon during this inaugural dialogue with a King. I had arranged them in a focused, tranquil methodology. Indeed, I discovered through my long odyssey, spanning half a century, that equanimity and the absolute mastery of one's nerves are the primordial conditions for success—not merely within the spheres of dialogue and politics, but in every facet of human endeavor.

We finally reached our destination, to be received at the majestic gates of the Aqaba Palace by Mrs. Laila Sharaf. At that historical juncture, she presided as the Minister of Information within the Jordanian government; she stood before us distinguished by a modest, welcoming smile, yet one tempered by a visible sense of reserve.

I suddenly found myself instinctively engaged in a silent comparison between her presence and that of Madam In'am al-Mufti, the former Jordanian Minister of Social Affairs, who had previously welcomed me during a summit of Arab Social Ministers in the city of Tunis. She possessed an intellectual and literary stature of such magnitude that it commanded an innate and immediate respect; her presence as the solitary female minister amidst that vast sea of male counterparts had been more than sufficient to dissolve my own layers of persistent anxiety and visceral awe.

Abruptly, Mrs. Laila Sharaf, the Minister of Information in the Jordanian government, knocked upon the portal. She opened it with haste, only for me to discover that His Majesty the King himself was the one facilitating our entry—as he was the sovereign master of the residence and the host, while we were his honored guests. King Hussein was inhabited by a refined civility and a sincere, unvarnished humility—traits that ought to be the defining hallmarks of every true leader. Indeed, his presence radiated a modesty far more profound and authentic than that manifested by many minor officials I had previously encountered.

I beheld him as I offered my formal salutations, while some of his young children were playfully perched upon his shoulders, one after another, entirely immersed in the joyous and carefree innocence of a game.

I was momentarily mesmerized by the sight, though I strived with all my resolve to ensure my features betrayed no hint of my inner astonishment. He ushered us toward an intimate salon within a modestly appointed chamber. Yet, before inviting us to take our seats, he guided our steps toward a

sprawling window and articulated with a resonant and deep gravity:

—"Madam, cast your gaze thither. That is the airport of Eilat, and whenever I stand to observe it, I am overcome by a profound and searing agony. Verily, everything upon this hallowed soil today serves as an invitation to a pained and lingering sorrow."

I perceived then that the man was struggling with all his fortitude to hold back the rising tide of his tears. His features shifted with a sudden, measured gravity, and we occupied our seats. It was as though my dialogue with him commenced instinctively from the very point where his poignant observation had left off. This shared emotional threshold facilitated my transition toward the core of our national cause and the formal delivery of the financial check—a sacred gift from Algeria to the Palestinian Revolution—which I subsequently handed to the Jordanian Minister of Health.

The King spoke for an extensive duration and listened to my words with an exquisite, profound attention. I delivered the sovereign message from my country and its President with the utmost and unblemished honesty. He, in turn, spoke at length and with visible emotion regarding the cherished and elevated status Algeria held within his own heart and the collective hearts of the Jordanian people. He embarked upon a sophisticated analysis of the specificity and the distinct, indomitable character of the Algerian people, praising what he termed their "Nationalism of Action" and their unwavering, heroic preservation of their principles, their cultural constants, and their ancient, blood-stained history of struggle. He articulated his perspectives with a high degree of scholarly knowledge and a remarkably deep civilizational insight.

Subsequently, his spouse, Her Majesty Queen Noor, graced the chamber with her presence. The currents of our conversation then shifted toward our national experience in the realm of social protection and the specialized care for individuals with special needs—a field in which the Queen herself manifested a deep-seated and personal devotion within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

As the hour of our departure drew near and we prepared to take our leave, the children had surreptitiously slipped back into the room, weaving playfully between our feet to reach their father and complete the game that our arrival had momentarily interrupted. We then embarked upon our flight back toward the capital, Amman.

Within the heart of the capital, Amman, our cherished and devoted friend Aisha Lamsin was awaiting our return with palpable anticipation, nearly holding her breath as she inquired with high urgency:

—"Ahmed, I implore you, recount the details of the visit! How did it transpire?"

Her spouse, the Ambassador, responded to her inquiry with a playful yet discernible pride, remarking with a smile:

—"Were I not restrained by the fear of invoking the ire of my superior, the Foreign Minister Dr. Ahmed Taleb, I would venture to declare that she discharged this sovereign mission with an eloquence and success that might have eclipsed even his own!"

A cascade of lighthearted laughter rippled through our small circle at his jest; yet, I felt moved to offer a respectful and measured commentary:

—"Say rather, my noble brother, that I merely reflect his own essence; for we are both the proud progeny and graduates of the very same reformist educational alma mater."

As for his spouse, Aisha, she performed a gesture of extraordinary intimacy and esteem; she unclasped a fine golden chain from her own neck—a piece adorned with a "Khamsa" (The Hand of Fatima)—and meticulously placed it around my neck with an air of profound pride. She beseeched me never to permit its removal, for she intended it to serve as a tangible manifestation of her immense pride in my conduct on that momentous day. I perceived her gift as a symbolic shield intended to safeguard me from the shadows of envy; indeed, I have faithfully kept that "Khamsa" anchored to my person to this very day.

It functioned, in truth, as a sacred shield that served to safeguard my spirit from the corrosive shadows of envy. I eventually returned to the embrace of Algeria; however, prior to my final departure from those hallowed lands, I was honored by a gracious dinner invitation from our brother and hero, the martyr Abu Jihad, and his noble spouse, my beloved companion Intissar al-Wazir (Umm Jihad). It was a warm, vibrant, and quintessentially revolutionary evening, resonant with the profound depth of the struggle that had traveled to them directly from the pulsating heart of the occupied lands.

Upon my return to the motherland, I formally presented both my oral testimony and my exhaustive written report to President Chadli Bendjedid regarding the intricacies of my mission. I found him to be in a state of high satisfaction and profound gratification. I meticulously related to his presence every singular item of news and every discerning observation I had gathered during my odyssey.

He addressed me with a radiant smile, offering his sincere congratulations:

—"On the contrary, your conduct was exceptionally brave. Our national stance regarding the Palestinian cause is universally recognized, formally declared, and remains eternally constant."

As I was traversing the threshold of the President's office, I happened to encounter our dear brother, Al-Sharif Kherroubi, who was making his way in to present his own report concerning a mission to the Sultanate of Oman. He remarked to me with a touch of jesting irony:

—"You are perpetually the favored child of Fortune. King Hussein himself graced the portal to welcome your arrival, yet Sultan Qaboos did not deign even to receive me in his presence!"

Descartes Lycée

The "Descartes" Lycée—formerly known simply as "Descartes"—was an educational institution formerly under the hallowed aegis of the French diplomatic mission. I harbor no intention of reciting mere technical specifications or administrative data here; my singular aim is to declare, for the eternal record of History, that the ‘Evian Accords’ orchestrated between the Algerian and French parties—destined to dismantle the colonial settlement—focused on a myriad of vital and sensitive levels.

Educational life within the newly sovereign Algeria was among these paramount levels. It was formally agreed to maintain these specific educational sanctuaries under the direct supervision of France on Algerian soil, implementing the identical pedagogical curricula utilized in the French motherland. This arrangement was meticulously intended to fulfill the educational requirements of the French community remaining in Algeria following the dawn of independence, providing the necessary administrative and security infrastructure for its successful and harmonious operation.

Consequently, the progeny of the French community residing in Algeria were granted the sovereign right to pursue their studies within an educational institution of their own, mirroring the privileges afforded to other accredited diplomatic corps.

However, as the river of time flowed on, these institutions began—drop by drop and little by little—to manifest a role for which they were perhaps strategically prepared, involving the Algerian officials themselves. They began to legally facilitate and encourage the admission of a significant number of

Algerian children, most notably the progeny of high-ranking state officials, to undertake their studies within those hallowed walls. This development inevitably birthed a myriad of profound complications and pained troubles regarding their cultural specificity and their national alignment.

The primary focus was anchored upon the instruction of the Arabic language, granting the Algerian educational inspectorate the sovereign right to exercise pedagogical oversight over the educators—specifically those entrusted with the sacred mission of its teaching.

To this extent, the unfolding of events appeared to follow a natural course. Yet, what manifested as profoundly "unnatural" and unsettling was the reality that those who primarily benefited from integrating their progeny into this foreign institution were certain high-ranking officials within the very State of independent Algeria. Notwithstanding their monumental responsibilities, and despite the visceral truth that our nascent school system had emerged directly from the hallowed womb of millions of martyrs who had offered their lives to reclaim the authentic identity and national history of this people, these individuals preferred for their own children the French pedagogical program.

They orchestrated this choice so that their children would not be—in their estimation—exposed like other Algerian children to the potential repercussions of errors, stumbles, and the unavoidable growing pains currently afflicting the Algerian school system. In their view, the national system was still a mere laboratory, struggling to define its essence within an educational framework influenced more than any other by the foundational infrastructures of Algerian society and the lingering, corrosive remnants of colonialism—most notably in

its cultural and educational facets. They further perceived a significant "peril" to their children in the State's resolute commitment to the Arabization of education within the foundational grades.

Independent Algeria had definitively chosen for its future generations to reclaim the first years through Arabization, designating the Arabic language as the primary medium for teaching and intellectual formation, and positioning the French language among the foreign tongues—notwithstanding its rank at the zenith of that list.

I do not assert that these officials were exclusively those already subsumed by French culture or the skeptics of the Algerian pedagogical edifice; rather, there existed intellectuals of Arab culture—nay, even the progeny of the Reformist Ulema themselves—who, in a moment of startling contradiction, preferred for their children the French tongue before the Arabic language.

It transpired one day that I sought an audience with Brother Al-Tahar al-Tijini, who then presided as the director of the Okba bin Nafie Secondary School in the vibrant Bab El Oued district. My purpose was to solicit his assistance in transferring my son, Hisham, to an institution positioned in closer proximity to our family hearth. He reacted with a sudden and fiery agitation, exclaiming with a pained fervor:

—"Behold! I am laboring to forge a modeled echelon of successful scholars destined for the triumph of Arabization, yet here you are, subverting my strategic vision just as [So-and-so] decimated it, notwithstanding his classification among the ranks of renowned scholars, reformers, and champions of the Arabic tongue!"

I offered him a serene and knowing smile, for I was intimately acquainted with his character—having served alongside him in the Ministry of Awqaf during his tenure as Secretary General. I replied:

—"Calm your spirit, Si al-Tahar. The singular motivation for my request is purely logistical; the family has relocated, and I yearn for Hisham to be in a secondary school that does not demand such a grueling daily trek."

He extended a dignified apology for his outburst, then proceeded to deliver an exhaustive and pained lecture concerning the complex issue of the Arabic language, the arduous path of Arabization, and the precarious, wavering stances manifested by some who were ostensibly counted within its vanguard.

Thus, I was possessed of a deep comprehension and profound contemplation regarding these multifaceted matters long before I was ordained with the sovereign stewardship of the Ministry of National Education. Prior to that ascension, I had traversed the professional ranks as a dedicated educator at the primary, subsequently the complementary, and finally the secondary tiers of instruction. Furthermore, during my tenure as an elected member of the sovereign Parliament, a meticulously detailed report arrived in our hands concerning the infamous demonstrations instigated by certain students and pupils within the Descartes institution. Other educational houses were subsequently drawn into that maelstrom, and they emerged onto the public thoroughfares brandishing the shocking and defiant slogan: *"History into the discard pile!"* (History in the trash!)—simply because the National Education Inspectorate had endeavored to implement the sovereign national pedagogical program by mandating History

as an obligatory subject in the examinations for Algerian students within that private sanctuary.

I find myself uncertain as to whether I was profoundly shaken by the magnitude of that specific incident, notwithstanding the fact that I had been—at the very first light of our independence—among the grateful beneficiaries of the nocturnal seminars provided within that very institution, consecrating those twilight hours to the meticulous mastery of a foreign tongue. I was then serving as an educator, and following the grueling demands of a day divided between professional toil and rigorous university research, I would direct my steps, in the company of my husband, toward that very institution, as I have previously noted.

I have already articulated within these chronicles that we were by no means dependent upon the tongue of the occupier to remain under its shadow. Let the French language recede from our soil, accompanied by its people and its distinct civilization. Our eventual victory over it was absolute; yet, our decisive expulsion of its political and military force was never intended as a wholesale banishment of its broader culture or universal civilization.

I was not then, nor have I ever been, among the voices calling for the total abandonment of a foreign language—at least not as a vital and secondary acquisition to be held alongside the mother tongue. Indeed, such mastery serves to enrich the individual and the educated professional in particular, vastly expanding the horizons of the mother tongue itself. It empowers one to navigate the labyrinths of discourse and reason through a myriad of varied channels. At that juncture, the vast majority of our administrative machinery remained under the dominant influence of this language; it

served as the grand gateway to an entire continent, many of whose nations remained within its linguistic sphere—most notably Europe. Verily, the window afforded by the Descartes Lycée provided a portal through which the light of global science and enlightenment could enter—and a room with a window shall always be superior to one that is entirely sequestered.

In this regard, I evoke the wisdom of our dear and brilliant brother, Mouloud Kassim Nait Belkacem, who used to assert:

—"Openness toward other cultures and civilizations is a vital necessity. It serves to balance our vision of ourselves and the 'Other,' and refines our judgments concerning both our own affairs and those beyond our borders. However, this must remain an additive and secondary pursuit. It should serve to deepen our own authenticity through experience and intellectual richness, provided it remains a positive catalyst among the many factors of life, and provided—above all else—that this process never infringes upon our national sovereignty within the educational sphere specifically, nor compromises the patriotic formation of our coming generations."

This sacred imperative had historically commanded our fathers and grandfathers to offer monumental sacrifices for the sake of reclaiming our national identity and our very existence, resolutely refusing to compromise its hallowed values and constants.

One momentous day, I was summoned to the presence of the President of the Republic, who entrusted me with a formidable and sensitive file concerning the future of this very institution (the Descartes Lycée). I was gracing the sovereign office of the Minister of National Education at the time. After

meticulously examining the complexities of the file alongside the relevant sovereign bodies—including the General Secretariat of the Presidency and the Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—I labored with all my resolve to ensure that the final decisions and administrative procedures did not, in any way, touch upon or diminish the Algerian side, its absolute sovereignty, or the rights formally stipulated within the Evian Accords. Simultaneously, I strived to ensure that the French side remained unmolested, and that the educational program of this private body was respected, notwithstanding the necessary cessation of certain unwarranted privileges previously enjoyed by this entity. And thus it was finalized. Yet, what cannot be shrouded in silence or ignored today is that a myriad of profound considerations had compelled the Algerian leadership to open this sensitive file. Foremost among them were:

First: This institution had decisively transcended the hallowed boundaries of its ordained jurisdiction, acquiring a status of singular prestige and far-reaching influence. It had successfully secured a myriad of significant privileges and administrative exemptions from certain high-ranking officials—individuals whose own progeny enjoyed the elitism of studying within its walls. These were privileges of such a distinguished nature that the national educational institutions, which were the very soul of the state, could never hope to attain for themselves.

Second: The institution had systematically bypassed and transgressed several foundational clauses of the international agreements established between it and the national educational apparatus. This was particularly evident regarding the blatant lack of respect for the mandated educational

curriculum intended for Algerian students, and a defiant refusal to submit to the necessary inspection and pedagogical oversight, most specifically within the sacred subject of national History...

Third: The institution occupied a geographically sensitive and vital strategic enclave. It was nestled precisely between the majestic Presidency of the Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, directly facing the grand edifice of the Ministry of National Education. All of this was situated within the "El Mouradia" district—a neighborhood that bears the hallowed name of the martyr leader Didouche Mourad. Furthermore, the Algerian students within this institution were observed participating in the daily ritual of saluting the French tricolor.

Every single morning, as the bell sounded, these Algerian scholars would arrive at the gates ensconced within their fathers' official sovereign vehicles, effectively paralyzing the traffic within the main artery of Beijing Street.

It was as if they—and those entrusted with the stewardship of that institution—were issuing a daily, overt, and public declaration of mockery toward the Algerian school system. It was perceived as a visceral rejection of the very essence of national independence, manifesting in the turning of their backs upon this school that had been so heroically liberated from the colonial night of yesterday.

Perhaps certain voices attempted to justify this by claiming their children were born to foreign mothers—an excuse that, in the final analysis, remains far more offensive to the national conscience than the original transgression itself.

These were some, though by no means all, of the monumental reasons that prompted the leadership to formally

reopen this sensitive file. It was my ordained duty to present a meticulously detailed report, encompassing every singular datum, every verified information, and every stark statistic.



An inspection visit to educational institutions in Laghouat in 1986



In the first Council of Ministers meeting attended by Mrs. Zhour Wanisi as Secretary of State for Social Affairs



With the mujahid Abdelhamid Mehri, on the occasion of being honored by the National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1982



With a group of mujahideen at the Mujahideen Congress, among them Amar Ouamrane, Ben Tobbal, El Hadj Lakhdar, Tahar Zobiri, and Saadia



One of the meetings of the Central Committee, featuring the mujahid minister Djelloul El Khatib



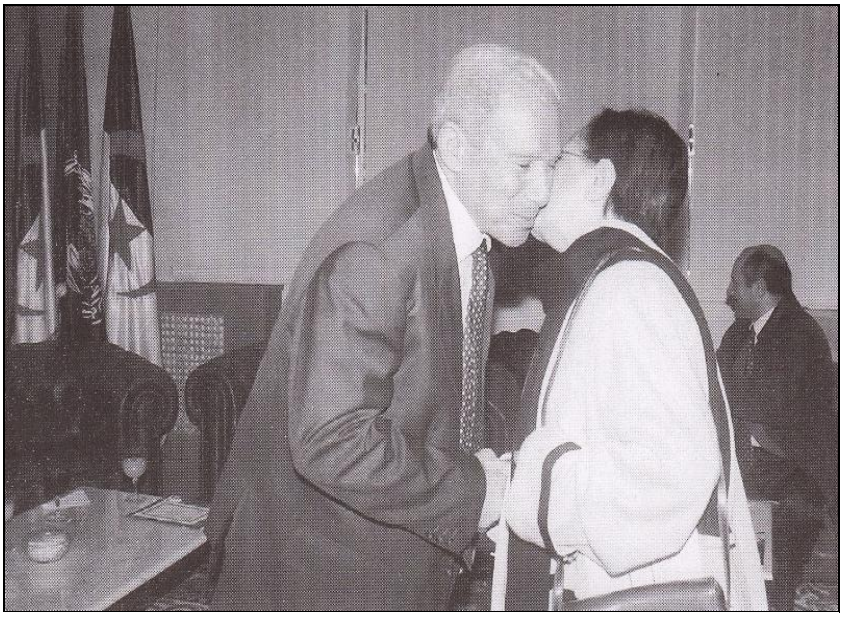
Arab Writers Union conference, Algiers, Palace of Nations: 1975. From left to right: Abdellah Cheriet, Malek Haddad, Mohamed El Mili, Ahmed Menour, Messaoud Boulanouar, Zhour Wanisi, and Mouloud Achour. Second row, from left to right: Omar Bernaoui and Mohamed Masaif



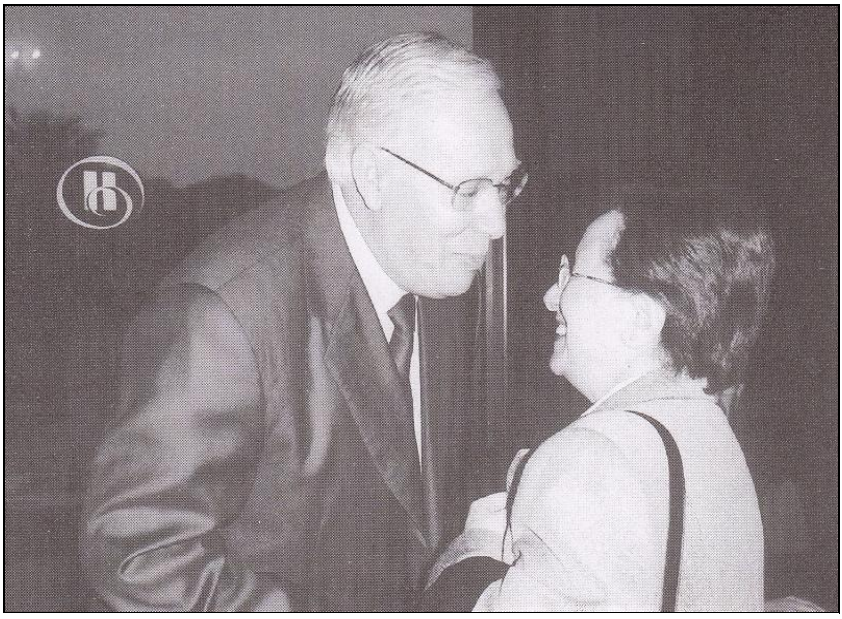
With President Chadli Bendjedid, at the Paris City Hall



With President Abdelaziz Bouteflika



With the martyr of the war on corruption, the mujahid Ali Tounsi



With the mujahid and minister, Mohamed Cherif Abbas



With Rajiv Gandhi



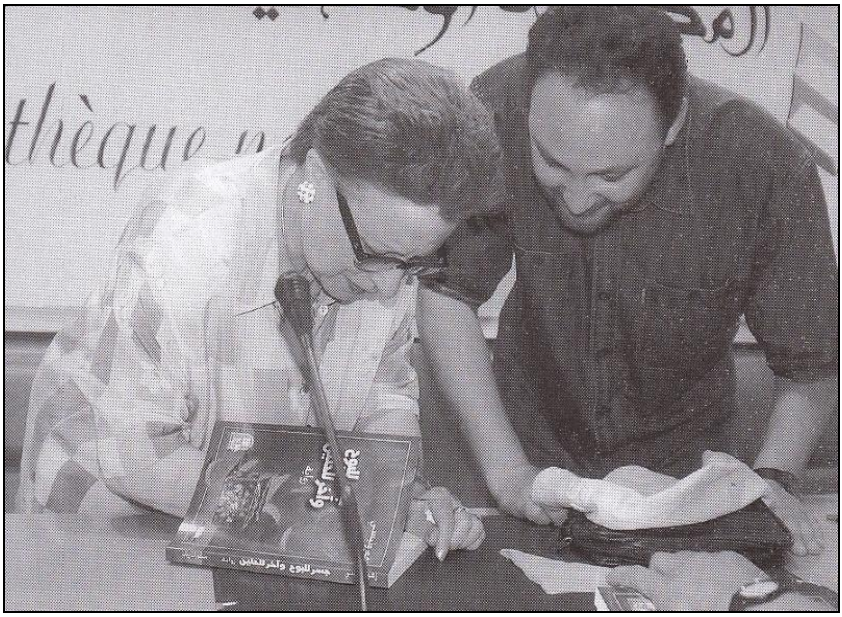
With Tunisian Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali, and the mujahid Mouloud Kassem, Abderrahmane Chibane, and Abdelmadjid Meziane



With the mujahid Bashir Boumaza and Prince Hassan bin Talal



With Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, President of the Al-Babtain Foundation for Thought and Culture



The author Zhour Wanisi inscribing one of her novels



The cover of Al-Jazairia (The Algerian Woman) magazine

There likely existed a myriad of other underlying factors and nuanced reasons, the intricacies of which remained beyond the hallowed scope of my ministerial mandate and the prescribed boundaries of my official jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the considerations I have previously articulated were, in my considered estimation, more than sufficient to justify the formal and final reopening of this sensitive dossier.

This process culminated in the eventual transmutation of this institution into a private educational mission, with its scholastic endeavors relocated definitively to another edifice situated within one of the capital's suburbs—a building that had previously served as a sanctuary for teacher training, bearing the hallowed name of the martyr Mustafa Khalef.

In subsequent years, this entity was officially rechristened as the "Alexandre Dumas International Lycée."

As for the ancestral building that once housed the Descartes Lycée, it was reclaimed and transformed into a sovereign national institution dedicated to secondary and technical education. It was bestowed with the name of a legendary hero and an illustrious commander of the National Liberation Revolution: Sheikh Bouamama.

To preside over its administrative stewardship, one of the most distinguished and competent female militant directors was appointed, Mrs. Fadila Ben Aziza, and it was then that our glorious national tricolor was hoisted high above its roof for the very first time in its history.

Should we hesitate to designate this as a fresh and radiant victory for our sovereignty, let us at the very least be content to proclaim it a necessary and harmonious correction of what had previously been a jarring and discordant note within the majestic symphony of our national educational system.

Dismissal or Resignation?

Following my final departure from the formidable and exhausting burdens of governance, and after I had formally submitted my professional dossier for retirement, I was hosted by the distinguished journalist and then-nascent statesman, Mr. Hamraoui Habib Chaouki, on his celebrated televised forum, *"Dialogue"* (*Hiwar*). During the course of our exchange, he directed toward my presence a piercingly blunt and direct inquiry:

—"Pray, Madam, was your exit from the Cabinet a matter of personal resignation, or were you formally dismissed from your post?"

I permitted a soft, knowing smile to grace my features and replied, momentarily caught by the suddenness of his query:

—"Let us venture to say that I both resigned and was dismissed simultaneously."

As much as the technical ensemble gracing that historic episode was struck with an audible bewilderment, I harbored a profound internal clarity as to why I chose those specific words.

I had perceived, during those turbulent days of **1987**, a deep-seated administrative yearning within my soul to withdraw; it was as though I had already formally resigned within the sacred sanctuary of my moral conscience. I was being subjected to a relentless succession of spiritual tremors, a direct result of the flagrant transgressions and the ethical deviations I was compelled to witness—and hear of—occurring within the very gears of the sector I coordinated, as well as among high-ranking officials within other ministerial spheres.

I was shaken with a visceral and violent agony by a monumental instance of systemic forgery and grievous academic fraud. I meticulously aggregated every singular datum surrounding this ethical breach with an unblemished honesty, purposing to lay the evidence before those who occupied the summits of sovereign responsibility above my own station, so that they might ordain the requisite corrective decrees. I was inhabited by a profound sense of pride in my own tireless vigilance and my indomitable resolve to dismantle such deviations within my vocational sphere, for I harbored a visceral refusal to ever be a silent accomplice to such corruption.

For example, I found it fundamentally insufferable that any individual should labor to secure the academic success of a solitary, failing pupil simply because he was the "Progeny of an Eminent Figure." Pray, what then could be said of the harrowing circumstance wherein an entire roster of failed candidates is granted fraudulent success in the Baccalaureate examinations solely because they are the children of senior officials—figures through whom strategic interests and illicit privileges could be brokered?

I was, in the final analysis, struck with a profound and agonizing shock when I perceived that those who scrutinized these affairs—matters I regarded as a flagrant deviation and a betrayal of trust by certain officials within the very sector I presided over—perceived them merely as "customary favors" and mutual bartering of interests for specific and isolated cases. In the eyes of these individuals, I was ostensibly magnifying the issues beyond their true scale; in their vision, I was expected to manifest a pliable "comprehension of circumstances" and respond with a flexible, accommodating

positivity. The situation descended to such a nadir of audacity that one among them, following the academic failure of his son, addressed me with these specific words: *"This is not a serious matter!"* He spoke thus simply because I had resolutely and categorically declined to orchestrate a fraudulent success for his failing offspring—and he himself was a Minister of the Republic.

It was as if a righteous and sacred indignation descended upon those deviants and the architects of corruption—at least within the specific sector over which I exercised stewardship. I meticulously placed the dots upon the letters, clarifying the stark and unvarnished truth, and leveled a formal accusation against them for betraying the most hallowed treasure within this nation: the children of the common folk, those vulnerable souls who are entirely bereft of the power to shield or defend themselves against such treachery.

These innocent students had placed their absolute and unreserved trust within our hands, and it was our sacred duty to deliver unto them the untarnished and authentic results of their examinations—results upon which they had anchored the totality of their future hopes and aspirations.

I stood my ground with an unyielding and fierce resolve, adding the monumental weight of a moral crusade to the administrative one. I was inhabited by a profound state of exhaustion, beginning to perceive with a heavy heart that the radiance of Right and Truth was being systematically eclipsed by the dark shadows of falsehood. I felt, with a piercing clarity, that certain individuals harbored a dark desire to monopolize professional success exclusively for the failures, while systematically disenfranchising the sincere and the devoted. I endured a deep spiritual ache, realizing that some were

tirelessly laboring to corrupt the very atmosphere of noble labor.

I eventually descended into a state characterized by a total loss of trust in everything I had previously held as beautiful or noble. In the aftermath of this specific episode, I was overcome—for the very first time—by a sensation of profound psychological relief. I felt as though I were the solitary survivor of a cataclysmic deluge, or a pristine bird making its desperate escape from the heart of a polluted storm. I had been nearly compelled to submerge myself and swim within those turbid waters; yet, I finally awoke from a nightmare that certain souls had mistakenly perceived as nothing but a rosy dream. Verily, my unyielding and rigid adherence to the principles of Truth and Justice had rendered me—in their eyes—a "heavy and burdensome nightmare."

The Events of October 5, 1988

The venerable social historian Gustave Le Bon once articulated a profound truth when he observed:

—"Political cataclysms do not register their genesis with an abrupt suddenness; rather, every singular occurrence appears to be birthed from a hidden womb of clandestine causes, enigmas often entirely veiled from those unversed in the dark and cynical arts of political maneuvering."

Or, more precisely, it was perhaps my own innate "ignorance" of politics as they are practiced within the labyrinthine world of conspiracies and shadow machinations—notwithstanding the manifest reality that I subsequently found myself engulfed by its most violent and unpredictable currents.

I had reached a state where I was content exclusively with labor performed in the "open field," a domain characterized by its transparency and its direct engagement with ideas and diverse perspectives. Due to my total immersion in serving the visceral concerns and the luminous ambitions of the common citizen, field itineraries and hands-on vocational engagement became, for me, a fundamental strategic methodology. This was an approach I favored above all others, precisely because it refused to remain a captive to dusty dossiers, clinical reports, administrative files, or the silent drawers of bureaucratic offices—all of which, when bypassed, facilitated the achievement of tangible results in the shortest possible span of time, far removed from the paralyzing obstacles of administrative inertia.

I recall that historic day with crystalline clarity. I was in the very first week of my sovereign appointment as Minister, embarking upon a journey from the heart of the capital toward

our farthest southern frontier: the province of Tamanrasset. It was my resolute intent to bestow the highest priority in our developmental labor upon those remote and neglected provinces. I used to repeat then, as I do today, that the sprawling metropolises do not truly represent the authentic countenance of our citizenry. When I selected this specific province for my inaugural field visit, the move was warmly welcomed by my husband and my esteemed colleague in the government—my dear brother and friend Said Ait Messaoudene (may the Almighty grant him His mercy).

At that specific historical juncture, daily commercial flights to those isolated reaches were entirely non-existent. The National People's Army, manifesting its unyielding commitment to the state's mission, facilitated my odyssey; on every occasion, I was received aboard a military aircraft departing from the Boufarik airfield. This gesture was profoundly appreciated by the local populace and the venerable notables of the region. Among them was the cherished Mujahid Haj Moussa Akhamouk (may he rest in peace), who had previously been my distinguished colleague within the National People's Assembly during the period (**1977—1982**). To express his visceral hospitality and genuine affection, he presented me with a unique silver amulet, remarking with a pained sincerity:

—"May this shield you from the dark shadow of envy."

I recall replying to him:

—"You have perhaps not fully realized, while I am discharging my sovereign duties as a Minister, that momentous political decisions and the true gears of power are often orchestrated behind heavy curtains and within late-night salons peopled by centers of power, rather than through these field

visits which some of us favor precisely because they remain unfettered by the cold constraints of papers and files, and those organizations that were perpetually emanating from daily public assemblies and communal gatherings, notwithstanding my active presence within the Party and its myriad deliberative committees".

Several months prior to the seismic and tumultuous upheavals of October **5**, **1988**, I had formally finalized my retirement dossier with Mr. Abdelaziz Bary, the Director of General Administration at the Presidency. I was endeavoring to seek a well-earned sanctuary of repose after decades of relentless toil and profound intellectual exhaustion. My heart yearned to finally consecrate to my small, cherished family some of that time and visceral effort of which they had been so long deprived, while simultaneously nursing the hope of returning to my sacred struggle through the majestic power of my pen.

Throughout the entirety of my governmental labor and my sovereign ministerial stewardship, I lived exactly as I had lived before—with an unvarnished simplicity that defied the vanities of office. Not a single facet of my status, my fundamental behaviors, or my unyielding spirit of struggle underwent any alteration or shift toward the elitism of power.

I recall with a poignant clarity that in the year preceding our national independence, we had established a "Teachers' Cooperative" within the hallowed walls of the Aisha Umm al-Mu'minin Secondary School, where I then served as an educator. We collectively secured a mortgage for an "HLM" (social housing)—an architecture synonymous with modest dwellings intended for the burgeoning middle class. We settled within the walls of such an apartment, and I continued to

faithfully and rigorously discharge the monthly installments for a duration spanning twenty-five full years.

We were foundering in our attempts to discharge those long-standing financial obligations until the humble accounts of my existence were looked upon through the unwavering stewardship of my husband. This was made possible only through a noble loan extended by certain cherished friends and kindred souls—foremost among them being the dear brother Ibrahim Hassani, my devoted companion Safia Ben M'ahdi, my venerable mentor Mohamed al-Salih Ramadan, and the virtuous Aisha al-Sghir, the sister of the martyr Mustafa al-Sghir, from the city of Algiers.

Thus, it was only later that the truth was unveiled to me with crystalline clarity: those who had unleashed those ominous torrents of malicious rumors and calculated falsehoods were driven by a dark and strategic intent. Their goal was to surgically divert the discerning gaze of the common people away from the genuinely flagrant transgressions, the systemic plundering, and the brazen embezzlements orchestrated by the true architects of corruption. Most regrettably, our spirits did not perceive the depth of their nefarious goals within the necessary temporal window.

And so, the pained and indignant citizen—caught in the fiery maelstrom of the popular eruption on October **5**, **1988**—found nothing stationed before his rage save for the woman who was perceived as a mere figurehead or high functionary of the prevailing order. I was a figure familiar to their eyes, identified both by the unpretentious sanctuary of my dwelling and the hallowed halls of my Ministry. We had resolutely refrained from altering our place of residence even when I had been ordained with the sovereign rank of Minister.

I continued to inhabit the world of the people and the neighbors, gracing the same market stalls and frequenting the very same modest shops I had been accustomed to when I was but a teacher and a school principal. I was never a Minister who exploited a fleet of state vehicles, nor was I one who permitted a singular administrative automobile to be hijacked for the private requirements or the domestic whims of family and progeny.

All of this was, to my mind, the quintessential expression of my authentic nature. For I was—and have eternally remained—a soul anchored in the firm belief of an absolute and sacred separation between the sanctuary of private life and the theater of professional obligation. Furthermore, I held the visceral conviction that a high sovereign station is but a transient and ephemeral shadow; the only enduring and immutable reality is the identity of the working woman, the educator, the neighbor, and the ordinary, devoted citizen of the soil.

Even during the zenith of my tenure at the Ministry, when the Director General of National Security at that time—the Brother Mujahid Abdelmadjid Bouzid—proffered the suggestion of stationing a formal guard at the portal of my dwelling, he undoubtedly retains the memory of my reaction. I met his proposal with a smile of gentle kindness and visceral gratitude, remarking:

—"I implore you, trouble yourself not with such measures, my brother. I am a daughter of the common folk, and such I shall eternally remain. My path has never once been crossed by an act or a deed that would incite the people to harbor a grain of hatred toward me."

I find myself wondering today:

—"Was I fundamentally mistaken in my analysis? Was my perception of reality clouded by an idealistic veil?"

Every single morning, prior to embarking upon my daily journey to my office at the Ministry, I would unveil my mailbox only to discover a veritable mountain of missives and visceral grievances emanating from my neighbors and the kin of my friends. I would carry these burdens of the heart with me, placing them under the direct and urgent stewardship of the relevant departments to orchestrate a resolution to those problems and dilemmas with the utmost celerity; for I considered their tribulations to be indistinguishable from my own. I was the one who personally placed their hopes in the hands of the officials, finding a profound and silent joy in beholding the radiance of gratitude upon the visages of their families.

On that historic and cataclysmic day—October **5**, **1988**—as the clock struck seven in the evening, my husband and I were absorbed in following the cascading results of the day's news when the sharp resonance of our outer doorbell pierced the silence. My husband descended to encounter the caller. It was a son of one of our neighbors—indeed, the offspring of our immediate neighbor—who addressed my husband with a voice of urgent concern:

—"Uncle Ahmed, a rumor has reached our ears that the demonstrators have resolved to direct their strike against the sanctuary of your home, having already laid waste to the Ministry headquarters."

My husband responded to the youth with an air of profound gratitude, yet one veiled in a quiet and almost detached indifference:

—"Our gratitude for your vigilance is immense, my son. Yet, pray, what transgressions have we committed that would warrant such a thirst for vengeance against us?"

He secured the threshold and retreated within, repeating with a heavy heart that sacred and timeless invocation:

—"There is no power nor might except with Allah. Pray, what manner of distorted reasoning is this?"

Was my husband fundamentally in error? Had he tragically underestimated the visceral gravity of the looming storm? Was he foundering in his analysis because he chose to ignore what revolutions, by their very nature, produce of chaotic noise, unbridled turbulence, and abnormal states of being? He, who had consecrated so much of his life to the scholarly dissection of revolutions and the meticulous comparison between various historical uprisings and our own sacred Revolution? In his numerous studies and analytical treatises, he had perpetually demonstrated that our Revolution was one of unparalleled nobility, anchored in transcendent values and hallowed principles. Was my husband mistaken because he was anchoring his logic exclusively to the generation of the November **1954** Revolution and the National Movement, entirely oblivious to the arrival of a new world, a different generation, and the jarring, unprecedented political and historical data of **1988**?

I possess no definitive answer; yet, what I know with agonizing certainty is that following the departure of that caller, we surrendered our weary bodies to sleep, only to be jolted

awake at the stroke of midnight by a deafening roar that mirrored the violence of a seismic earthquake. When the portal was flung open, we were confronted by a phalanx of young pupils, between the tender ages of ten and fourteen, still clad in their white school aprons—a sight that stood in stark and haunting contrast to the darkness.

They were orchestrated and led by a triad of older youth, aged between twenty and twenty-five. These were the individuals who systematically decimated the very wall of our residence using a heavy industrial machine specifically designed for such destruction—a "Backhoe." They then issued their commands to the youngsters to shatter every remaining shard of glass and vandalize the automobile, alongside whatever else could be smashed by the hands of those children.

The very moment my husband and I emerged to face the maelstrom, they fled into the night; yet one among them persisted, still relentlessly hammering at the car’s glass. When my husband endeavored to seize him to halt the mindless destruction, he was struck with a shard of iron. His brow was split, unleashing a torrent of blood that refused to cease until his wound was meticulously stitched with ten full sutures at the healthcare sanctuary in Kouba.

With a profound surprise by the decision to refrain from pursuing them through the unyielding channels of the Law. It was revealed that they were nothing more than inanimate puppets, whose strings were being manipulated by clandestine puppeteers whose names remained conspicuously absent from every official ledger.

I found myself reflecting that if these adolescents were indeed the true perpetrators of such sacrilege, then the

supreme indictment must be leveled against us. It would signify that we had fundamentally failed to nurture them or form their spirits with the necessary rectitude. For these children to burn the very fabric of their country and incinerate its foundational roots and symbols is a national disaster of the highest order. The catastrophe is rendered even more acute because these youngsters were not acting from a pure or nationalistic impulse; they were, in truth, organized gangs of darkness. The tragedy is amplified because these individuals did not represent that singular or unique will that has perpetually dominated the initiatives, the thoughts, and the noble endeavors of others.

The neighbors converged upon our residence, though their arrival followed the culmination of the storm. One among my neighbors, the venerable Mr. Qasim, stood as a resolute sentinel at the portal of our dwelling, his rifle held firmly in his hand as he declared with a solemn and unyielding vow:

—"By the Almighty, should they dare to return to your threshold, they shall not pass save over my dead body first."

I shall never permit my soul to forget the magnificent and heroic stance taken by my neighbors, my friends, and my kindred spirits. Among them were the brothers Abdelaziz Khellaf, Abdelmalek Nourani, Aboubaker Belkaid, and Al-Hashmi Jiar, who at that historical juncture presided as the Wali (Governor) of the capital. It was thanks to their swift and sincere intervention that the night did not conclude until the residence had been restored, ensuring that the State itself would not be exposed to the shadow of public shame.

In the immediate aftermath of those harrowing events, an official proposal was extended to facilitate my transition to the sovereign State residence in Sidi Fredj; yet, I met this offer with

an absolute and categorical refusal. I harbored a visceral and principled preference to remain anchored among my neighbors, choosing to face life and meet my destiny alongside them during the most perilous and dark epoch our nation ever traversed: the harrowing and blood-stained stage of terrorism.

Today, as I reflect upon the debris of those days, I find myself posing a haunting inquiry to the conscience of History:

—"Was all of that truly a mere coincidence? Or was it the bitter harvest of a meticulous and calculated design? Who, in truth, stood as the architect behind such a plot? Was it the so-called 'France Party' whose ideological tails continue to sway the levers of power within the shadows?"

The answers began to manifest only later, revealing themselves drop by drop through the passage of time. I came to the agonizing comprehension that those who were most vocal in their call for pluralism and democracy had resolved first, and above all other considerations, that the National Liberation Front (FLN) must be the inaugural fortress to be dismantled. Their strategic aim was to incinerate the historic symbols of the sovereign ruling party, ostensibly to provide a tangible proof of their "good intentions" to their masters beyond our borders.

I was specifically targeted because I stood as one of the most paramount symbols of the Front and one of its unyielding, foundational pillars—numbered among those who remained perpetually steadfast upon the bedrock of national constants and characterized by a state of eternal, sacred revolutionary vigilance. Yet, despite their calculated assaults, I remained an immutable symbol. As even my most fierce adversaries were compelled to admit before my companions, I continued to

inhabit the sanctuary of the masses' hearts, representing the most sublime meanings of affection and profound appreciation—a moral gain of which I am profoundly proud and which I shall preserve as a hallowed treasure for as long as I draw breath.

It was whispered into my ears at a later hour that the "France Party," alongside those who harbored a visceral resentment for my uncompromising stances regarding the Descartes Lycée dossier, the adversaries of our Arab-Islamic civilizational identity, the foes of the Arabization of the Algerian pedagogical system, the detractors of women’s advocacy for social enlightenment, and the bitter enemies of the valiant *mujahideen* and our glorious November Revolution.

A myriad of narratives was woven in those days; yet, when I formally petitioned to deliver a sovereign intervention during the Extraordinary Congress of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in the wake of those blood-drenched events, I resolutely refrained from alluding to my private circumstances as an individual soul. I held the firm conviction that my personal predicament was but a minuscule fragment of the gargantuan cataclysm that had shaken the very foundations of the nation—a historical pivot for the profound crisis we continue to navigate today. Instead, I chose to address the very abyss into which the country had plunged, characterizing the situation with a stark and uncompromising clarity as a "Conspiracy—the Grand Conspiracy"—a description that not a single other soul at the congress possessed the fortitude to articulate, to the extent that this very phrasing was subsequently echoed even by the President of the Republic himself.

Indeed, the legitimate Head of State who subsequently assumed authority, the Mujahid Liamine Zeroual, would reiterate in one of his monumental orations:

—"It is the Grand Conspiracy."

Having substantiated that truth through my own formal and sovereign channels, I maintained that it was a conspiracy. Those who served as silent architects, facilitating the weaving of its insidious threads—through our excessive openness, our flawed management, and the pervasive absence of a spirit of justice, equity, and the shadow of regionalism—were the ones whose conduct distanced our governance from justice, equity, and the fundamental respect for the citizen's dignity.

That intervention functioned as a meticulous and visceral dissection of the regime and its institutions, illuminating the stark reality of the day. When I articulate this, I mean that it exerted a profound impact upon the souls and minds of the militants gathered at the congress, creating a resonance that transcended the Front to reach the masses of honorable citizens. My discourse was formally recorded and widely distributed; to this very day, certain militants and citizens continue to seek out copies of that address.

I was the sole author of that intervention. I was not merely a figure traversing the halls of the "Baydaouia" Pavilion alone. The echoes of my incendiary intervention reached President Chadli Bendjedid, who was gracing the hall with his presence. He formally requested the recording to witness it with his own eyes and ears, for it represented a decisive and major historical pivot.

The impressions voiced by the congress members were invariably magnificent and positive, to such an extent that the

Tunisian periodical, *Al-Maghreb al-Arabi*, subsequently authored an extensive report on the subject under a gargantuan headline: *"Zhour Wanisi: The Only Man in the Government."*

Conversely, the impressions harbored by certain military commanders were decidedly discordant, or more precisely, they were visibly annoyed; for my discourse had touched upon the sensitive issue of the army's intervention during the demonstrations, responding as they were to certain armed elements of the extremist Islamic current who sought to ignite the fires of strife amidst the protests.

As for the Prime Minister of that era—the primary architect of the so-called "Restructuring," the master who dismantled our monumental economic edifices, and the primordial catalyst for the subsequent surge in national unemployment—he was the visionary behind the "Predatory Privatization" project. When I encountered this Prime Minister within one of the congress corridors, he addressed me with a congratulatory air:

—"May the Almighty grant you His blessing, Zhour."

Then, employing the visceral resonance of the colloquial dialect, he added:

—"By the hallowed Truth, you have provided a refreshing balm to our weary hearts." (والله برّدتينا قلوبنا)

I was momentarily struck by an audible bewilderment, yet I responded with the visceral heat of the courage my intervention had ignited:

—"Pray, why did you choose to await my voice to articulate these truths? Why did you not find it within your own station to declare them yourself? Are you not, after all, the Prime Minister

of the State? You were far more worthy and intimately acquainted with the intricate gears of power than I could ever be."

I perpetually observed his conduct and his administrative decrees with a pained astonishment—notably his desire to hijack social security funds and reallocate them to the Ministry of Health, or his placement of formidable barricades before the Algiers Metro project, which had been so meticulously prepared and labored over by the Brother Mujahid Saleh Goudjil (who then presided over the Ministry of Transport). I recall also his systematic obstruction of the strategic endeavors of our brother and martyr, Kasdi Merbah, who held stewardship over the Ministry of Agriculture.

I invite the imagination to ponder: what would have been the state of our capital had the Algiers Metro reached its completion during that epoch, in the **1980**s? Subsequently, the Prime Minister departed for foreign climes, while the Army and our national cadres were besieged by the heinous accusation of plundering "**26** billion dollars." This left everyone to wonder in agonizing silence:

—"But where were you, sir, when these monumental funds were ostensibly being plundered, while you occupied the sovereign seat of the Prime Minister?"

In the wake of these cataclysmic events, I arrived at the definitive resolution to cease all political labor within the Party forever, or even within the newly emerging factions birthed by the era of political pluralism. I was content to limit my contributions to the vibrant sphere of civil society, consecrating my efforts exclusively to the hallowed realm of cultural labor.

Migration to the South

The years of terrorism constituted a dark, somber, and melancholic era for the Algerian people—years saturated with profound tribulations, visceral agony, the shedding of hallowed blood, and monumental loss. Terrorism stood as the chilling title for a calculated and nihilistic plan intended to annihilate the very life and civilizational progress that our people were achieving day after day. It represented a cold mercantilism in the people's blood and spirit, a desperate attempt to drag the nation back into the lightless abyss of ignorance and a fresh form of human servitude.

Terrorism was, in its essence, a brutal assault intended to eradicate the tolerant and enlightened values of Islam, alongside its foundational principles aimed at the building of human civilization and the preservation of sacred human dignity. These were the very principles that had permitted Islam to radiate to the farthest reaches of the globe through the exemplary conduct and the refined interactions of the believers. It stood in stark opposition to a foolish, modern-day Jahiliyya—a primitive and dark zealotry fueled by a diseased, narcissistic mindset that violates the primordial rights of the human being, ordained as the vicegerent of the Almighty upon this earth. Indeed, it sought to bury once more that very half of society which gives birth to life itself and populates the earth. "And when the girl who was buried alive is asked: For what sin she was killed?" (The Holy Quran).

During those bleak and lightless years, when intellectual terrorism began to spread even before the onset of physical violence, the Algerian intellectual emerged as the primary target of its predatory assaults. This was because the

intellectual serves as the living conscience of the nation, its storied history, its refined civilization, and its luminous future. Terrorism harbors no desire for such culture or enlightenment; it hungers only for a diseased, extremist mindset dictated to it by the strategic mandates of major global powers, which had recruited such elements for the conflict in Afghanistan to serve their own imperialistic interests, under the hollow pretext of thwarting the communist tide and ostensibly protecting Muslim Afghans. In reality, their ultimate, shrouded objective was to consume and dismantle Islam thereafter across every other Islamic nation. It was a manifestation of a deep-seated and visceral hatred directed against the sanctuary of Islam and its radiant, noble principles.

Verily, it was the primal fear of the rise of an enlightened Islamic civilization that birthed the specter of terrorism—aimed at annihilating this civilization before it could once again encompass the world, and ensuring it did not surpass other faiths in its geographic spread or the profound sense of human belonging to it. It was, in essence, a new crusade waged through the cynical and technological means of the modern age.

The West endeavored to imprison this righteous faith—which was ordained as a mercy to all the worlds—within the narrow, suffocating molds of a few Muslim youth who possessed no genuine comprehension of Islam's true core or its spiritual foundations. Rather, their leaders attempted to exploit their youthful fervor for their own private, mercenary agendas, whether political, economic, or social.

Thus, these dark forces turned their weapons to assassinate the very *mujahideen* who had liberated the nation but yesterday, reclaiming it from the colonial yoke and returning it

to the fold of Islam. They did not hesitate to desecrate and even excavate the hallowed graves of the martyrs, trampling upon the sanctity of martyrdom for the sake of God and Religion. The human intellect was taken hostage, held in a terrifying suspension between threat and hollow promise, warned of the fires of hell before being falsely promised the gardens of paradise—all at the hands of a diseased faction that possessed no authentic connection to Islam whatsoever. They were a directed and manipulated collective, moved by the unseen hands of foreign entities and funded by certain Arab regimes that arrogantly claimed for themselves the leadership of the Muslim world.

They besieged intellectuals and media luminaries with a myriad of threatening missives and varying degrees of orchestrated dread. Shrouds were even dispatched to their doorsteps alongside these threats, as an omen of death, and the list of victims began to fall, one after another Algeria was forced to turn a blood-stained page every day in the chronicles of its men and women: intellectuals, media luminaries, and specialists in engineering, medicine, and various burgeoning sciences. Civilian and military cadres—the very structural pillars of human development and national prosperity—were being systematically erased from existence.

They orchestrated the assassination of Djillali Liabes, Ibn al-Khanchir, Flici, Boussebssi, Mokadem, Djaout, Sebti, Benhamouda, Abada, Rachida Hammadi, and countless many others. These were individuals of profound intellect, sovereign reason, and genuine genius—the rare kind of people a nation might not produce the likes of for another full century. Added to this immense intellectual hemorrhage was the staggering loss of the common folk, who were being shattered daily by the

thousands, falling victim to treachery and cold betrayal within our hamlets, our metropolises, and our rural heartlands. Even the humble shepherds in the mountains were slaughtered and mutilated like cattle.

In those days, we heard startling reports of foreigners from disparate nations who ostensibly entered the fold of Islam by the dozens, only to be subsequently apprehended while engaged in the clandestine smuggling of various armaments—certain of which had even been manufactured within the Israeli entity—into the very heart of our sovereign homeland.

As the river of days and years flowed on, the question marks proliferated and our collective bewilderment grew. The Western media apparatus, and even certain sectors of the Arab press, opened their predatory maws to hurl heinous accusations and corrosive doubts at us, maliciously characterizing our ordeal as a "civil war." We found neither support nor fraternal assistance from any quarter; we were met with no empathy. Thus, we stood in a magnificent solitude, enduring until we emerged from our dark crucible victorious. Eventually, the Almighty ordained that terrorism should strike at everyone, so that they too might taste the visceral bitterness of its sting.

During this grueling period, the great migration abroad commenced. My own departure was imminent, for I stood closer to the epicenter of peril than most, residing as I did in the vibrant heart of an expansive popular quarter, far removed from any specialized security protection save for the infinite mercy of the Almighty. It was common knowledge that an assault directed at my person would undoubtedly secure for the terrorists an unparalleled level of international publicity and dark notoriety.

This was primarily due to the profound appreciation and visceral affection I was privileged to enjoy within the popular strata and even the high sovereign circles across the entirety of our national territory. Everyone was acquainted with my essence; my name and my public persona had been familiar to the people's consciousness since the very first breath of our independence, and I had never once been absent from the theater of public life.

This final thought I have articulated was not the progeny of my own composition, nor was it a byproduct of individual hubris or vanity. Nay, it was the sobering observation voiced by one of our senior *mujahideen* brothers, Professor Dr. Mohamed al-Toumi, whom I happened to encounter one afternoon in one of our popular markets. He was visibly startled upon beholding me; he took me aside and whispered with a grave concern:

—"No matter how much you endeavor to veil your identity through the modesty of your raiment, I have recognized your essence—and others surely will as well. You are courting an immense peril and gifting those of the darkness a monumental media triumph, notwithstanding the eternal truth that death resides only in the hand of the Almighty and every life is bound by its ordained span."

And so, my "migration" was not directed toward the West, and certainly not toward France in particular. My departure was toward the profound heart of the nation—to the ancestral birthplace of my husband, Ahmed: the village of "Lioua." It is a modest hamlet nestled within the province of Biskra, where my husband's forefathers had finally settled. They had arrived from the lost paradise of Andalusia—expelled in the wake of the Arab defeat—and had planted their banner upon that specific soil, bestowing upon it the name "Liwa" (The Banner). Thus,

that beautiful nomenclature was subsequently distorted into "Lioua" by the heavy hand of the colonial administration, as was their custom with everything authentic.

I inhabited that remote village for a duration exceeding six full years, excluding the summer intervals. I was enveloped by the meticulous care and the protective mantle of my husband’s family—or rather, his expansive clan. The primary responsibility lay with the families of "Jaber," "Rehab," and "Attaf," notwithstanding the complex reality that certain among them harbored a quiet sympathy for the political faction that had birthed the specter of terrorism. I harmonized my spirit with the pristine, virgin nature of that place, living with an intense and pained passion within that majestic Silence—the silence of the birds and the blossoming flowers and I found myself kissing the nascent buds as they sought sanctuary in the cooling shade of the palm fronds, sheltered beneath a sun that manifested a generosity more profound than all other suns.

I lived amongst the village patriarchs and their women—those sovereign custodians of the region's oral heritage and authentic folk culture. I gleaned from their company many profound truths that remain perpetually hidden from the eyes of city dwellers. I learned how they labored and struggled alongside their husbands without the slightest expectation of material compensation. I learned that their men were often escorted to their final rest and martyred to the melodic cadence of ululations (zaghrouda), notwithstanding that there existed certain writers who manifested a startled bewilderment at the idea of bidding farewell to a martyr with trills of joy.

I learned of the woman who, having not conceived a male offspring, would herself meticulously seek out a second spouse

for her husband so that he might secure a male heir—acting as if this were an inherent and natural right due to his person.

In reciprocal exchange for the profound knowledge I harvested on the spot, I would daily gaze upon the stagnation and the backwardness that plagued that small hamlet—a village upon which the Almighty subsequently bestowed His grace. Through my advocacy, it was transmuted into a full municipality. Electricity was finally ushered in, water was provided through structured channels, and a clinic and a secondary school were erected so that the young girls would no longer be forced to terminate their studies after primary school due to the prohibitive distance from the village. All of this was realized thanks to the Brother Mujahid "Mohamed El-Hadj Yala, who then presided over the Ministry of the Interior and who absorbed my grievances with a deep and visceral sincerity.

Verily, that "migration" to the profound depths of the nation was numbered among the most exquisite and radiant days of my existence. It was in that sanctuary that I drank deeply from the many "Mothers of Books" (foundational texts), and it was there that I composed what many consider to be the most sublime of my novels: Lundja and the Ghoul, which was subsequent classified among the top one hundred most influential Arabic novels of the twentieth century.

The Council of the Nation and the Presidential Third

Rare are the individuals—and I may humbly count myself among them—who perpetually yearn for their destinies to embrace new pathways brimming with love, infused with a resolute determination to transcend the states of frustration imposed upon them. We strive always to move beyond those stages characterized by the heavy weight of oppression and the pervasive fear manufactured by those who specialized in the architecture of ignorance and narrow selfishness. Amidst that suffocating atmosphere came my formal appointment as a member of the inaugural Council of the Nation (the Senate) upon its creation as the primary parliamentary chamber. This designation emanated directly from the Brother Mujahid and PresidentLiamine Zeroual—the singular President in the Arab world who possessed the fortitude to resign from the presidency to serve the supreme interests of his nation, resolutely refusing to cling to the vanities of power.

On that historic day, I was in the ancient city of Damascus, Syria, serving as a member of the official delegation of the Algerian Writers' Union. We had arrived to participate in the proceedings of the "Twentieth Congress of the General Union of Arab Writers in December **1997**.

The congress agenda had ordained that I should preside over the Algerian delegation in one of the primary academic seminars concerning contemporary Arabic literature and thought. I was in the very heart of that session when Dr. Abdellah Hamadi, the head of our delegation in his capacity as the President of the Algerian Writers' Union, approached my station to whisper a grave message into my ear:

—"Sister Zhour, we urgently require your presence outside the assembly hall for an issue of monumental importance."

I found the distinguished Syrian lady of letters, Mrs. Karam, being honored by the request to assume the stewardship of the seminar until the hour of my return.

Beyond the threshold of the hall, I encountered our esteemed Ambassador in Damascus at that juncture, the Brother El-Hadi Messaoud (may the Almighty grant him His mercy). Following our mutual greetings, he addressed me with a focused gravity:

—"Madam Minister, the Chief of Staff at the Presidency has formally apprised me that the President himself desires your definitive response regarding a matter of the highest state priority."

I endeavored to pose inquiries and comprehend the nature of this summons, yet my efforts were met only by a wall of necessary silence. It was a staggering surprise to be asked for a response at the stroke of twelve—a circumstance that sparked a maelstrom of bewilderment. Why was such a response required at this precise hour? Yet, finding no path to further understanding, I found myself compelled to offer an immediate answer to a mandate emanating from the President of the Republic himself. I addressed the Ambassador with a voice touched by a glimmer of confusion:

—"And pray, where might we find an available aircraft and a designated flight path between Syria and Algeria within the span of a single week? "

His Excellency the Ambassador responded to my concern with a reassuring smile:

—"Should the necessity of the matter demand it, we possess the authority to transform a sovereign aircraft specifically to facilitate your arrival at the presidential appointment."

Indeed, I returned to the soil of Algeria at the precisely designated hour. I was received by the President within the majestic legislative hall at the Presidency to be formally handed my assignment. He greeted my presence with a legendary humility and a smile that never once deserted his features, remarking:

—"We find it necessary to extend our sincerest apologies to you, for we have intruded upon your noble work at the congress. Yet, the leadership of the nation—your humble servant included—have collectively selected you to serve as a member of the 'Presidential Third' for the Council of the Nation. Thus, it is our most fervent hope that you shall accept anew the mantle of this mission."

Those were exquisitely beautiful words—phrases that uplifted the spirit and elevated the soul. In his presence, I felt that my nation was still in a state of robust spiritual health, and that it remained guarded by men of immense greatness and unblemished sincerity. I felt a visceral reassurance that my person was still recognized and valued by our men and women of excellence.

I replied with a profound humility:

—"Mr. President, it is an honor of monumental proportions for me to be counted among the members of this august and sovereign Council."

I paused for a pregnant moment to anchor my emotions, then added:

*—"Most specifically following the tribulations I endured during the upheavals of October **5, 1988**. I perceived within this honor that you are personally restoring my reputation and my national stature. It had pained my heart deeply that such an assault should ever have been directed toward one of the symbols of modern Algeria. But such is the ordained lot of the believer—a series of trials, as the saying goes."*

I departed from the President's presence, inhabited by a profound sensation of self-satisfaction, and perhaps everyone around me shared in that feeling, particularly as I found Sister Mariam Belmihoub awaiting her own turn to enter the sanctuary. Subsequently, I became cognizant of the fact that the President did not receive every soul with the same level of personal attention; he extended his personal welcome to only ten of the nominees for the Presidential Third, while the remaining candidates were received by his advisors.

The Council of the Nation was formally inaugurated, presided over by the Brother Mujahid and intellectual luminary, Bashir Boumaza. Thereafter, I contributed my efforts to the diverse proceedings of the Council, with its intricate and multifaceted relationship with the twin realms of politics and legislation.

Within the halls of the Council of the Nation, I encountered men who truly and rightfully deserved their distinguished stations there, alongside a vibrant youth who had earned their place through the electoral process. The majority of these young deputies were fueled by a fervent desire to drink from the wells of knowledge possessed by their seniors, absorbing wisdom from their elders without a trace of false shame or hollow vanity, so that they themselves might eventually ascend to greatness through their own diligence.

The stewardship of the Brother Mujahid and intellectual Bashir Boumaza played a pivotal and architectonic role in transforming the Council into an established and venerable institution, in addition to its primordial legislative and political mandates. It assumed a majestic cultural and intellectual role, as the Council evolved into a radiant center of illumination that filled a vast cultural and political void—a void that had been maliciously exploited by terrorist ideologies for a protracted interval. Consequently, the doors of the Council were flung wide every fortnight for a symposium, a high-level lecture, or an intellectual forum, graced by the participation of esteemed professors from abroad, the nation's elite cadres, and university students. Everyone would emerge from those sessions boasting of one of the most vital institutions of the Algerian State—an entity that bestowed a supreme importance upon the realms of culture, the weight of history, and the sacred dialogue between civilizations.

Perhaps it is my ordained duty at this juncture to pause before this paramount point: the issue of Culture, or specifically when the high official is himself a man of the intellect—drawing this conclusion from what I personally witnessed of the President of the Council of the Nation and his immersive interest in the chronicles of history and the arts.

I happened to travel in his distinguished company to several foreign capitals, where I bore witness to the sophisticated manner in which he would engage with the Russian Duma, the Moroccan Parliament, and the sovereign officials in the State of Qatar. He meticulously programmed a series of cultural seminars between our own thinkers and the intellectual elite in Qatar. I participated in those forums alongside my brother, the Mujahid Boualam Bessaih, with the aim of filling that

monumental void created by the specter of terrorism between our nation and our Arab brethren, or between us and the West. Our objective was to correct many of the errors and systematic injustices promulgated by the Western media, and unfortunately by some sectors of the Arab press as well.

His endeavors were characterized by a magnificent comprehensiveness, utilizing every ounce of his inherent capacities, his vibrant energy, and the expertise of the delegation that escorted him. His intellectual energies were immense; he would analyze, compare, and engage in discourse simultaneously as a professor, a historian, a statesman, and a philosopher.

In stark reality, the cultural process is far more expansive and profound than the mere trappings of power or the maneuvering of politics, regardless of the tribulations an intellectual might encounter from the seat of authority. Furthermore, it remains fundamentally impossible to sever the cord between Culture and Power; for the connection that binds them is so vast and the entanglement so intricate that its threads can never be easily unraveled.

The illustrious Ibn Khaldun articulated in his Muqaddimah:

—*"Know that the sword and the pen are both indispensable tools for the master of the State, assisting him in the sovereign conduct of his affairs; yet, each has its ordained stage of service."*

And the formidable Napoleon Bonaparte manifested his agreement with this wisdom, declaring:

—"The pillars of power in this world are two: the sword and the pen; however, while the sword serves its master for a fleeting season, the pen remains in service for all of time."

Thus, I consecrated six full years within the hallowed halls of the Council of the Nation—half of that duration through the honor of presidential appointment, and the remainder through the mandate of election by my peers within the Council. These were six years saturated with vibrant activity and unyielding giving, including my personal contribution to the foundational enrichment of the Council's official periodical.

At this juncture, I must not allow a magnificent initiative we undertook—myself and my sister-in-arms, the *Mujahida* Mariam Belmihoub—toward our fellow Algerian *mujahidat* (female freedom fighters) to be consigned to silence. This endeavor was realized under the gracious and noble sponsorship of the President of the Council of the Nation, Bashir Boumaza (may the Almighty grant him His mercy).

The vision for this initiative emerged after Mariam and I had endured much spiritual ache from the myriad letters and visceral grievances that reached our presence from certain mujahidat, concerning their rights or the hallowed rights of their martyred spouses or progeny. The core idea was that Mariam and I would collaborate on submitting a formal memorandum to the President of the Council, encompassing an invitation to a significant number of mujahidat arriving from the cold depths of oblivion, to be gracing the Council as honored guests for a duration of three days. Our proposal was met with an immediate acceptance and profound gratitude for the move. Mariam and I, in seamless coordination with the Council’s administrative apparatus, orchestrated this hospitality with an extraordinary level of care and surgical precision—both

regarding the logistics of travel and the reception at the honorary terminal of the airport, and in terms of their accommodation at the majestic Hotel Aurassi, alongside comprehensive media coverage. The number of these valiant women exceeded one hundred, arriving from every singular corner of the nation and its forty-eight provinces.

Perhaps I should record for the archives of history that among those mujahidat were souls who had never before beheld the capital with their own eyes, and some who had never once crossed the threshold of a hotel in their entire existence. There were those whose families had broken all records in the sheer number of martyrs they had offered upon the altar of freedom.

Those three days were entirely saturated with a visceral joy, a profound happiness, and an unalloyed delight; they were a tapestry of traditional dances, intimate meetings, shared kisses, cherished memories, and evocative interviews. The itineraries commenced with a pilgrimage to the Mujahid Museum, capturing collective photographs upon the majestic steps of the Martyr's Sanctuary (Maqam el-Chahid). This culminated in a solemn assembly with the President of the Council and a profound dialogue in his presence, followed by commemorative photographs with him at the Council's sovereign headquarters. The melodies of our heritage resonated throughout its halls, performed by some of the most exquisite musical ensembles, as those valiant women danced to the rhythms of every authentic Algerian costume—the youngest among them having already surpassed her sixtieth year.

And notwithstanding the reality that each one of them carried a bundle of pained complaints—all of which found their path to resolution and diligent follow-up through the efforts of

Mariam and myself, under the grand sponsorship of the President of the Council of the Nation—the radiant joy of those mujahidat and their palpable happiness served to dissolve every vestige of fatigue from this massive operation. It bestowed a profound sense of comfort upon our own consciences as mujahidat within the Council—a visceral feeling that we had, at last, discharged our sacred duty toward the nation in its entirety, and toward our sisters-in-arms in particular.

And when the hour arrived for us to bid them farewell, we felt that every one of those valiant women was experiencing the vibrant joy of victory anew, savoring a renewed and absolute confidence in the sacred cause of Jihad and the honor of the *mujahideen.* This was particularly evident as each of them received a commemorative album containing those exquisite and beautiful memories of their visit.

As the years surged forward, the hour arrived when a change in the members of the "Presidential Third" was rendered inevitable. The President of the Republic, in accordance with his sovereign rights and within the hallowed scope of his constitutional powers, possesses the authority to appoint or dispense with those members.

It happened that I was in the company of one of our senior official brothers to discuss the nearing process of re-designating the Presidential Third. He addressed me with a tone of sincere concern:

—"I find myself entirely unable to envision the Council of the Nation without your presence; perhaps it is in your best interest to establish contact with some of your senior acquaintances, for

many are already panting in a frantic race to secure this membership."

I was struck by an audible bewilderment at his logic before I offered my response:

—"True, my brother, I am acquainted with both the senior and the junior, and they invariably hold my person in the highest esteem and profound appreciation. Yet you, my brother, are intimately aware of my authentic nature and my unyielding ethics; never in my life has it occurred that I should enter a private office to solicit a favor or request an administrative intervention of this kind. I have never ascended to any of my previous sovereign positions save through the merit of my own tireless effort, the integrity of my work, and my unswerving loyalty to one majestic Man whose name is Algeria. A political system that fails to recognize or appreciate the intrinsic competence of its men and women is, in truth, the only loser when it forfeits their presence."

He looked at me with a visible pain and remarked:

"I harbor a deep-seated dread that Algeria itself is the one who suffers their loss."

Were I to revisit the archives of my experience within the elected councils once more, I would find myself articulating things of an entirely different nature from what I have previously said or penned. This is because the relationship of the writer or the woman of letters manifests as a far more complex and profoundly absorbing state in her visceral self-experience of her other trials and practical, sovereign missions.

The transcendent visions, the delicate feelings, and the intricate sensations of creative innovation almost always discover a suitable platform and a fertile field—one that serves, in one way or another, as a striking and living paradigm for the symbiotic relationship between creative vision and the pragmatic requirements of other vital fields. Indeed, it evolves into an existential model for the total dissolution of creativity into the vibrant dynamics of practical labor.

This was the bedrock of my belief; yet, following decades of presence upon various public platforms and within the most arduous practical arenas, and given my passionate, unyielding desire for an absolute belonging to the world of culture and literature—a choice made out of profound conviction, preferring this affiliation above every other and positioning it as the supreme priority within my mind, my visions, and my ultimate goals—to such an extent that it almost appeared to some as a form of extremism for one field to the exclusion of another, or a perceived superiority that might suggest a neglect for other fields no less vital than the cultural and literary inclination.

...Following those protracted years of service, my overarching perspective on everything has undergone a

profound transformation; it has matured into—as I envision it—a comprehensive, deep, and panoramic gaze into every vital field of human existence. It has become crystalline to my understanding that without these other spheres—the economic, the political, and the social—which might appear through a mistaken judgment to be remote or of a lesser degree than the cultural and literary realm, it is unequivocally confirmed to me as the days pass that these fields are, in absolute truth, the very raw material, the fundamental themes, and the contents rich with the pulsating life for all literary and creative odysseys among writers and authors across the ages.

I perhaps consider my person to be among the exceptionally fortunate ones, in that my character was able to attain that profound level of trust required to reach a platform of such magnitude: the Council of the Nation, for instance—a sovereign pulpit from which to represent the common citizen, to represent the entirety of the nation, to articulate its most luminous ambitions, to contribute to the alleviation of its visceral pains, and to exit from them toward the wide horizons of national development, prosperity, and enduring stability. This is all performed with the noble objective of keeping pace with the majestic caravan of human civilization, contributing its rightful part through what it possesses of a storied and ancient civilizational heritage.

It was a trust in which I took immense pride, and shall eternally continue to do so, notwithstanding the reality that my entry into this historical edifice—the headquarters of the Council of the Nation, the Zighoud Youcef Palace—was by no means a recent occurrence. This name serves as an immortal commemoration of one of the legendary martyrs of our glorious liberation revolution, one of the illustrious

commanders of the historical Second Province. This was long after the palace had served as the seat of the French parliament during the colonial night in Algeria.

My entry into this palace was not a novelty; I had entered its halls and labored within its confines for a duration exceeding seventeen years: a journey defined by struggle, vocational labor, and meaningful contributions in the embrace of the National Liberation Front (FLN), of which twelve full years were consecrated to my role as the director and inaugural editor-in-chief of the women's periodical, Al-Jazairia.

Nevertheless, when I traversed the thresholds of this historical edifice on this specific occasion, I found myself observing it through an entirely different prism—a gaze that had shifted according to the weight of circumstances, the cascading events, and the succession of generations. It was a vision filtered through the relentless change of Time, whose wheel never ceases to turn, save to take from my own person. Between my inaugural entry into these halls and this present arrival, more than three full decades had surged past.

It was a vast span of time—a long age in which a monumental chapter of human existence passes: one of its most pivotal chapters: the vibrant spring of life, or perhaps even a portion of its melancholic autumn. A long age that does not merely alter the form and the body alone, but decisively transforms the internal outlook as well: it corrects it, it deepens it; for were it not so, it would be a flawed and superficial gaze. It would be a narrow vision, preoccupied with one facet while neglecting or entirely overlooking a multitude of others—a gaze immature, unreflective, and bereft of wisdom. For youth possesses its own reckless impulses, its inherent flaws, and its

improvisations, precisely as it possesses its visceral vitality and its active, surging movement through the river of life.

And as I embark upon my entry through the majestic bronze portals, their intricate decorations and historic engravings having shimmered for nearly a full century, my footsteps resonate upon the polished and cold marble floors. The grand, sweeping staircase, which whispers the architectural chronicles of the early **19**th century, meets my gaze. The vibrant hues of the murals adorning its grand halls dazzle the eye, telling the pained story of a century of occupation—celebrating as they do the "conquest" and colonial dominion, and meticulously chronicling the condition of Algeria, its metropolises and its people, across various fields.

Indeed, Western colonialism never offers an apology to the archives of History; rather, it possesses the audacity to write that history while systematically distorting its truth. Verily, it even stands as a witness to its own grave mistakes, its unbridled tyranny, and its savage aggression. History, in those days, was recording the darkest of unfair conditions and was itself the primordial catalyst for them.

Everything my gaze beholds this day was capturing my heart and my conscience with an extraordinary intensity, as if I were looking upon it all for the very first time. I felt that every singular corner of these reaches bore within it a chronicle, a specific content, a principled stance, a past of depth, and a future of promise. All of this is vibrant and alive—not merely within the archives of memory, but as a living project for our present and our coming morrow.

I allowed my imagination to envision the very walls moving, speaking, and engaging in profound discourse, narrating the

epic history of a steadfast and indomitable homeland. It is a nation that perpetually continues its march through its majestic glories and its pained defeats, through its stumbles and its triumphant surges.

I had not envisioned all of this when I first entered this historical edifice in the prime of my youth. For as age advances, its inherent merits and subtle advantages flourish as well; it bestows upon us the sublime pleasure of reflection and contemplation, and grants us the supreme virtue of reason, wisdom, and the diving into the world of philosophy imposed upon us by the very grace of age. Philosophy encompasses intricate comparisons, nuanced approaches, and rigorous methodologies; age organizes our thought, arranges its priorities, and elevates the spirit toward more humanely refined and luminous worlds.

Within the Great Hall—the General Assembly Hall—there were many visages, diverse features, varied ages, and a myriad of dialects arriving from the numerous regions of our vast and sprawling homeland: its North, its South, its East, and its West, and everything that lies between of plateaus, plains, rugged peaks, and verdant valleys. These were personalities representing different generations: there stood the ambitious, promising youth who had rightfully earned the people's mandate through the grassroots councils, and there were those monumental names, with their storied history and their pivotal roles in forging our glorious chronicles—through their struggle within the National Movement, followed by their heroic participation in the victorious Revolution across all its grueling years. Today, notwithstanding the advance of years and the inevitable frailty of the physical body, their faces overflow with

a magnificent humility and luminous dreams, coupled with a vast well of experience and a unique, hallowed record.

The hall itself had been newly renovated with a magnificent restoration, meticulously performed without ever touching or neglecting its rare and ancient antiquity, yet equipped with the most modern and sophisticated technical and creative instruments of the day.

Every singular device and every corner within this chamber whispers the chronicles of its age and its history. The grand chandelier, suspended from the very center of the ceiling of the Great Hall, casts its radiant lights upon everyone present—drawing its luminescence from the hallowed scent of freedom, looking perpetually toward the vibrant spirit of democracy, and transcending the narrow self through the virtues of criticism, reform, and correction. It moves the collective spirit toward the vast and promising space of desired parliamentary thought.

The momentous subject we were studying, discussing, and engaging in dialogue about on that day with the members of the executive body—the Ministers of the State—was the Finance Law. This is the pivotal legislation that arrives in our hands during the final month of the year, after traversing the deliberations of the members of the National People's Assembly to distribute its vast financial clauses, following ratification, across the various ministerial sectors for final implementation and execution.

This is the sector of National Education and Teaching, which invariably claims the lion's share of the sovereign budget—a direct result of the massive cohorts of children who must be provided with a new seat at school every single year, reaching in certain instances a staggering million children attaining the

age of six annually. They must, by national mandate, have a beginning in their journey toward science, enlightenment, and education.

I have traversed these paths myself, and I comprehend with absolute clarity what it means for a guardian to find no place for his child within a school, notwithstanding that such a right is formally codified within the Constitution—even if the primordial catalyst for this incapacity is the citizen himself, due to his lack of foresight and the organization of his own household.

And this is the sector of Culture, which all too often receives almost nothing of substance, notwithstanding its paramount importance alongside Education as a vital human and civilizational investment.

And there are other sectors, arising in addition to the traditional ones, imposing themselves time after time with a startling violence and without prior warning—such as earthquakes, natural cataclysms, and that specter of terrorism which nearly swept away the very existence of the nation, were it not for the heroic efforts of men who remained true to what they had pledged to the Almighty.

And the deliberations commence, as the list of speakers stretches long, exceeding forty deputies, each harboring a visceral desire to articulate his vision. Every single one of these forty individuals carries a specialized thought, a private vision, and a distinct partisan affiliation that differs from his neighbor. What serves to unify them all in stark reality is the place, the time, the subject, and a Speaker presiding over the sessions—acting as the "Maestro" of a complex orchestra, where each performer is playing a specific note with a unique tone. Each

envisions his own contribution as the best, the finest, the most legitimate, and the closest to the true concerns of the nation.

—How can he possibly function as a Maestro, while this formidable bloc he manages possesses no inherent harmony between its members, nor any observable discipline notwithstanding the perceived unity of their political instruments?

And I find myself smiling in a moment of quiet contemplation.

He shall emerge triumphant, and each soul shall articulate his opinion with absolute freedom and within a rigorous framework of profound mutual respect. For I am intimately acquainted with the man: he is a venerable Mujahid of the first order, an authentic son of the National Movement and the victorious Revolution, and a man of renewed, visionary thought. He convenes here to represent the nation alongside a select galaxy of national personalities who bear the most honorable of records.

He shall succeed, just as he has achieved success before this day in other momentous missions both within the homeland and beyond its borders. Yet, this success is won at the steep cost of years and years surrendered from his own life. They have turned his hair to a distinguished gray, they have exhausted his physical strength, and they have doubled the weight of his responsibility and his sacred commitment—all while deepening the well of his experience and his seasoned expertise.

The Finance Law: a subject of monumental importance upon which the entire activity of a whole year depends—encompassing the intricate processes of implementing projects

and securing achievements across various political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes, notwithstanding the disparity in data and the varying levels of the budget allocated for each sector individually.

A subject intimately connected to the developmental trajectory of the human being in my homeland, charting the migration from one state to another, and the ascension from one level to the next. It is an evolution fervently desired by the people, whom the legislator perpetually represents as a positive force, entirely devoid of errors or negative traits—desired, in essence, as an eternal ideal.

So how can such an ideal be realized? Especially when every human act or administrative achievement can potentially carry within its folds the dormant seeds of failure and corruption, just as surely as it carries the seeds of success and unblemished integrity?

From this specific point of friction emerges the conflict—the preconceived and preordained judgments—between the executive body, comprising the Ministers of the State, and the legislative body that is entrusted to study, discuss, and enrich the laws, including this specific Finance Law that empowers its various clauses for the practical implementation and application of the proposed national programs.

The term "Conflict" is utilized here as a metaphor, but the stark truth remains that both sides harbor the illusion in their proposals that they are more authentically concerned with and protective of the common citizen than the other. The deputy is frequently found to be in error in this imagining, for he harbors the belief that he alone serves as the true representative of the nation and the singular voice for the people—rather than the

Minister who, in his initial estimation, limits his powers to the implementation of projects entrusted to him within the framework of the Finance Law, living as a minister at the high peak, far removed from the common folk and their visceral concerns at the grassroots level.

This is a deputy hailing from the East of our land, intervening and addressing a myriad of issues that concern his specific electoral district. He manifests such intense fervor that one might almost see foam escaping his mouth; he is exuberant in presenting a certain case, meticulously highlighting the evidence and the justifications, aiming to thwart or challenge a member of the executive body whom he envisions as entirely indifferent to the people's woes—as if that official had descended from Mars and was never a son of the common people for a single day.

And this is a deputy arriving from the West of the country, striving to outdo the other in his fervor and analytical rigor, as if the specific problem he presents is uniquely solitary among the tribulations of the other side. He adorns his intervention with various descriptions and formidable proofs until a member of the executive body arrives at a definitive decision regarding it with a practiced celerity—a decision previously prepared for all such decrees in other regions.

And here stands a deputy from the South of the nation, holding the firm conviction that the absolute first priority must be the South—addressing what it endures of stagnation and the relentless harshness of nature. This is notwithstanding the manifest reality that this South remains the primordial wellspring of all our national energies and wealth, from the liquid gold of oil and the solid gold of our mines to the vast, majestic expanses. In his eyes, his cause is the most paramount

of all causes, and he believes that without its resolution, there can be no genuine presence of justice or equality among all members of the nation.

And this is a deputy representing one of the capital's neighborhoods, lecturing and pleading with an air of profound grievance. He harbors the belief that all other parts of the nation have already seized their rightful share and more, at the agonizing expense of our "White Capital." He portrays his district as the victim—wrongfully accused of seizing everything, while in reality, it has enjoyed nothing save for the ceremonial title of "The Capital." Rather, it is the one that has graciously provided the locations for the various state institutions, without gaining anything substantive from their presence—a fame of no practical avail trailing in its wake, while every single neighborhood within its bounds equals an entire province in its needs.

And then there is a deputy—or a female deputy—whom I behold as nothing more than a stagnant, immovable presence. They express no opinion, nor do they aid the deliberations with a single constructive idea. Silent, static, conducting themselves as though they represent neither a citizen nor a people; yet, at the very same time, we find them transforming into massive, tireless chatterboxes and prolific presenters of "important" reports during the nocturnal sessions and the evening soirées held outside the Council. Through such clandestine channels, they seek to guarantee their victory in a second electoral term alongside certain high officials. Why then should they exhaust their energies and labor as others do?

So, one might ask, how does this Maestro succeed in managing every single session, and with every singular topic, navigate these disparate and biased opinions—which are, in

the vast majority of cases, strictly localized for the benefit of a specific region or district?

Nevertheless, he succeeded every single time, employing a masterful blend of profound wisdom, sovereign reason, and a refined emotional intelligence. He was tireless in reminding everyone that each member of this Council was ordained to represent the nation in its entire, unified essence, rather than merely serving as the voice of a single municipality or a specific, localized province.

This Council is, in its spirit, a House of the Nation—a hallowed sanctuary where representation must invariably take on a nationalistic and patriotic character. A deputy hailing from Tebessa possesses the right and duty to speak of the pained issues in Tlemcen, just as a deputy from the North is bound to raise the visceral concerns found in the deep and sprawling South. Such an approach serves to fortify the true credibility of a deputy who, in any other circumstance, might appear to the public eye as nothing more than a partisan campaigner, feverishly pursuing re-election at the hands of his own kin and tribe.

In these warm, vibrant, and intimate atmospheres—resonant in both their outer form and their internal substance—I lived through some of my most beautiful and radiant stages of work. I engaged with the cascading events and the shifting circumstances, contributing my part to the monumental processes of reform and national reconciliation. I strove to highlight the foundational elements of building and construction. Whether within the heart of the General Assembly during its fierce debates and profound dialogues, or within the hallowed confines of the specialized committees—most specifically the Committee for Culture, Education, and

Vocational Training, which remained my primary concern—or during those intellectual and scientific symposia encouraged by the Council's Maestro, I felt a deep sense of purpose. We utilized every conceivable resource and capacity to confront the most pressing issues and the myriad intellectual, philosophical, and legal complexities. We strived to breathe a vibrant, dynamic spirit into the dry legal texts, rendering them a living movement capable of keeping pace with the majestic march of an entire people toward the horizons of progress and prosperity.

The unvarnished truth is that everyone, notwithstanding the vast diversity of their opinions and the varied nature of their proposals, remained fundamentally united in their collective embrace of conviction, shared principles, and the hallowed values of the Nation and our storied History. All these disparate and seemingly contradictory paths converged decisively at a single, luminous point: a profound adoration for the homeland and an unyielding commitment to the welfare of the citizen.

How BOUNDLESSLY happy and at peace I felt during those days! I harbored an expansive love for everyone, and I felt that love returned in a magnificent measure. The ambitious youth among us viewed me through the prism of a maternal reverence, as a mother of the nation, while the venerable elders regarded me as a cherished and devoted sister. I distributed my smiles among them as one would distribute blessings, feeling my soul warmed by the radiance of their own kindness and the visceral sincerity of their tenderness. They were, in every meaningful sense, my children and my continuity; they were my life and my future.

How it gladdened my spirit to be consulted on a burgeoning idea or a fresh legislative proposal. It bestowed upon my soul a

sensation of absolute confidence, profound appreciation, and a visceral sense of recognition. I was never once perceived as a stranger among them, even during those intense seasons when they sought for themselves the mandate of another legislative term. It remained a noble, clean competition, and their dialogue had evolved into a discourse of high responsibility and conscious awareness. Democracy had meticulously laid for them a refined framework of objectivity and methodology; respect for the opinion of the "Other" was no longer a superficial, theatrical performance, but had been transmuted into a high-level civilizational dialogue.

Thus, the Maestro emerged triumphant in his orchestrating of harmony and a profound, seamless cohesion. The Council rightfully earned the profound appreciation of this nascent and vibrant legislative institution—serving as a monumental lesson in the building of a nation upon the majestic path of democracy. It was a spirit that we believed should prevail throughout the entire edifice of state institutions, and indeed, within every hallowed position of sovereign power

My Mission to Germany

My inaugural journey to the soil of Germany transpired during the epoch preceding the historic fall of the Berlin Wall, specifically in the year **1978**. That odyssey was undertaken within the formal framework of an institutional exchange between the National People's Assembly and the West German Parliament (the Bundestag). At that historical juncture, the venerable Brother Rabah Bitat held the sovereign stewardship as the Speaker of the Assembly.

As for my second journey to that land, it was also a parliamentary mission of significant magnitude, meticulously organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was part of a strategic national initiative intended to introduce the global conscience to the authentic situation in Algeria, particularly in the shadow of the grueling crisis we were then navigating. The paramount objective was to reclaim Algeria’s rightful and distinguished standing within the international forums, following a period where a myriad of harsh circumstances had labored to distort our image beyond our borders. That distortion was predicated upon the flawed premise that the events unfolding within Algeria were merely the byproduct of domestic policy errors and administrative mismanagement.

To what extent did the insidious paths of terrorism knock upon the door of every soul? They had harbored the illusion that these dark, criminal conspiracies would never cross the hallowed boundaries of Algeria to reach other lands. However, the relentless march of time proved that terrorism—both intellectual and physical—is a transnational and global phenomenon that strikes at nations, continents, and

civilizations alike, driving them toward the bitter harvest of whatever seeds of hatred and sorrow they may have sown. In their monumental tragedy, Algeria stood in a magnificent solitude, confronting its grueling ordeal with the limited yet resilient resources of its people.

No matter. The paramount truth is that I was part of a combined and multifaceted parliamentary and political delegation of the highest order. It was comprised of several eminent national figures—legal experts, administrative architects, and political luminaries. The delegation was presided over by the Great Brother and Mujahid, the venerable legal scholar Professor Ali Haroun, alongside the Mujahid Brother Mohamed Yass'ad and the Mujahid Brother Boualam Bessaih.

During that odyssey—which I discovered once again tapped into the formidable capacities of Algerian cadres when they are motivated by determination—I found that our capacity for initiative and decisive action increased exponentially whenever we were granted the freedom of maneuver and sovereign conduct.

We engaged in protracted and multifaceted dialogues with German parliamentarians, seasoned politicians, and vibrant activists from their social and civil society spheres. I shall not hide that our jubilation was immense when we bore witness to their sincere interaction with our proposals and their profound openness regarding our national experience and our visceral desire for a just resolution to the crisis.

During that elegant journey—notwithstanding its arduous and taxing nature—I enjoyed the distinguished companionship of Brother Ali Haroun, Brother Mohamed Saïd, and others. I

perceived a magnificent sense of refinement and civility in their every interaction and behavior.

One minor point of pained regret remains: every soul with whom we engaged from the German side mastered at least one language other than their native German. However, when we addressed them, we did not provide them with translators from our own Arabic tongue, at a historical juncture when we ourselves mastered the French language with absolute fluency—not to say with a proficiency that surpassed their own.

It was as if we were a French delegation, notwithstanding the manifest reality that our official and national language is Arabic. The error, of course, did not emanate from their side; for such arrangements naturally fall within the pre-negotiated protocol mandates agreed upon prior to the visit.

We embarked upon pilgrimages to various historical landmarks and monuments throughout Germany, commencing from the majestic Bundestag and reaching the solemn remains of the Berlin Wall. Yet, I did not perceive our hosts as being motivated by a spirit of mere boastfulness or superficial pride; rather, they manifested a fervent and sincere keenness to introduce us to the luminaries of their soul—their poets and their scholars. Foremost among these was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—the illustrious writer, poet, and dramatist. They explained to us, with a detail that was as meticulous as it was profound, his poetic sensibilities toward the perpetually changing countenances of Nature.

And mirroring their reverence for Max Schiller, the intimate and kindred spirit of Goethe, they insisted with a gentle fervor that we capture a photograph before his monument. He was the philosopher who had meticulously researched the hierarchy

of values and arrived at the transformative theory that "every singular individual develops for themselves a persona synthesized from values of varying ranks, and beneath the superficial differences of individual personas resides a shared and common human value."

I was inhabited by a profound state of spiritual ache as I followed their unwavering insistence on illuminating their own history. I found myself unable to escape a state of constant comparison and analytical approach between our own behaviors and theirs regarding the weight of history, and I asked myself with a pained curiosity:

"Pray, do we not also possess a storied history, a refined culture, and a legacy of scholars and writers of our own?"

I responded to my own soul: *Yes, we most certainly do. But certain of my colleagues who shared that delegation seemed to be in a state of dazzled mesmerization by their glory, precisely because they possessed only a meager knowledge regarding their own national history—and perhaps, in some cases, they knew nothing of it whatsoever.*

As for my third odyssey or sovereign mission to this European nation, it was a responsibility entrusted to my person by Brother Dr. Mohieddine Amimour, following his ascension to the Ministry of Culture.

The Ministry, which he had so evocatively likened to the celebrated French star Brigitte Bardot after the hand of age had touched her—noting with his signature wit that he had once yearned to encounter her in the bloom of her youth.

I found it fundamentally impossible to decline his request. I was inhabited by a profound joy that he had assumed

stewardship of this ministry; for he is an erudite media man who has been seasoned in the crucible of culture and information for over half a century, notwithstanding the resounding success he achieved in his multifaceted political missions and his original medical profession.

Dr. Mohieddine Amimour was a cherished companion upon the long path of media. We were among the primary architects and founders of El Djeich magazine, and we shared many spirited forays, intellectual skirmishes, and respectful differences of opinion across its pages. These high-level debates elicited a magnificent intellectual spirit within the magazine's folds, notwithstanding the reality that it functioned as the central organ of a military establishment. These discourses were somewhat distanced from the clinical aspects of the institution, yet they served to compel the ordinary reader—and the reader within that institution as well—to follow those topics and philosophical skirmishes with an extraordinary intensity, particularly since subscription to the magazine was a mandatory requirement for certain ranks of officers.

We subsequently convened at the Presidency of the Republic, where he served as the Director of Information and I graced the office of Minister, and thereafter within the Council of the Nation as fellow members of the Presidential Third.

The catalyst for my third sojourn in Germany was my participation in the majestic celebration held in honor of the Algerian writer Assia Djebar, on the auspicious occasion of her being bestowed with the "Peace Prize" in Berlin.

It was an assignment of a semi-official nature. The Minister of Culture was resolute that the sovereign presence of Algeria

must be manifested when an Algerian writer was being crowned with the Peace Prize.

This was despite the fact that I had known Assia Djebar previously, long before her final migration—as she had graced our pages several times with her contributions to the French-language edition of Al-Jazairia magazine.

Nevertheless, when I encountered her on this specific occasion, I imagined she was a woman I had never truly known before. She appeared to have become an entirely different persona—not necessarily in her conduct or her fundamental thoughts, for those ideas had not yet transcended certain emotional ruminations confined within her novels concerning the woman's cause and the traditions of Algeria. Yet, there were new facets. Among the resonant effects of these visions were her writings concerning "The Women of Algiers," which had been transmuted into a cinematic masterpiece, and the profound interview we had previously conducted with her regarding it for Al-Jazairia magazine.

I beheld another woman, one with a more comprehensive, yet simultaneously narrow, vision. She was striving with a visible effort to seek out the specifics of Arab-Islamic culture—an essence she had either previously ignored or resolutely refused to acknowledge. Thus, it seems our lot as Arabs that we do not fully grasp the monumental value of our own culture and civilization until we behold the West manifesting an interest in it that surpasses our own.

We shared an intimate and profound session where we engaged in the exchange of our various publications. We evoked the memory of Al-Jazairia magazine and revisited the

details of that interview concerning the script for The Women of Algiers.

When I stood before the assembly during the formal ceremony, pleading the case for the brilliance of Arab-Islamic culture and citing the venerable scholars of Islam such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Rushd, and others, I was overcome by a surging wave of pained pride. I felt a visceral dignity that I, an Algerian woman, was articulating this defense of Arab culture. I have perpetually felt the heartbeat of my Algerian identity, and infused with this emotion, I took a shawl—a "Shala"—hand-embroidered with authentic Algerian motifs, and I draped it with a tender gravity upon her shoulders, declaring:

—"...I bestow this upon you, so that you may feel, my dear sister, the visceral warmth of the motherland."

Assia Djebar surrendered to a deluge of tears, while her aunt Baya, who graced the occasion with her presence, also wept in a silent symphony of emotion. In that hour, I realized for the thousandth time the absolute truth of what the ancient poet once sang:

—"Transfer your heart wherever you wish of passion... for love belongs only to the first beloved.

How many dwellings upon this earth does a youth adore... yet his yearning is forever anchored to the first home."

And upon my return to the soil of Algeria, I held a deliberative session with Brother Mohieddine Amimour. Our dear Brother Tahar Ouettar (may the Almighty grant him His infinite mercy) was present during that meeting. He addressed me with a tone weighted with brotherly blame, inquiring:

—"By what logic could you accept such a mission and formally honor Assia Djebar, when you are the proud daughter of Ben Badis?"

I replied to his inquiry with a serene and unshakeable certainty:

—"She is an Algerian soul, and I am an Algerian soul. She is a daughter of the Ben Badis legacy, and I am a daughter of the Ben Badis legacy. In my heart, I find it fundamentally impossible to separate those two truths."

Kuwait Once More... But

I had graced the sisterly State of Kuwait with my presence on several occasions before this—missions of a militant nature within the framework of the General Union of Arab Women, and practically during my tenure as an elected deputy and a Minister of the State. But my odyssey to it on this specific occasion—which I shall recount to the noble reader—or rather, my visit during this interval, left a profound and pained impression upon my soul. I shall not venture to label it as purely "bad," but perhaps it was the toxic combination of unfavorable circumstances that besieged the individual and amplified their sense of frustration. It left one bereft of the capacity to resist and confront the behaviors of those around them. Thus, one falls in the inaugural round as a prey to these discordant conditions, which permit others to persist, plunging their daggers into the body of this pained prey or the frustrated "Bull." Then, the "Friend" manifests a cruelty far more savage than that of the enemy, gloating over misfortunes and the whims of destiny. Did not our venerable popular proverb say:

—"When the bull falls, the daggers multiply"? This was precisely the tragedy that befell my country during the dark era of terrorism.

I shall articulate it with absolute frankness here: our Arab brethren never truly grasped the magnitude of what transpired within our borders; for we were forced to fight the grueling ordeal of terrorism in a magnificent and pained solitude. This was notwithstanding the bitter reality that certain among these sister nations were the very architects funding terrorism, recruiting the Arab youth for its dark ends, and providing them with material support and ideological protection. They did so

under the deceptive pretext of eradicating the communist tide in Afghanistan.

And when the issue of Afghanistan was finally resolved or faded into the background, these dark forces turned their predatory gaze toward Algeria—the pioneering Republic that stood as a bulwark against colonialism, anchored in its devotion to Islam and its authentic civilizational belonging. They targeted us for our geographical surroundings, our storied history, and the profound strength of religious conviction that pulsates through our people.

I harbored the hope that certain of these nations, within their media apparatuses—which have become sophisticated with our national cadres first and foreign expertise second—would finally cease using the clinical term "Islamic Groups" when addressing the atrocities in Algeria, and instead have the courage to name it "Terrorism."

My specific journey transpired during the final days of May **2001**. I had received a gracious and formal invitation to participate in a scholarly study circle dedicated to Arab women creators. This forum was meticulously organized by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in coordination with UNESCO, intended to facilitate a consultative dialogue among creative spirits and those entrusted with cultural projects within the member states of the Organization. Their interest was centered upon Muslim women's issues, aiming to link their collective efforts with the overarching goals of comprehensive development across the Islamic world. The Mauritanian lady, Sa'di Ma' al-Aynayn, was the designated representative of the organization and the person responsible for this high-level assembly.

I attended the circle and was honored to preside over one of its formal sessions. The Arab women gracing the event represented the vast majority of the Arab world. Each delegate was expected to present her unique experience within the literary and creative fields. The experience of Algeria emerged as a subject of profound appreciation and unalloyed admiration; for it was clear to all that it did not emanate from a cultural void or from the artifice of "salon culture," but was a visceral expression of the life of a people who had navigated monumental stages saturated with epic events—the most recent of which was the grueling era of terrorism and what it had left in its wake of profound agony and human suffering. Consequently, Algeria stood as a luminous exemplar for Arab women creators and a model for developmental resilience.

The working sessions and deliberations proceeded as we engaged in the exchange of visionary insights, lived experiences, and mutual acquaintances. We collectively identified with the storied history of our singular nation and our unified destiny.

Everything was advancing with a serene harmony; the discourse was exquisite, characterized by a refined maturity. The interventions concerning the creative labors of Arab-Muslim women, in particular, were of an extraordinary depth. This continued until one of the senior officials within the Kuwaiti cultural sector joined our assembly, proposing—in a manner that bore the semblance of semi-coercion—a purely political project: the issuance of a formal statement concerning the conflict between Iraq and Kuwait. He articulated a vision so entirely detached from the literary and cultural subject of the forum that it was, in its essence, a blatant attempt to politicize the gathering.

A heavy silence descended upon the participants; none of them spoke, for they harbored the assumption that the Kuwaiti host's desire to orchestrate this symposium in their land carried this singular goal behind it—or that issuing such a statement would be seen as a positive outcome of the event. I, however, viewed the matter through an entirely different prism. I recalled that visceral Algerian proverb:

—"The mouth partakes in the meal, but the eye is inhabited by a sense of shame."

True to our innate Algerian nature—blunt, anchored in principle, and resolutely rejecting of any form of coercion—I intervened to articulate the following:

—"My dear sir, this forum is, by its very definition, a literary and cultural assembly; it is not a political symposium, is it not? Furthermore, the issue of a statement condemning Iraq necessitates the adoption of a definitive stance for or against. As for me personally, and as a citizen of the Arab world, it pains my soul deeply to behold what transpires between brothers—it is akin to a hand that strikes its own right with its left."

I formally articulated my reservation regarding the issuance of the statement in that proposed form, suggesting instead a resolution centered upon gratitude and praise for the State of Kuwait and its cultural sectors for their hospitality in hosting this forum.

The session reached its conclusion, and the project never manifested as a formal statement. In the aftermath, we engaged in several meetings with Kuwaiti personalities. I perceived that the echoes of my intervention during the session had leaked out with the velocity of light; I beheld everyone

observing my presence with a distinct kind of reservation, yet one not entirely devoid of respect and a certain appreciation.

Following the conclusion of the forum, we were invited as a formal delegation by the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco in Kuwait for a lavish banquet at the ambassadorial residence. I occupied a seat at the Ambassador's table alongside other Kuwaiti and Arab dignitaries. Abruptly, the flow of ordinary conversation was diverted toward the talk of terrorism and the pained events unfolding in Algeria. I felt myself suddenly "like an orphan at a table of villains," for one of them had the audacity to harass me with a blunt inquiry:

—Pray, why are you intent upon slaughtering one another in Algeria?

Before I could find the words to respond, others emboldened him, each one of them hurling a drop of their own venom, their latent hatred, and their visceral gloating—or tossing a drop of oil upon the flames.

The first speaker had already ignited the fire with his harassing question. Most shockingly, even the Moroccan ambassador himself—who was ordained by the laws of diplomacy to remain neutral, polite, and respectful of the sacred laws of hospitality as he was the host and we were his honored guests—refused to remain neutral.

Perhaps I have never lived through moments in my existence characterized by such intense pain, such profound oppression, and such visceral bitterness as I endured in those seconds. Everyone at the table seemed to be in absolute consensus that it was a "civil war," citing as their evidence the Western or French media in particular—the very apparatus that, at that

juncture, had raised that cynical and dark slogan: *"Who is killing whom in Algeria?"*

Notwithstanding my responses to them—which I strived with all my fortitude to maintain within a framework of objectivity, logic, and a serene calm, far removed from the fires of agitation—the psychological pressure and the searing sensation of being oppressed and betrayed were too much for my spirit to bear.

The desire to release the reins of my tears for the sake of my beloved country and the depths to which it had been dragged almost overcame me in the hours that followed. They simply possessed a collection of preconceived, cynical judgments tailored to their own interests, and they spoke from a bedrock of profound ignorance regarding everything that concerned or involved Algeria and the Arab Maghreb in its entirety. I had always harbored the belief that they would prioritize the sacred bonds between them and the essence of Arabism and the great Arab homeland over the "Wretched" (Algeria); yet, I discovered those hollow words regarding Arabism and our common destiny were merely deceptive masks for a spirit of ego, isolation, and a cold uniqueness. It was envy and jealousy that truly moved many of those souls.

As the dinner party reached its conclusion, one of the Kuwaiti ladies—a mistress of the business world—offered the final, chilling word of the conversation, declaring:

—"I shall never grace the soil of Algeria with a visit as long as I live; Tunisia and Morocco, yes, but Algeria... God forbid..."

So as not to retort with:

—"Algeria itself manifests no desire to welcome your presence,"

I replied with a smile that sought to veil a raging inferno in my heart—a fire so intense it almost halted the very beating of my pulse:

—"When you arrive, my lady, in Tunisia or Morocco, it is as though you have graced Algeria with your visit. For in stark reality, we are but a single country in our geography, our religion, our language, our sect, and even in the sacred bonds of our marriages."

The virtuous Khadija Kamoun from sisterly Tunisia added her voice in support:

—"Indeed, by the Almighty, we are but one single nation."

And thus, I found myself standing in a magnificent solitude against seven disparate voices—every single voice acting like a heavy cannon endeavoring to demolish the noble reputation of my country through my person. My heart was bleeding within me, and the tears were on the very precipice of escaping my control. Therefore, as I commit these memories to paper today regarding my sojourn in Kuwait, I endeavor for the final time to contemplate the state of the Arab world in its entirety, and how a brother can find it within himself to gloat over his brother during any manifestation of terrorism. I ask:

"Is it truly possible that everyone gloats today? And by what distorted logic is it possible for an Arab to feast upon the misfortunes of his Arab brother?"

When I finally returned to the sanctuary of my hotel room, I surrendered to a bitter and inconsolable weeping, if only to purge the soul of its sickness.

I arrived at the definitive resolution to return to my homeland the very next morning; the forum had concluded, and every desire within me to remain for celebratory or honoring activities had utterly vanished.

The overwhelming majority of my odysseys beyond our national borders were professional missions undertaken in a myriad of official capacities: international conferences, intellectual symposia, and countless Arab and global summits. These journeys were spread across my multifaceted roles as a dedicated educator, a tireless activist within the Arab Women's Union and its grassroots organizations, as a member of the sovereign Parliament, or within the missions I performed as a Minister of the Republic—whether for the Social Protection sector or the National Education sector. All of these were missions characterized by such a grueling schedule that they left me no time even to behold the beauty of the nation I was visiting; for time was perpetually constrained between the rigors of work programs, the demands of travel, and the other heavy commitments imposed by such assignments.

However, during my tenure as a member of the Council of the Nation, my specific group—alongside a distinguished collection of Algerian mujahidat and high-level cadres—received a formal invitation from Her Majesty Queen Rania, the consort of His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, to grace the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with our visit. This invitation had been orchestrated via the Jordanian embassy in Algeria, meticulously organized by Mrs. Narjis, the spouse of His Excellency Ambassador Abu Fudil. She shared a profound relationship of collaborative activity for the benefit of both Jordan and Algeria with several of our mujahidat, most specifically with our sister, the Mujahida Yamina al-Tunisi. It was a bond that transcended mere private acquaintance to become a bridge of national cooperation

And we convened to embark upon our journey to Jordan as the honored guests of Queen Rania al-Abdullah. Our delegation comprised more than twenty ladies of distinction, including veteran mujahidat, luminaries of the media, activists of civil society, and representatives from various Algerian political parties and organizations, encompassing a wide spectrum of intellectual and political currents.

It was intended as a touristic odyssey for the purpose of mutual acquaintance and cultural introduction, for which an exceptionally rich and varied program had been orchestrated. We were privileged to meet a host of prominent Jordanian figures—both men and women—as well as numerous women's economic, political, and social associations. We engaged in a series of constructive and profound dialogue sessions with certain senior statesmen, most notably His Excellency Mr. Zaid al-Rifai. He manifested a deep-seated admiration for the sophisticated presentation delivered by myself regarding the multifaceted political experience of the parliament in its dual chambers, and the exhaustive presentation given by the Mujahida sister Mariam Belmihoub concerning our nation's legal and parliamentary trajectory.

The most whimsical and humorous episode that transpired on this journey occurred upon our arrival at the hotel. As each of us was receiving her luggage, we made the startling discovery that the suitcase belonging to Sister Mariam Belmihoub was conspicuously absent. It had been lost, purloined, or perhaps detained by some administrative error—its fate remained shrouded in mystery. The incident was transmuted into a recurring joke that we lived with for the duration, commenting upon its details for hours on end. Our sister Mariam was nearly driven to a state of humorous

madness, given her well-known and meticulous care for her personal elegance and her refined attire. Notwithstanding the fact that every one of us volunteered to offer her a beautiful dress or some of our own cherished items, her joy in the odyssey remained slightly incomplete until the officials finally unearthed the missing luggage. In a sudden spark of inspiration, the muse of poetry visited me, and I composed a lighthearted verse concerning the incident:

—"The suitcase of Mariam has vanished into the air... and across every airport it has wandered.

—Toward the shores of Marseille, some whispered it fled... and toward the gardens of Tunis, it has roamed."

Adorned with her raiment and the fragrance of her perfumes... weighted with her volumes and her profound thoughts.

We surrendered our hearts to grief for their loss... and we offered up a symphony of tears in their wake.

That entire journey was nothing short of exquisite; we immersed ourselves in the exploration of ancient ruins and venerable historical landmarks, including the majestic city of Petra. We sought a spiritual cleansing within the hallowed waters of the Jordan River, whose sacred currents we implored the Almighty to use to wash away the scars and the remnants of the barbaric [Zionist] incursions.

As we reached the culmination of our visit, we were graced by a protracted and meaningful working session with the youthful Queen Rania al-Abdullah, who absorbed every intervention with an extraordinary measure of care and a visible interest. Throughout those myriad interventions, I was

ordained to serve as the keynote speaker on behalf of the entire delegation, both at the inaugural opening of the session and at its final conclusion.

I observed toward the end that the Queen was visibly mesmerized by our eloquent and beautiful Arabic tongue—a language that was neither the cold, formal "Standard" nor the fragmented and broken dialect common in some regions. She leaned toward my person with a gracious curiosity and remarked—joined by those who had encountered her at the very beginning of her sovereign life:

—"Pray, within which halls did you learn to master the Arabic language with such refined perfection?"

I responded to her inquiry with an unyielding sense of nationalistic pride:

—"I acquired my command of the tongue in my own homeland, during an era when its very existence was prohibited by the cold and rigid laws of the French colonizer."

We were inhabited by a profound pride, and our dignity in this civilizational and militant momentum reflected a great deal of honor upon the Algerian people as a whole.

Thus, the bonds of brotherhood between our nation and a sister country that holds the Algerian people in the highest esteem were significantly fortified, irrespective of any other secondary considerations.

The most junior among our ensemble was already treading the path toward her sixtieth year; nevertheless, the driver assigned to our sovereign bus perpetually took a distinct pleasure in addressing us as "Beauties" (Sabaya).

—"O Beauties, I implore you, this way... O Beauties, pray, gather that way."

This playful nomenclature only served to amplify our sense of felicity and added a touch of radiant joy to the heart of that existing happiness.

I find myself posing a poignant inquiry to the Arab conscience:

—"Why is it that assemblies of this nature do not manifest between the women of our Arab nation with greater frequency? For through such encounters, we would achieve a more profound mutual acquaintance, our fraternal relationships would be significantly fortified, and our strategic visions and national positions would be decisevely unified. This is precisely what would pave the majestic path toward the long-cherished unity of an ancient and storied Nation—a goal for which successive generations have tirelessly struggled."

I had graced the soil of Jordan on numerous occasions prior to this, and I had previously served as a member of the Arab Intellectual Forum; yet, I must confess, this particular visit possessed a singular and exquisite taste within the sanctuary of my soul.

The Obsession with Writing

The Algerian society was a vibrant and distinct entity among the Arab collective during the **1940**s—the precise epoch when I began to awaken to self-awareness and to a profound comprehension of those who inhabited my world. I became cognizant of their ideas, their divergent views, and their patterns of behavior, all while living through historical events and monumental turning points of the highest gravity.

The Revolution had inaugurated its first tremors within the realm of the intellect, manifesting not only through the formal literature of the political parties and the structured National Movement but also pulsating within the hearts of the various strata of the common folk: my father, my uncle, my maternal uncle, our neighbor, and many others. They were all engaged in a relentless quest within this faction or that, or within this specific association. These various platforms served as a fertile and nurturing soil for the planting of their nascent ideas and their subsequent flourishing, destined to eventually become a lush and sprawling tree—a tree that bore the authentic identity and the sovereign nationality of this people, watered by the myriad tributaries of its long, ancient, and glorious history. It was a tree destined to evolve from a militant thought and a fierce, unyielding resistance into a monumental edifice carrying all the sacred components of freedom, absolute sovereignty, and unblemished dignity.

The Algerian society of that era, as my consciousness first took flight, was a community enduring the agonizing weight of the occupation and the manifold pestilences it had spawned: systemic ignorance, biting poverty, rampant disease, and a pervasive, enforced backwardness. The far-reaching effects of

the Second World War, and the subsequent joy of victory shared by those within its reach and beyond, were further complicated by the sacrifice of thousands of Algerian youth who had been offered up as oblations for the sake of that very victory—all of these factors were capturing the eyes, the thoughts, and the strategic projects of the nation.

...Until the "Forbidden" cataclysm finally transpired: the horrific events of May **8**, **1945**, wherein more than forty-five thousand martyrs ascended to the heavens. They fell for no transgression save for their visionary belief that freedom is an indivisible human right, one that belonged to every singular people upon this earth. They were met with the brutal response of a fierce colonial ideology—one that arrogated to itself what it ruthlessly prohibited for others, exploiting for that dark purpose the blood and the very souls of the youth from its various colonies and settlements. They cast to the wind those soaring slogans concerning the principles of freedom, justice, and equality, choosing instead to enthrone the principle of "Raw Power" above the "Sacred Force of Right." This compelled our people to subsequently re-examine and correct their ideas and strategic projects, including the very paths of struggle and resistance that they had fought before and which they were ordained to engage in once again in the coming days.

Those were, alongside other historical burdens, weighing heavily upon the spirit of the people, causing them to forfeit the right even to dream of a new existence, and ruthlessly attempting to assassinate their desire for rebellion once more.

In that very epoch were the primal dawns of my profound love for the school and my absolute adoration for the book. I was inhabited by a visceral infatuation with the "Letter"—whether it was meticulously written, artistically drawn, or

hallowed through engraving, be it upon the school blackboard, on fragments of paper, or in every conceivable corner.

During that formative interval, it happened that I was afflicted by Trachoma (granular conjunctivitis). My eyes became violently red and ulcerated, and the mild remedies provided by my maternal uncle, the druggist, proved to be of no avail. The situation persisted for several grueling weeks, until my mother finally arrived at the definitive resolution to present my condition before an eye specialist.

The specialist physician was a Jew by the name of Dr. Bouni. I still retain the memory of his name with crystalline clarity, for he was a figure of great renown within my city, Constantine. The doctor diagnosed the malady with a singular and stark treatment, declaring to my pained and bewildered mother:

—"She must immediately cease her attendance at school, or she shall inevitably forfeit her vision in its entirety..."

My mother surrendered to bitter tears on that day, and my father flamed with indignation toward her, for she had sought the counsel of a Jewish physician. I found myself unsurprised by such a diagnosis; for this was the definitive judgment rendered by my father upon a man whom he believed was perhaps being entirely truthful in his assessment.

I was struck with a visceral shock at this news while I was still a small girl, not yet having reached my twelfth year. I wept with an unmitigated intensity—weeping because I was, in truth, severed from the sanctuary of school for an entire full year. Eventually, the Almighty granted me recovery; yet, I had never actually been cut off from the school in my spirit. In stark reality, I never once ceased my studies, my reading, or my writing. I made it my practice to meticulously read every single

lesson that I did not attend, through the assistance of my companions among our neighbors' daughters. Notwithstanding my mother's palpable fear for my sight, I recovered because the malady was, in fact, nothing but a simple and fleeting ailment. Very soon, the curative ointment and my maternal uncle's diligent stewardship of my treatment performed their necessary work.

I harbored a visceral hatred for that physician, a rancor as intense as my loathing for being confined within the home; I did not begin to question the doctor's motives or his diagnosis until I had attained maturity.

Was my father, in his skepticism, anchored in truth? Was the doctor's diagnosis and his subsequent decree delivered in genuine good faith? Or was it that he harbored a dark desire that the Algerian mother—perceived as a second or third-class citizen—should never see her daughter educated, most specifically in the sacred Arabic tongue and the storied history and civilization of her ancestors?

When I finally returned to the path of study, it was in the capacity of a "Free Student," utilizing the channels of correspondence and a tireless diligence in gathering the materials of the academic curriculum. I sat for the Primary Certificate examination from the sanctuary of my home, entirely outside the framework of formal schooling, and I emerged triumphant. Indeed, the literary text I composed for the exam—and for which I was bestowed with a high mark—was officially classified as the preeminent text on a national scale, to be subsequently published in its entirety within the Al-Basa'ir newspaper, the official organ of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, which exercised its hallowed

stewardship over the "Free Schools," as a gesture of profound encouragement and a formal recognition of its literary quality.

From that historic threshold was the beginning—a beginning that possessed no true beginning. I never permitted my pen to fall silent, even when the journal was forcibly halted from publication by the mandates of the French colonial administration. The newspaper subsequently published several articles of my own, which I regard today as light and nascent efforts—short narratives intended to foster and encourage young pens, and feminine voices in particular. The profound credit for all of that encouragement resides with the illustrious historian, Professor Ahmed Tawfiq al-Madani (may the Almighty grant him His infinite mercy), through the Al-Basa'ir newspaper, and with the martyred man of letters, Ahmed Reda Houhou, through the Al-Shu'la (The Flame) journal.

I was then but sixteen years of age. Thus, I found myself immersed in the act of writing, dwelling within the "Garden of Youth," rather than being confined by the "Age of Youth." Regardless of how much that initial writing might have been a collection of mere reflections, scribbles, glimpses, or poetic and prose fragments—perhaps poor in quality or truncated in their structure—I was inhabited by a state of absolute and unwavering confidence that I was, in truth, a Writer. I forged a relationship with the pen—an intimate and sacred bond. I was, notwithstanding the simplicity of my early work, articulating the essence of this woman who is "Me," expressing her through the medium of the pen in a manner that could rightfully represent other selves or be their authentic archetype.

I read with an insatiable and feverish intensity; I consumed every singular volume that found its way into my hands. I did not possess the discernment to distinguish between the "chaff"

and the "wheat" of literature, for I only truly understood and absorbed a modest percentage of what I read in those years.

As the river of days surged forward, I began to discover—through the immersive act of reading— the human essence that resided behind the art, the knowledge, or the sovereign position. How I was intoxicated with wonder, and how I was discovering the nobility of ethics, the loftiness of character, and even the "sick" and distorted archetypes in what I read of literary and artistic masterpieces. How often I smiled in bewilderment and was overcome by a pained pity as I clashed with various manifestations of human deviance and the myriad colors of ignorance within diverse human models. I discovered with the passage of time that art and culture are, in their essence, nothing but a potent instrument fueled by a burning desire to transform society and the world—most specifically the medium of Art. I came to the profound realization that at its core, it is a liberated activity aiming to emancipate the human spirit from the shackles of nature, the rigid bonds of social conditions, and the attempt to elevate the soul to worlds more sublime and more worthy of its inherent humanity.

I discovered that the history of Art flows in a majestic parallel with the history of Humanity itself. When we embark upon the study of the history of Art, we are, in truth, studying a liberating human history—a humanity perpetually striving to create for itself an exceptional world in reality, endeavoring to transcend the mere process of societal expression to orchestrate the desired change within that very society.

I fell in love with the world of Philosophy through the echoes of what I read, and when the hour of my university entrance arrived, I selected it as my second degree and a crowning achievement.

I embarked upon the writing of the short story, as many nascent and emerging writers are wont to do—a literary color I adored and within which I found myself uniquely capable of diving, entirely devoid of any hubris or belief that through it, I would one day be hailed as a "Writer." The profound credit for that early success resides with Dr. Suhair al-Qalamawy, as I have detailed in earlier chronicles. She meticulously gathered my stories—mere scraps of paper from the pages of El Djeich magazine—and synthesized them into a published book in the year **1967**. She preceded the volume with an introduction signed by her own hand, a text not devoid of the scholarly modesty of great thinkers, the sensitivity of true women of letters, and the visceral sincerity of ancient and noble Arab human nationalism.

Indeed, the observer across the vast Arab world had the absolute right to be struck with a profound amazement as he beheld an Algerian woman whose pen was authentically Arabic—and this within a country upon whose very soul a colonial settlement had pressed its suffocating weight for a century and a quarter of time, ruthlessly preventing its people from learning their own tongue or exploring their hallowed heritage and being informed of its storied history and profound civilization, while trying in a myriad of peaceful and non-peaceful stratagems to replace all of that with a new, alien civilization, language, and history.

The amazement manifested by the world was entirely legitimate when we observed that anyone who sought to carry the sovereign pen in Algeria was almost exclusively expected to be a graduate of the French school system alone.

Indeed, such a challenge—and the fierce defense of the sacred Arabic Letter—is a credit that rightfully belongs to the

schools established by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema. Many a martyr offered the supreme sacrifice to uphold this challenge, both during the Revolution of Liberation and in the years that followed.

This represented a giant stride forward; it solidified my unyielding self-confidence and bestowed upon my spirit a profound happiness. For I stood with this inaugural collection of stories, entitled The Sleeping Pavement, as a soul truly loyal to the women mujahidat I had known within the countryside, the rugged mountains, and the pulsating heart of the city—women whose struggle was of a magnificent grandeur precisely because it was a deed that sought no reward, no thanks, nor even a medal, a formal certificate, or a material grant. I meticulously recorded every singular detail I beheld during my intimate assemblies with them.

For this "Kharfiya," the spouse of one of our mujahideen, is the mother of Hamo—that lad of ten years who used to labor alongside his father as a vital link between the militants within a single cell. He operated without a shadow of suspicion ever falling upon his innocent form, notwithstanding the predatory eyes scattered throughout every popular neighborhood—the eyes of colonialism and its treacherous henchmen.

Kharfiya is the very woman whom my father admired with such extraordinary intensity when he escorted her on a visit to that place on the eve of our independence. He sought to be certain that his daughter—who had not always been disciplined to his strict mandates—was not preoccupied with those instances of delay or absence from the hearth for any reason save for a singular, hallowed one: her visceral contribution to the labor of this sacred Revolution. And these were her

comrades, and among them was Kharfiya, whom he viewed with such profound reverence.

And here stands "Fatima," who wedded one of the mujahideen following the martyrdom of her husband, and there is another who continues to inhabit the long shadow of what she has lost.

I have never once ceased to know them, and they have remained, through the passage of years, the living and vibrant subjects of my stories. I never permitted my pen to fall silent. The hours I consecrate to the act of writing are the happiest and most radiant of my existence, as if writing were a sacred escape from the weariness and the grey monotony of life. I feel, with a visceral intensity, that if days pass without me embarking upon a fresh project for a story or an analytical treatise, I am losing a vital and irreplaceable fragment of my life. I perceive time then as a severed piece of my very being, being consumed and heading toward an inevitable end. Writing, for me, is the primordial heartbeat of existence itself.

I came to the comprehension later that it resides not within the sovereign power of a writer—whether an absolute professional or a devoted amateur—to ever cease the act of writing, even when a fleeting desire to stop manifests. Writing has become, for me, a gradual and profoundly desirable addiction. It is a portal through which both the soul and the mind may draw breath; it is, at times, a final sanctuary, for it often finds itself bound by a myriad of chains, both visible and invisible. Writing is a state where the rigor of self-criticism is significantly more intense and more severe than any external censure could ever be.

Just as every novel possesses its own unique and secret "key," I discovered that every novel inhabits its own distinct and singular language. Frequently, these languages are colored by a myriad of complex emotions: sometimes they are explosive, sometimes thunderous with rage, and at other times, they are exceedingly delicate, carrying within them harsh and profound spiritual aches.

In my considered view, the novel represents a fundamental transformation: a shift from the mere depiction of reality's superficial architecture toward focusing upon the profound, subterranean structure of that reality—stripping away its masks and employing dialogue as both a strategic means and a supreme end to dismantle this reality, whether it be immediate or distant.

When I composed my inaugural novel, Diary of a Teacher, it was articulated through the "first-person" narrative. Certain critics subsequently labeled the work as being closely akin to formal memoirs, while others perceived it solely as a direct reflection of my own persona. In truth, it was the chronicled life of the novel's heroine, whose events were indeed drawn from the well of reality; yet, it was a life that was never bereft of the beauty of evocative description, profound analysis, and the resplendent splendor of the creative imagination.

The heroine of any novel can indeed be the "I" of the narrator, or she can be the heroine of a life representing a myriad of other selves—of the present, the morrow, or the ancient past.

Notwithstanding these technicalities, I took a magnificent joy in my capacity as a writer. I found my spirit engaged in the constant reconciliation of the "Politician" within me with the

"Woman of Letters," notwithstanding the reality that I frequently found myself torn between these two distinct identities. I am a politician by my very nature, and I am a human being—yet, when I take up the pen to write, I am inhabited by a sensation of absolute and unyielding freedom from every earthly constraint or social pressure.

I held the firm conviction that the writer is an artist of the first order, and that this artist bears a sacred role in highlighting the historical cataclysms of his people through his creative and artistic recording. I used to believe that the writer is, in essence, a visionary, and that this vision should never reach a terminal point; it is akin to a destiny imposed upon him by the heavens. Its end is not defined by those who see in writing a mere reporting or an archival style. Writing, thus practiced, remains a record of a shadow, a mirror reflecting the depths of the self, the presence of others, and the visceral reality of life.

It meticulously captures the profound human emotions with a spirit of unblemished and honest language. The role of the artist is to manifest these ephemeral sentiments within artistic or literary masterpieces—be it through the architecture of a novel, the cadence of a poem, the hues of a painting, or any other medium of human expression.

Literature is, in its essence, a sublime game of language; it is a game of time and space. This "game" does not accumulate its power except through the immersive act of reading. Every time knowledge increases, the questions proliferate, and every answer provided to a question serves only to give birth to a new, more profound, and more majestic bewilderment.

The most exquisite and radiant aspect of art and literature is that it articulates those things that life itself barely dares to

whisper, or says only with an agonizing bitterness. Since the most ancient of times, the human being has soared upon the wings of his imagination, attempting to swim through the vastness of the universe to unlock its most guarded secrets or draw closer to their essence. He has perpetually strived to fill that terrifying and hollow void—a void that the manifold visual and auditory devices of our modern age have fundamentally failed to fill, notwithstanding their density and total saturation. Electricity and technology possess no power to stretch the enchanted hours of the evening or the long nights spent in sacred vigil, nor can they truly satisfy the diverse artistic and cultural yearnings of the soul. For pray, is there any true substitute for the One Thousand and One Nights?

And so, with the relentless passage of days, the alphabets of consciousness within me intensified, and the intricate threads of our cultural tapestry appeared vibrant and crystalline. I awaited the arrival of the "Master Pen" until the desire to embrace that pen grew within me to a monumental degree. It expanded across time and space, bearing contents whose pressure and absolute priority in my soul were derived from the hours, the days, and the years I lived through during the Revolution of Liberation.

Revolutions also aim to trigger latent creative energies, to dismantle the walls of stagnation, and to develop the multifaceted persona. They empower thoughts to shatter their shackles, expanding the horizons of reflection and the recording of insights and sensations—sometimes as a subtle leak, sometimes as a slip of the tongue, and at other times as a magnificent state of rebellion, aimed at the ultimate conquest of stagnation.

At other historical junctures, these creative energies may stumble and appear to die out, like a glowing coal buried beneath a heavy shroud of ashes, struggling against the shadow of extinction, only to flare up with a radiant life once more, then fade again into silence.

Why then does stagnation prevail in so many instances? You find stationed before you massive barricades of "diseased" and regressive ideas, standing like a formidable stumbling block designed specifically to distort the expansive space before you and force your spirit to a halt.

—"Stop... No entry."

It is a signal of the highest peril, notwithstanding its minuscule size and its few letters. It is grave when it seeks to address the soul, the thought, and the sovereign pen. In short, it signifies a halt, a terminal cessation, and a spiritual imprisonment that frequently leads to the death of the intellect.

Certain critics manifested a desire to blame me, inquiring: "Why do you consecrate so much of your care to this past, even if that past were the sacred Revolution?" I would merely respond with a soft laughter at those who endeavor to soar without a foundational ground from which to launch... those whose comprehension of the Past is fundamentally erroneous, short-sighted, and pained with injustice. Any past? The Creative spirit who remains true to his art can never be severed from his profound psychological and historical roots.

Linking the Past to the Present is an absolute necessity under which every sincere and authentic creative falls. This Past is his rich, primordial reservoir and his vast accumulation of wisdom; it is his hallowed ground from which he can take flight

toward other temporal and spiritual worlds. It remains, at the very same time, the mirror reflecting the depths of himself, the presence of others, and the visceral reality of life.

When I read extensively regarding the tenets of Modernity and Contemporaneity, and the alleged necessity of keeping pace with the "crisis of creativity," I was only convinced by what I concluded from the sanctuary of my own thoughts. I discovered that true Modernity must never be an epistemic rupture or a violent severance from our origins; rather, it is a refined re-examination of this Past from other angles and hidden corners upon which the light had not yet been shed.

Like the legacy of Ibn Shuhayd al-Andalusi and his evocative work, The Treatise of Elves and Orchard Spirits, or the wisdom of Ibn Hazm in his ‘The Ring of the Dove’, alongside the monumental contributions of Ibn Rushd, Al-Ghazali, and many others. These are the foundational and primordial texts of our soul; without them, no Modernity can rightfully claim a lineage or a heritage. A modernity bereft of its references is a "stagnant" modernity that manifests no concern for these sacred reference texts. Is it even within the realm of possibility to construct a Modernity that chooses to disregard the Past? Is there any capacity for human thought to accumulate and persist in its continuity without these anchors?

Every singular new global literature possesses deep-seated roots. Notwithstanding this truth, we find—most regrettably—those who speak with an unbridled freedom regarding "Modernity" while we continue to inhabit a "Pre-Modern" social structure.

Truly, the primordial basis of all art and creative innovation is Freedom. The writer must be absolutely free in his treatment

of subjects, and he also cannot be but a child of his specific age, attempting within his works to keep pace with this era and its particular modernity. But Modernity also touches the very circle of the proposal; it can never be surgically separated from the Past. Every singular point of modernity within that circle is touched by the essence of the beginning. Everything eventually reaches its end, yet we find it forming a complete, harmonious, and unified whole.

A rose remains fundamentally a rose, notwithstanding what plant scientists and botanical experts have introduced of changes or modifications. The human being is, in essence, a Thought—a thought that remains flung wide open for experience, a vast and expansive horizon. His ground is the one that can be perpetually renewed with every addition of new spaces of experiences and trials. He constitutes a constant re-examination of things, selecting and evaluating them through the dual prism of the Past and the Present, aiming perpetually to anticipate this daunting unknown called the Future. Thus, and through this, the creative spirit remains vibrantly alive, a valiant challenger, keeping pace with the relentless cycle of life and the perceived crisis of creativity.

Writing and creative innovation constitute a noble and sovereign mission, reaching at times the point of absolute obsession. Writing is but a state of constant, pulsating tension and profound suffering. This is because the most vital role for the creative in this entire process is the obsession and the perpetual agony. For Art is the singular force that seeks out the exquisite moments of joy in human existence across its varied and fleeting aspects. It searches with a pained fervor for the "Lost Seasons," removing the stains of historical distortion, and digging deep into the layers of despair to plant the radiant face

of Hope in the hearts of others. It labors tirelessly to remove the heavy shadows of despair and the state of existential loss that humanity suffers from in all its varied states.

Creativity, in its most expansive and general sense, is the domain of one of the pioneers of intellectual civilization who realized that the basic characteristic of life is soaring with this human being toward more sublime and radiant worlds, through the transformative fire of creativity. The ordinary person does not harbor the hope for the creative to be a mere mirror image of him in his pains and his hopes. Rather, he yearns for the creative to be the idealized image he could not himself achieve in reality. He is a creative who possesses the formidable tools of expression and the divine ability to innovate, simultaneously controlling them and being controlled by their power.

Therefore, the mission of writing and innovation was an obsession, a tension, and a profound suffering. It takes an even more agonizing toll when it emerges from the soul of a creative woman, where this widening circle of her inner world is manifested in all its complexity. She orchestrates this expansion out of the myriad problems, the specificities, and the formidable challenges of an adventurous and courageous creativity.

Notwithstanding that these are specificities, they constitute, in the final analysis, interests of universal human concern, linked together as chapters that enrich a vast and majestic process of human operations. They integrate decisively within the human predicament and the single, overlapping, and influential struggle for meaning.

The woman and the man, in every singular corner of the world, are not in a state of mere relativity. We inhabit a world

whose components are found to be sick, and its walls are but a prison of stagnant and regressive mentalities. We are governed by antiquated ideas and the heavy complexes of both our ancestors and our descendants, having traversed ages of intellectual decline and profound human defeat.

Thus, we frequently find that writing for women manifests as an aborted project before it is even birthed—the factors of its miscarriage are sown within its very components, stunted from the start. It is a life that is all too often snatched in its very first breaths and overwhelmed by the malignant factors of the soul, aimed at extinguishing every rosy and vibrant color of life.

Therefore, I behold today certain individuals who have the audacity to blame the woman as she writes with an absolute and unfettered freedom, breaking all the heavy shackles that remained standing from bygone eras. I am inhabited by a surge of righteous anger and a sense of triumph for these writings, whatever their nature may be. I reiterate and repeat with all my resolve that Freedom is an indivisible whole. A word like "But" should never be permitted to infringe upon the sacred world of creativity.

The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once inquired:

—"Is literature a state of pain or is it sacred?"

Therefore, I find that the moment of writing for me is the supreme moment of crystalline clarity, of absolute truth, and of profound pleasure as well. I was never artificial or contrived as I wrote, nor did I embark on a frantic search for exotic words or new vocabularies. I wrote only what emerged directly from the sanctuary of the heart to reach the heart of the "Other."

So that I do not say, echoing the wisdom of the philosopher Immanuel Kant:

—"Two things continue to inspire my constant admiration and awe: the starry sky above me, and the moral law within my heart."

And just as the enchanting writer George Bernard Shaw never once trusted anyone among his circle of intimate friends to offer a judgment on what he wrote, placing his absolute trust only in his maid. For him, she represented the quintessential model of the "True Reader"—one who purely wants to reach the intended goal. Should she fail to understand a single thing, he would immediately tear up what he had penned, then restart his search for a more reaching and evocative style.

I, too, made it my practice to write and then present what I had composed first to my husband, who was a high-level specialist in the realms of Law and Politics. We would frequently be locked in a spirited debate, for he would always open another intellectual path for me to reach the literary truth. He would discuss with me some of its multifaceted aspects, looking at them through their literary and legal dimensions. We were perpetually opening paths for one another to reach a more beautiful idea or a more brilliant and resonant form for what I wrote—be it a story, a novel, or even a study in various disciplines. Just as I feel a growing pleasure today as I receive the literary manuscripts of our youth every week to read or to introduce, I feel those texts overlapping like this in a wondrous and majestic tapestry, integrated and faithful between the Past represented by myself and the Future represented by those youth.

I used to playfully tease my husband whenever he offered a rigorous critique, saying:

—"True, you are the sovereign master of law and politics; leave for me then the sanctuary of literature and the mastery of language."

And in the stage of the final completion of the text, I would present it to my sister, Halima, who represented for me the model of the "Simple Reader" whom I assumed would read my work extensively. I would meticulously watch the features of her countenance as she read: sometimes a smile would play upon her lips, and at other times, her eyes would fill with the radiance of tears...

At other historical junctures, she functioned as a "human barometer" for the weight of what I penned. When she was in my presence, she would answer me with an unvarnished honesty about everything I desired to know. If she failed to grasp a certain concept, she would remark with a piercing and admirable boldness:

—"I—with profound regret—did not comprehend the meaning you intended to convey."

And I would pause at her observation, surrendering to a state of deep and silent contemplation.

I find myself wondering: do the "Ambiguous Ones"—those writers of obscurity—truly write for no one save themselves? Those masters of complex styles and convoluted writings that endeavor to say everything, yet in the final analysis, succeed in saying nothing of substance?

Why, in the end, do we not choose to write as we speak? As we converse naturally every day, and across all the days of our

lives? Why do we persist in starting with the ambiguous, shadowed thought, and only then raising the pen to the paper? What is the ultimate benefit of such an exercise? I realized that excessive thinking often consumes much of the pen's inherent magic. Creativity, through over-analysis, loses its visceral spontaneity, erasing from its essence that innocence which forms the very foundation of its beauty—even if it had arrived as such without any labored affectation.

Why do we not choose to put the words down like this—purely, simply, and organically upon the paper, without our own intrusive interference? Why do we choose to stifle its growth and squeeze the very lifeblood out of its spirit?

The majestic building of meaning is, in truth, a process of solemn contemplation, where diverse expressions compete for existence—the meaningful and the seemingly meaningless alike. It is akin to ink falling in black, rhythmic drops upon the white desert of paper, multiplying and forming bubbles like those of soap. It may evaporate to leave behind only a void, or it may grow and grow, forming indomitable lines and conquering the dead paper to breathe into it a soul, a vibrant beauty, and a continuous life.

Reaching for ideas is much like picking flowers. As for thinking in the act of creativity, it is akin to gathering and arranging those flowers into exquisite bouquets and wreaths of thought. The living moment, the moment of pure sensation, the moment of the poem, the moment of longing... all are but a spontaneous breath and an intimate, visceral human sincerity.

Why do we not write in this manner—with an absolute freedom, without the burden of chains, without the coldness of plans, and without the shadow of backgrounds, just as we were

fashioned and made every single day in our authentic behaviors and conduct? Not through the medium of words alone, but by stopping within our very selves, looking toward windows of invigorating air and energies of release. Not merely those limited by terrestrial bounds, but toward a result of the unleashed thought, reaching into the great Unknown, toward the limitless spaces of the selves and other sovereign entities.

What manner of oppression is this that never once ceases to control and find a dark delight in its dominion over us? Any oppression is this that stands as a formidable barrier between our souls and the Truth? Any oppression is this that prevents us from living in absolute honesty with ourselves and with the "Other"? Any oppression is this that holds back our visceral impulse and the vibrant vigor of the feelings within us? Pray, do we equal anything of substance without the fire of feelings or the grace of creativity?

What is the ultimate meaning of restricting our spirits to expressions whose power others have taken and denied us from? What is the meaning of being merely the heirs to certain pre-packaged ideas, and sectors designated for their substitution, their enrichment, or their renewal with what is perceived as better?

Is it not a profound injustice to the human Mind to remain forever a hostage to certain static ideas and specific, narrow sectors? Is it not a criminal freezing of the intellect to narrow the majestic path and limit its inherent vigor?

Is it not a visceral injustice to the human being to imprison his spirit of freedom, forcibly directing it toward a singular viewpoint of which he is neither convinced nor satisfied?

What is the true meaning of Freedom when we are expected only to write what others desire from us? What is the meaning of Freedom when the cold judgments of others surround us from every conceivable direction?

What is the true meaning of Freedom, while the unyielding caution within us makes us perpetually wary of every articulated word? And of every strange expression that leaves upon the sanctuary of our souls the mark of thousands of invisible lashes? And of every thought that inflicts upon our spirits a wound more agonizing than any physical blow could ever be?

Give us a wider, more expansive space to breathe better, to differ in our visions until we multiply and flourish in thought, in science, and in lived experience. Let us differ within a framework of profound mutual respect, so that we may improve ourselves, and even learn the sacred art of listening to one another. Let us not interrupt the flow of discourse, and let us refrain from rushing into the making of pre-conceived judgments.

Give us a wider space to draw breath more easily. We are, in truth, almost suffocating from the narrow horizons that surround us, and Ignorance has become a predatory and savage beast. We, as the intellectual elite, possess the horizons, yet we are found lacking in the tools. The pen is a majestic tune inhabited by an eternal terror; the pen is sometimes inhabited by a knight-errant of the soul. As for the words themselves, they appear as losing battles for the woman since the very beginning of time.

The fingers continue to be creative in the shadows of secrecy... and the "Dinosaurs" of regressive thought have not

yet gone extinct. They have not been extinguished notwithstanding all human progress and civilizational advancement. They are still surreptitiously hiding their eggs in some dark place, ready to attack and devour—every single time—the "White Doves" of advanced thought and pure, unblemished genius.

Conclusion

To you, my dear and noble reader, at the final conclusion of these moments—which I have meticulously shortened for you into some paths and historical stations characterized by absolute openness, visceral honesty, and profound truth. I implore you to permit me to wonder alongside you:

"Does it ever happen that we make mistakes?"

"Does it ever happen that we surrender to love or to hatred?"

"Does it ever happen that we fail or that we succeed?"

Yes, indeed... we err as much as we act with righteousness. Error is our constant and faithful companion through the river of life. We move, we live, and we interact with the world, and what truly matters in all of that is that we distance ourselves from what is far greater than error: to decisively distance our souls from Sin.

The human being is neither a celestial angel nor a dark devil. He errs and is struck with misfortune, but he confirms his essential humanity every single time he corrects these errors and possesses the fortitude to admit them, so as not to be overcome by their weight and not to wrong others through them.

As for Love... any manifestation of Love, it seems that it transpires without our conscious volition. Love is our exquisite and beautiful destiny in this existence; it serves as a shield that protects us from the fires of doubt and suspicion, from the corrosive anxiety of jealousy, and from the untamed blaze of the physical body.

But we remain always, we who harbor love in our hearts, laboring tirelessly to preserve that delicate, ethereal thread that separates the sanctuary of Wisdom from the abyss of slipping. As the ancient poet once sang with profound insight:

—"May our physical bodies be spared and our honors remain whole... and let sovereign Reason and the hearts be the ones afflicted."

In our capacity as the carriers of the Mind and the keepers of experience, we find ourselves uniquely capable of controlling our emotions and our delicate sensations. Because we imagine that we represent noble models for others to follow, we do not permit that delicate thread to be torn, nor do we allow our emotions to become a reckless, unbridled surge or a state of abandonment. We emerge with another meaning, far removed from that madness and deterioration that we once inhabited in the feverish prime of our youth. We are now possessed of less weight and far more seasoned experience. We have finally become capable of controlling our own selves, and being the sovereign masters, always and forever, over our own impulses.

It is, in the final analysis, the beautiful and majestic destiny of a sound and authentic humanity.

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Through Blossoms & Brambles

The Odyssey of a Woman

Are these memoirs? Are they diaries, or perhaps confessions? Could this be a novelistic biography? Or is it all of these combined, embodied in the life of an Algerian woman—distinguished in her own right—who navigated the most extraordinary and transformative eras in the history of Algeria?

The reader of these diaries and this extensive odyssey will undeniably perceive that the author lived her experiences with profound maturity and heightened awareness. Through these moments of critical reflection—upon both the self and the "Other"—she strives to safeguard these temporal spans, preserving her significant milestones from the erosion of oblivion and the futility of loss.

I lived alongside her—as both husband and confidant—sharing her fear and apprehension as she wrote. It was a fear of falling into the treacherous trap of narcissism or the hollow idolatry of the self. This trepidation shadowed us both throughout the writing process; a natural and legitimate concern when one strives for absolute honesty and unyielding integrity. Despite her creative spirit, she understood the imperative to penetrate the very essence of events, employing an analytical rigor that yields moral and humanitarian wisdom, without ever encroaching upon the domain or the jurisdiction of others—most notably, the historians.

Ultimately, these diaries are but one subjective version among many human experiences and testimonies of those who coexisted with the same era and events. Yet, it is these visceral reactions to history that forge her singular character, distinguishing the author from all others.

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Professor Ahmed Jaber
Husband of the Author

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